



State Council of Higher Education for Virginia UPDATE

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Hampton University Receives \$1.2 Million

HHML grant will introduce students to bioscience research and careers

Dr. Edison R. Fowlks has no doubt that students and faculty at Hampton University will benefit greatly from the updated biology curriculum and renovated laboratory and research space that will result from a \$1.2 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). However, he is most excited about the opportunity to generate student interest in bioscience research and career possibilities.

"In my opinion, the greatest outcome of the HHMI grant will be the creation of a culture of undergraduate research that will result in a cadre of students entering doctoral programs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) areas," said Dr. Fowlks, professor of biology and HHMI program director at Hampton University. "We hope to see more students in Ph.D. programs and more professors from diverse populations teaching in major universities."

Dr. Fowlks designed the program to enable HU to meet the National Research Council's Bio2010 recommendations. Beyond constructing a modern molecular biology facility, the new bioscience initiative will also create an inquiry-based curricular approach that draws from biology, computer science, and mathematics.

"Combining these three disciplines is a new paradigm in biology," Dr. Fowlks said. "[Hampton University is at] the forefront in developing a genome-inspired biology curriculum."

Dr. Fowlks believes that fusing these three disciplines will lead to more scientific discoveries. "Knowledge of the quantitative sciences is essential for students to be prepared to use the tools of bioinformatics to interrogate DNA and protein sequence information," he said, adding that he hopes to expose students to this new approach early in their academic careers.

To that end, the HHMI grant will introduce qualified students to the biosciences through a fully paid summer program for entering freshmen. Participating students will examine DNA as an information science, first by taking interdisciplinary classes, then by completing gene expression experiments and analyzing their results in a bioinformatics lab.

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Dr. Fowlks in his laboratory at Hampton University.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT:

Institutional Success

Alan Edwards
Policy Studies Director

The State Council's new policy-issue discussion series resumes at the July meeting with a focus on student and institutional success, with success operationalized as persistence/retention and completion/graduation rates. The July session involves a group of college and university leaders discussing their institutions' student retention and completion efforts, challenges, and results with the Council.

These topics are not new to the State Council; its Academic Affairs Committee reviewed exemplary institutional models and strategies for student success in 2006. The current discussion will continue that review, as well as broaden the scope to encompass the Council's recent policy focus on affordability and its ongoing advocacy for access.

Such discussions are timely, if not critical. The expectations placed on higher education have intensified as the college degree has replaced the high school diploma

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"A professor can never better distinguish himself in his work than by encouraging a clever pupil, for the true discoverers are among them, as comets amongst the stars."

-- Carl Linnaeus

Swedish botanist, ecologist, and taxonomist

(POLICY continued from page 1)

as the standard necessary to compete in the modern workforce. Often these expectations center on “front end” issues – expanding access, improving college-going rates, and maintaining affordability – to the exclusion of important “post-admission” issues.

Enhancing a student’s ability to attend and afford college is very important; however, doing so does not guarantee that the student will succeed academically and complete a degree. Moreover, the promotion of access and affordability on the front end, without equal promotion of success in the middle and degree completion on the back end, does a disservice to students and to the Commonwealth.

Therefore, it is in this spirit of broadening the conversation from “affordable access to higher education” to one centered on “affordable opportunity for success in and completion of higher education” that the Council is undertaking this policy discussion of persistence/retention and completion/graduation rates.

Via the Restructuring Act, the state has committed itself statutorily to keeping public higher education accessible and affordable. The Act also requires public institutions to improve student retention and to increase the number of degrees conferred. But challenges abound. The populations of Virginia and the nation grow more and more demographically diverse; Baby Boomers are retiring in ever-greater numbers; other nations are experiencing significant growth in postsecondary attendance and educational achievement; and the perception of higher education as more of a private good than a public one is growing.

Whether we are meeting these challenges is a matter of perspective and debate. Graduation rates, which appear to have been making modest improvements in recent years, continue to be perceived by some as unacceptably low for most institutions, states, and the nation as a whole.

Of the Southern Regional Education Board’s 17 member states, Virginia ranks first in first-year persistence rate and second in both progression rate and graduation rate for its public four-year colleges and universities. Conversely, retention and graduation rates vary greatly among Virginia’s institutions, as well as among different categories of students within our individual colleges and universities. While Virginia higher education appears to do a relatively above-average job of retaining and graduating students, an unfortunately large number of students, especially in-state students from underrepresented groups, are not retained through to timely completion or to completion at all.

Contributing to improved student and institutional success – without sacrificing or compromising academic quality and integrity – will be a focus of the Council going forward as is already reflected in the Council’s 2007 statewide strategic plan. ❖

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The best students from the five-week summer program will also have the opportunity to receive 10 pre-Ph.D. scholarships as rising sophomores at HU. A new cohort of 10 will be selected every two years and provided with mentors, stipends, and summer research opportunities.

Most importantly, according to Dr. Fowlks, these young scholars will be exposed to the joys and challenges of multidisciplinary scientific inquiry. “It would be great if a future Nobel Prize recipient were a product of our program,” he said. “Our nation needs more Ph.D. scientists to develop strategies to solve important societal crises.” ❖

Financial Aid Blog

SCHEV blog to aid families in planning

SCHEV has launched an online resource for students, parents, and education personnel seeking information about federal and state financial aid. The new blog, which can be found at vfinancialaid.wordpress.com, provides an informal forum for Virginians to ask questions and gather information about financial aid opportunities.

“With the growing focus on the economy and student loan options, it seemed like an ideal time to provide students and parents with an interactive online tool to explore their financial aid options,” said Daniel J. LaVista, SCHEV’s Executive Director. “By giving constituents a new way to ask questions, share tips, and make comments about securing college funding, we hope the blog will benefit all Virginians who are seeking financial aid.”

Agency financial aid and communications staff monitor the blog, write informational posts, provide links to resources, and respond to questions and comments from users. Interested constituents can also subscribe to a feed that automatically sends updated information from SCHEV’s blog to their email or other web-based reader programs.

Soon after launch, a press release about the blog was picked up by the Associated Press and coverage was reported as far away as Chicago. As this newsletter went to print, the blog had received over 3,000 hits from interested readers. ❖

Public Art on Campus

Longwood University's Outdoor Sculpture program brings art to Brock Commons

Established in 2004, Longwood University's Brock Commons Outdoor Sculpture Program has prominently placed on campus a variety of sculpture by nationally known artists. The sculpture program's purpose is to bring to Longwood contemporary art and artists to foster intellectual discourse and illuminate the creative process, as well as to provide an aesthetic environment in which the visual arts can be appreciated on a daily basis. Each year, three artists complete a residency during which they install their work with students and present collateral lectures for the campus.

Graduating art students select the works based on the artistic merit of the project, evidence of the artist's experience with producing large public outdoor work, ability of the works to inspire meaningful intellectual discourse, and the appropriateness of the project for the Longwood community.



▲ **The Golden Mirror** (2005; steel) by Tripp Jarvis is situated along the length of Longwood University's Brock Commons, an axis along which many of the university's academic buildings are located.



◀ North Carolina sculptor Hanna Jubran stands in front of **Mountain Landscape** (2004; polychromed steel) following its installation at Longwood University in 2007. An award-winning sculptor and engaging speaker, Jubran's sculptures have been exhibited in fifteen states and thirteen countries.

▶ The whimsical **Two-Headed Trojan Ducky** (2004; polyurethane, EPS foam, paint, and wood) by Wisconsin sculptor Rob Neilson arrived at Longwood University in 2007. Each spring, students graduating from Longwood's art department select three pieces to be placed on campus for a two-year period. Two-Headed Trojan Ducky was previously featured at Chicago's Navy Pier.



▶ **Strobus** (2003; painted steel) – is on two-year loan to Longwood University as part of its Brock Commons Outdoor Sculpture Program. Massachusetts sculptor and illustrator Joyce Audy Zarins created Strobus, which arrived at Longwood's Greenwood Library in the fall of 2006.



*For more information,
visit the Longwood Center for the
Visual Art's web site at
www.longwood.edu/lcva.*

On Campus: Radford University's Dynamic Duo

Professors Cliff and Donna Boyd hope to instill a love of learning in their students

Kathleen Kincheloe

Assistant Director for Communications



Drs. Donna and Cliff Boyd measure a human skull from a historic site in Bath County, Virginia.

Drs. Cliff and Donna Boyd seemingly do everything together. The married couple has three children together, they are both Professors of Anthropology at Radford University, and they have each received Virginia's Outstanding Faculty Award (OFA), she in 2006 and he in 2008. Though their intertwined destiny wasn't always clear to them, they are now jointly committed to teaching and serving their community through anthropology, an academic discipline once described by renowned anthropologist Eric Wolf as "the most scientific of the humanities, and the most humanistic of the sciences."

Donna and Cliff have known each other since childhood, though their romance didn't start until their paths crossed at the University of Tennessee where she was a freshman and he was a graduate student. At the time Donna was considering becoming a veterinarian, but thought taking an intro to Anthropology elective class might help her win Cliff's affection.

"I knew he was interested in anthropology and I wanted to have something to talk with him about if he asked me out on a date," she laughs. But that one course sparked Donna's interest in forensic anthropology, and "now I owe my whole profession to Cliff," she says.

After receiving his doctorate, Cliff began teaching at Radford University in 1986, where he is co-founder and co-director of the University's Forensic Science Institute, an interdisciplinary organization devoted to research, academic training, and public outreach. Donna arrived at Radford three years later, where she developed seven anthropology courses supporting the development of Radford's popular Forensic Studies minor.

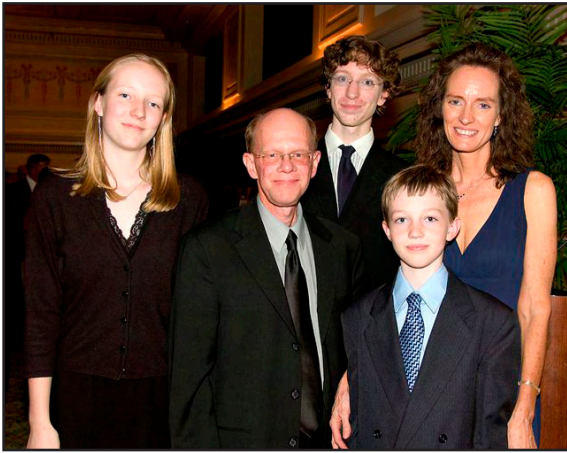
By this time they were married, and together the Boyds founded Radford's Physical Anthropology and Archaeology Laboratory, a repository for significant archaeological and physical anthropological collections, including human and primate skeletal remains.

"At first we operated the lab out of an old fraternity apartment because that was the only space the University could give us," explains Cliff. "We'd have lab stations of bones in the bathroom and another in the kitchen sink. This really became a problem during exams!"

In 2003, Radford appropriated space in Reed Hall for the Boyds' laboratory, which by now had evolved to include experiential classroom facilities for upper division courses in Physical Anthropology and Archaeology, as well as archaeological materials in the form of pottery, soil samples, and arrowheads. "When Radford was able to give us that new space, we knew we were well on our way," says Donna.

Donna went on to receive the 2006 U.S. Professors of the Year Award for master's universities and colleges from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Additional recognition of their achievements came for both Boyds in the form of the Outstanding Faculty Award (OFA), a program administered by SCHEV and sponsored by Dominion that recognizes the finest among Virginia's college faculty for excellence in teaching, research, and public service.

Though Donna was honored two years earlier than Cliff, she says she was much more excited when he was chosen as an OFA recipient because Radford had nominated Cliff for several years in a row. "He really deserved the recognition," she says, though Cliff argues that Donna was a driving force behind his win.



OFA recipients Cliff and Donna Boyd with their children, Emily (age 15), Merritt (age 17), and Forrest (age 11).

"Having been through the process before, Donna was instrumental in helping me organize my [OFA nomination] packet," says Cliff. "It also helped knowing that she was cheering me on. Receiving the OFA award was really an affirmation of all that we'd been doing for the past 30 years."

Viewing the OFA honor as an opportunity to give back to the academic discipline that has defined their lives together, Donna and Cliff decided to donate their \$5,000 OFA award stipends from the Dominion Foundation. "We gave our prize money to the Radford University Foundation to help develop a forensic science scholarship," Donna says.

Both Cliff and Donna hope their dedication to teaching anthropology and the public acknowledgement that comes with the Outstanding Faculty Award will benefit Radford. "More than anything about us as individuals, our OFA wins reflect the high quality of teaching that takes place at Radford," says Cliff.

"Even as we increase our emphasis on scientific research, [Radford] instructors have remained focused on the importance of teaching and inspiring students," Donna adds. "Cliff and I just want to do all we can to help instill a love of learning in our students." ❖



SCHEV Hosts OFA Workshop

SCHEV and Dominion went a step further this year to encourage broader participation in the Outstanding Faculty Awards (OFA) program. Administered by SCHEV and sponsored by Dominion, OFA recognizes superior accomplishments of Virginia faculty members in teaching, research, knowledge integration, and public service.

SCHEV conducted a workshop at the College of William and Mary to help institutions understand the process of preparing OFA nomination packets. More than 30 Virginia institutions were represented at the workshop, where participants heard remarks from previous OFA recipients, Dr. Kate Slevin of the College of William and Mary and Dr. Faye Belgrave of Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. E. Clorisa Phillips from the University of Virginia moderated a panel on the institutional perspective that included Dr. Joseph Kent of the University of Richmond, Dr. Heather Macdonald from the College of William and Mary, and Dr. Robert McDonald from the Virginia Military Institute.

Additionally, Dr. John Dever of Northern Virginia Community College made remarks on Boyer's principles of scholarship, and Dr. Pat Huber of New River Community College had participants break into small groups to analyze winning nomination packets. A final Q&A session was facilitated by Dr. Laura Moriarty of Virginia Commonwealth University.

"Both SCHEV and Dominion are committed to making the OFA nomination process as inclusive and understandable as possible," said Dr. Maricel Quintana-Baker of SCHEV. "I think hosting this hands-on workshop for interested institutions from across the Commonwealth was a wonderful and collaborative effort." ❖



The OFA nomination application and guidelines, as well as the completed packets of the 2008 recipients, can be found on the SCHEV web site at www.schev.edu/AdminFaculty/OFAprogramIndex.asp



Staff Spotlight

Diane Vermaaten

One of Diane Vermaaten's first assignments as SCHEV's Associate for Finance Policy is advising the Commonwealth

Graduate Engineering Program (CGEP), a consortium of Virginia universities established to deliver graduate engineering courses via distance education. "I am very excited about this project," says Ms. Vermaaten who has been with SCHEV for six months. "This is a marquee for cooperation that could be a template for an entire system."

Ms. Vermaaten has worked with a consortium before, but instead of engineers her stakeholders were filmmakers, including directors Michael Moore and Ang Lee. As the Director of Member Services and Programs for the Independent Feature Project, based in New York City, she was responsible for a broad range of events including finance seminars and the American Directors Press conference at the Cannes Film Festival. "I had a great time, but worked ridiculous hours," she says. "All I did was work."

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Ms. Vermaaten was in her office near the World Trade Center and watched the twin towers collapse. A close friend who worked outside the city placed a panicked call, asking Ms. Vermaaten to pick up her daughter from the girl's school in Manhattan. "The streets were filled with dust and people running," she says. "It was surreal."

Ms. Vermaaten says 9-11 caused her to rethink her priorities and her lifestyle. On a visit to her sister's home in Richmond, she says, "I just fell in love with the city, it feels like home to me." She took a job with Virginia Credit Union in Business Development where, among other duties, she coordinated educational programs for her constituents.

A belief in the power of education has been a touchstone throughout Ms. Vermaaten's life. "If higher education wasn't affordable and accessible, I wouldn't be sitting here today," says Ms. Vermaaten who received her bachelor's degree from Ryerson University in Canada, her master's degree from Averett University, and is currently working toward her Ph.D. at Virginia Commonwealth University. She calls her position at SCHEV a "dream job," because it allows her to combine her experience in finance with her passion for education. "For someone like me who has benefited so much from higher education, it doesn't get any better than this!"

Along with a full-time job and her studies, Ms. Vermaaten manages to spend time taking advantage of Virginia's natural beauty. "I am an outdoors person," she says. "I love walking, biking, and running." The one thing she doesn't do in her spare time? "I hardly ever go to the movies anymore." ❖



State Council of
Higher Education for Virginia

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