

Next Level Leadership: Three VMI Cadets Lead 1,600 Peers



Good leadership is essential to any organization—but often, chances to develop and hone leadership skills are hard to find for young people starting out. That’s not the case at Virginia Military Institute, a small college in western Virginia where the students, known as cadets, run a leadership development system that encompasses every cadet’s daily life. From the moment cadets get up in the morning until they go to bed at night, they are guided by cadet leaders, some of whom have been chosen by their peers, and shaped by a system designed to teach personal honor, accountability, discipline and resilience.

Max Ankrah ’26, class president; Devin Auzenne ’26, regimental commander; and Grant Rose ’26, Honor Court president, make up three of the top leadership positions at Virginia Military Institute. Within VMI’s all-encompassing leadership development system, this group helps lead 1,600 of their fellow students, known as cadets.

Devin Auzenne ’26, Regimental Commander



Because VMI is a military school, cadets are organized into three battalions—and as the top leader of all three, the regimental commander, Devin Auzenne, class of 2026, is charged with making sure cadets are disciplined and ready to show the world what a VMI cadet looks like: polished, professional, mannerly and eager to be of service to others. Auzenne, who plans to commission in the U.S. Marine Corps at graduation, said he’s experienced significant personal growth since his first year at

VMI. “I have grown and matured a lot—not only as a person, but as a leader,” said Auzenne. “VMI has really taught me confidence as a leader. It’s taught me how to be decisive. It’s taught me how to wear my own skin a lot more confidently, how to walk into a place and have a commanding presence.” This year, Auzenne has been focused on leading VMI’s approximately 1,600 cadets with humility and honor. “Each and every person is the face of VMI,” he stated. “The people who come here want to be all they can be.”

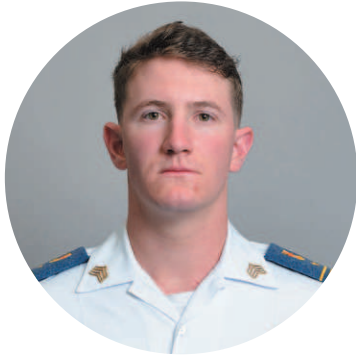
Max Ankrah ’26, Class President



Max Ankrah, class of 2026, is the president of his class, and while at some schools that position would end at graduation, at VMI, the close bonds among class members foster such a strong affinity that class leaders hold their positions throughout their lifetimes. Ankrah’s parents immigrated to the United States from Ghana as teenagers and met while stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where they were both serving in the military. When the time came for Ankrah to choose a college, he found himself drawn to military schools. After a high school trip to Ghana to visit his grandparents, he became very aware of the almost limitless opportunities he had in the United States, and he chose VMI so he could make the most of those opportunities.

As president of the current senior class, Ankrah plays a vital role in ensuring freshmen are properly trained—because at VMI, seniors set a high bar for underclass cadets. “The people who come to VMI, they’re already motivated, so it’s more just making sure you grab that part of them that’s motivated and wants to be here,” said Ankrah. “I’m a big fan of motivational quotes.” Ankrah can see a big change in himself since he was a freshman. “I would say one thing I’ve noticed is just confidence—confidence in myself,” he said. “I feel like once you’ve known you’ve done hard things, it kind of just brings the strength in you that you could do anything that you set your mind to.”

Grant Rose ’26, Honor Court President



Fellow senior Grant Rose, class of 2026, is president of the VMI Honor Court, a group of cadets that educates others about the VMI honor code, a simple statement that reads, “A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do,” and doles out the penalty of expulsion from the school for those found guilty of violating the code. “The honor code is not just words written on a page, but it’s an actual system that people live by,” said Rose. “There’s a spirit behind it.”

Looking back at his VMI experience, Rose is grateful for significant personal growth and for the leader he will be after graduation. “I’ve changed a lot since I came to VMI,” said Rose. “Seeing how much I’ve grown as an individual and seeing how much my [classmates] have grown is awesome. It’s awesome to see that VMI is working, and the leadership opportunities do work to make people better leaders and better men and women of character.”