



In This Issue...

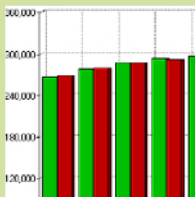


We Are Virginia Veterans on Campus



Innovation On Campus: Danville Community College

DCC helps students cross the "Finish Line" to degree attainment



Painting by Numbers: Enrollment Projections



Student Snapshot: Virginia GEAR UP Student Earns "Life- Changing" Experience in San Francisco and Beyond



Staff Spotlight: Lee Andes Assistant Director of Financial Aid

We are Virginia Veterans on Campus

By Beverly Covington

How can Virginia's colleges and universities provide a high quality higher education experience for our nation's wounded warriors? On August 9, the "We are Virginia Veterans on Campus" conference held at the Virginia Military Institute addressed the challenges faced by student veterans and servicemembers as they negotiate the transition from the military arena to academia. Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Services' Wounded Warrior Program with assistance from the Virginia Commonwealth University's Partnership for People with Disabilities, the conference helped to fulfill one of Governor McDonnell's priorities for his administration. By Executive Order the Governor directed state agencies to identify services to meet the educational, health care, and social services needs of Virginia's veterans.

Over 200 attendees included students, administrators, and leadership from public and private institutions in Virginia seeking to discover what resources are available for military students and to discuss how to develop and improve programs on their campuses.



The conference kicked off with an inspiring keynote address from Major General (Ret.) Christopher Cortez, the General Manager of Microsoft's Strategic Operations for the Public Sector in the Americas and Asia. Speaking about programs developed by Microsoft and other military-friendly corporate employers, he demonstrated that many viable employment opportunities

exist for veteran students. The key for student advisors is to become familiar with such employers in their communities and to seek their engagement and partnership.

A variety of firsthand perspectives were provided during a panel discussion with four current students at Virginia public and private institutions who recently transitioned from military service to the classroom. Participants included Sarah Bonner from Southwest Virginia Community College, Vivian Greentree from Old Dominion University, Johnathan Hoggatt from Virginia Commonwealth University,

continued on page 5

SCHEV has recently launched a new section on the website that highlights educational benefits for service members and their families. Go to www.schev.edu/MilitaryEducation.asp.

Innovation On Campus: Danville Community College

DCC Helps Students Cross the “Finish Line” to Degree Attainment

By Kathleen Kincheloe

“I just got comfortable and made up excuses not to finish my degree,” says Anne Moore-Sparks, Project Manager for the City of Danville’s Office of Economic Development. Ms. Moore-Sparks was attending Radford University when she left school in 1985 to return home. Later she found stable fulltime employment and decided not to go back to college.

However, Ms. Moore-Sparks often thought about what it would take to earn her degree, which is why she was excited to learn about the new Finish Line initiative, a project spearheaded by the New College Institute in Martinsville to help Southside Virginia residents who are within 15 credit hours of receiving an associate to complete their college degree.

Through the Finish Line program, Ms. Moore-Sparks will be able to apply her previously earned Radford credits to Danville Community College (DCC), one of three community colleges in the Southside region to participate in this project.

“I am excited about this opportunity in my own hometown,” she exclaims. “I want to complete my degree for personal satisfaction and to advance in my career.”

A Call to Action

The impetus for the Finish Line initiative is based in part on recommendations from Governor McDonnell’s Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and

Investment, of which DCC President Dr. Carlyle Ramsey is a member.

The Commission supports Governor McDonnell’s call for the completion of 100,000 additional postsecondary degrees in Virginia over the next 15 years, as well as the creation of affordable pathways to college degree attainment so that Commonwealth citizens are prepared for employment in the high-income, high-demand fields of the new economy. The Virginia Business Higher Education Council made similar recommendations in its Grow By Degrees initiative to make Virginia a national and international leader in attracting new business investment, research grants, and job opportunities.

After hearing this call to action, the New College Institute submitted a proposal to the Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission and received approximately \$165,000 in funding to partner with DCC, Patrick Henry Community College, Southside Virginia Community College, and the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center.

Each of the community colleges will hire a staff member responsible for creating awareness of the Finish Line initiative and identifying area students within 15 credit hours of receiving an associate’s degree. In addition to establishing a public-private higher education consortia to help identify potential students, the colleges plan to use SCHEV’s data system to identify candidates by zip code.

“The Finish Line provides an exciting regional strategy for strengthening our workforce,” says DCC President Carlyle Ramsey. “It also encourages the higher education partners to leverage and maximize our resources to assist thousands of students who have accumulated some college credits to earn a credential.”

Impacting a Campus

DCC took its first step in the enormous task of identifying potential students by hiring Ms. Traci Daniel as its Community Outreach Specialist. She is tasked with creating a plan to contact and recruit eligible former students and other area residents who have accumulated prior college credits. An internal advisory committee will assist Ms. Daniel in evaluating transcripts, placing interested students in appropriate academic programs, and providing friendly customer service to new students, many of whom haven’t been inside a college classroom in years.



DCC’s Community Outreach Specialist Traci Daniel will identify and contact students who have accumulated prior college credits.

“Everyone at the college will be engaged in the Finish Line initiative,” says Andrea Burney, Director of Public Relations at DCC. “From the Admissions and Counseling offices that will oversee the enrollment process to our faculty, academic advisors, and Career Placement and Workforce Services offices, we expect

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all areas to help us provide a seamless transition for the returning student.”

DCC administrators and faculty believe that the Finish Line initiative will positively impact not just those students returning to campus to finish their degrees, but also traditional students already attending classes. “Current students will benefit from their interaction with others who bring life experiences to the classrooms,” says Ms. Burney. “Through this initiative, for example, we expect to see more veterans taking advantage [of DCC degree programs].” School personnel are there to offer their support for returning students, reiterates Traci Daniel, DCC’s Community Outreach Specialist. “I love being able to walk the students through the process of enrolling and helping them overcome the barriers that may have prevented them from succeeding before,” she says. “I want to help them see that there is an end in sight, with a better job and higher quality of life once they finish their degree here at DCC.”

Benefitting a Community

Officials expect that the Finish Line program will benefit the community by creating a more educated citizenry, which in turn, could attract more economic development to the region. Ms. Burney says she expects the initiative will have an important impact on the DCC service areas of the City of Danville, Pittsylvania County, Halifax County, and other nearby localities by increasing the number of residents with a marketable skill. Of the estimated 900,000 Virginians who currently have some college credit, but have not yet completed a degree, approximately 41,000 are Southside residents who could potentially benefit from the Finish Line program.



Traci Daniel (left) helps Anne Moore-Sparks return to college after a 25-year absence. Through the Finish Line program, Moore-Sparks will be able to apply her previously earned credits to DCC.

When Governor McDonnell and Secretary of Education Laura Fornash announced the Finish Line initiative in August via video conference, the positive feedback was immediate. “It’s been amazing,” says Ms. Daniel, describing community reaction to the project. “Right after the news conference announcing the initiative, I had messages on my phone daily from people interested in returning to college. It’s rewarding for me to be part of a project that will benefit so many of our citizens.”

“We know that going back and getting a degree is a challenge for some people, especially for those who may have been out of school for quite a while,” says Ms. Burney. “This is not a one-size-fits-all project. These students have stopped out of higher education for many different reasons.”

Though DCC is still reviewing the data on their target audience, Ms. Burney says school administrators are

learning that many potential students are employed fulltime and are seeking flexible options. Based on preliminary findings, DCC anticipates that many of the Finish Line students will find that financing their return to college is a significant challenge, so the school is exploring ways to assist these students with tuition costs, such as scholarship opportunities.

“We are finding that many have financial need and are looking for student-friendly tuition assistance processes,” she says. “We want to be sure that DCC’s programs are flexible and responsive to their needs.”

The Finish Line program seems to be living up to that promise for Ms. Moore-Sparks who returned to the classroom after leaving Radford more than 25 years ago. After completing her Associate of Arts and Science Degree in Liberal Arts at DCC, she plans to transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree. ❖

Painting by Numbers: Enrollment Projections

The State Council recently approved six-year student enrollment projections submitted by Virginia public institutions. In summarizing projected enrollments and degrees for 2011-12 through 2017-18, as well as 2001-2010 enrollment trends, SCHEV data guru Tod Massa painted the Council a clearer picture of the state of higher education in Virginia. Within that fore- and aft-looking picture were three takeaways:

- *These projections are probably conservative, as proved to be true for estimates made in 2009.*
- *Degree estimates indicate institutions appear to be on track to meet the goal of 100,000 cumulative new in-state undergraduate degrees and certificates by 2025.*
- *Despite financial challenges and economic uncertainties, Virginia institutions are still committed to growth.*

The picture created by Tod and his staff is worth a closer look.

The conclusion that enrollment projections for the next six years are likely conservative estimates is predicated on two facts. First, recent enrollment projections underestimated actual headcounts. (In fact, public institutions' Fall 2010 headcounts exceeded their 2009 projections by 28,671 – by 23,536 at the two-year institutions and 5,135 at the four-year institutions.) Secondly, recent guidance to institutions encouraged the cautious development of enrollment projections.

The enrollment estimates project growth. Across both the public and the TAG-eligible private-institution sectors, Virginia institutions' projections forecast an overall increase of 13% in headcount enrollments by Fall 2017 – a move from 515,546 to 581,397 students. Of these 65,851 additional headcounts, 30% (19,756) are expected to be new, first-time-in-college, in-state undergraduates; 23% (15,225) are expected to be transfers; and the remainder are expected to be graduate students, out-of-state students, or better retained students who remain in school longer, possibly through graduation.

The growth in in-state undergraduates and transfers should yield more degree awards to these populations. Over the next six years, the public two- and four-year institutions project an additional 42,614 degree awards to in-state undergrads (24,485 at two-year institutions and 18,129 at four-year institutions). TAG-eligible private institutions, which participated in the projection process this year as a result of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, project an increase of 7,100 degrees to Virginia students.

Secondly, Tod concludes that these degree-award estimates put Virginia institutions on track to achieve the state's goal of 100,000 cumulative additional undergraduate degrees and certificates by 2025. In the first 40% of the 15-year period, public institutions project producing 42.6% of the 100,000-degree goal. Private institutions project producing 17.5% of their suggested target. And if these projections prove to be low, as Tod speculates, then so much the better. However, he does caution that these estimates assume at least level funding.

Lastly, Tod concludes that Virginia institutions continue to commit to growth in the face of ongoing challenges

and uncertainties. Such growth was certainly borne out in the tumultuous 2001-2010 period when total public and private nonprofit enrollments increased 38% and total degree and certificate awards increased by 48%. Continued growth is also reflected in institutions' projections through 2017-18. Despite budget reductions for public institutions, endowment losses for private institutions, and tuition increases for students and families over the past decade, Virginia higher education experienced increased demand, responded with increased supply, and yielded increased results.

Going forward, uncertainties abound. Nonetheless, the public four-year institutions project enrollment growth over the next six years of 10% (20,263 students); the public two-year institutions predict growth of 7% (13,040 students); and the private nonprofits estimate 31% (32,548 students).

Virginia institutions appear committed to serving more students and producing more graduates, with the recent passage of the Top Jobs legislation, our Governor and legislature have provided a blueprint to guide, assist, and support them. All agree that adequate funding and prudent, efficient expenditure of that funding will be necessary. When Governor McDonnell introduces his budget proposals, the picture of higher education in Virginia will come into even sharper focus. ❖

We are Virginia Veterans continued from front page...

and Allen Nelson from St. Leo University. Each shared personal experiences and took questions from the audience, fostering a candid discussion of issues ranging from administrative obstacles to personal interactions with fellow students. Several described unpleasant experiences with relatively immature traditional-aged students. Others emphasized the benefits of interacting with staff and faculty who are sensitive to veterans' issues, such as the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The panel shed light on the importance of having a veteran student group or other unifying presence to allow these students to establish a community on campus. Universities can create a military-friendly atmosphere by giving top-down support to such groups and listening to their input.

Following a networking lunch, the afternoon began with representatives from the Virginia Wounded Warriors Program (VWWP) providing an overview of the services offered in five regional offices throughout Virginia. The VWWP seeks to engage the institutions of higher education located in each region and ensure they are aware of VWWP's unique programs, such as equine therapy, as well as family social events. For smaller institutions that lack the resources to provide specialized attention for their veteran population, linking to VWWP regional offices can ensure that those students have access to a broader array of services and help them develop a sense of community.

Three afternoon breakout sessions were devoted to sharing effective practices for leadership, administration, or counseling staff. SCHEV staff members attended the leadership session, which featured a presentation from the American Council on Education outlining the many initiatives, grant opportunities, and publications they offer in support of improved educational experiences for veterans. Other presenters highlighted best practices from Northern Virginia Community College, George Mason University, and Virginia Commonwealth University. Following the breakout session, conference organizers distilled the results of the three discussions into a set of recommendations for universities to consider in their efforts to become more military friendly. Recommendations included the need for staff training, providing a dedicated orientation session for

student veterans, and being aware of the barriers for veterans seeking help. SCHEV staff will continue to examine the lessons learned from the "We Are Virginia Veterans on Campus" conference while working with institutions and veterans to develop statewide guidelines for military-friendly campuses. ❖

For more information, visit:
We are Virginia Veterans
<http://wearevirginiaveterans.org>

Virginia Department of Veterans Services
www.dvs.virginia.gov
1-877-285-1299



Student Snapshot: Virginia GEAR UP Student Earns “Life-Changing” Experience in San Francisco and Beyond

By Emily Matney, with Alice Funk and Kelly Hammond



Though many Virginia GEAR UP students will graduate high school this spring, Emily is proud that she will be the only one wearing the National Youth Scholar scroll pictured here.

treat for a girl who had rarely had the opportunity to venture out of her home state. What Emily didn't realize immediately was that sightseeing would be the last thing on her mind when she arrived in San Francisco, or that she would have such a life-changing experience at the Summit.

Gearing Up for Her Future

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) initiative was created by the U.S. Congress in 1998 to foster increased knowledge, expectations, and preparation for postsecondary education among all students, including those from low-income families. SCHEV received one of the first grants awarded and began serving seventh-graders in 1999, providing continuing services to the cohort of students as they progressed through high school.

When Emily Matney, a senior at Marion Senior High School in Marion, Virginia learned that she had been accepted by the National Council for Community and Education Partnership (NCCEP) to participate in the 2011 NCCEP/GEAR UP Youth Leadership Summit, she was extremely excited. She knew that she would be flying in a plane for the first time and getting the chance to see San Francisco, California — quite a

When the first cohort of students graduated from high school in 2006, SCHEV applied for and received its second grant to serve Virginia students. GEAR UP Virginia currently provides services to over 4,000 senior students attending 36 high schools in 25 school divisions across the Commonwealth. Services to students include tutoring, career awareness counseling, and college-readiness programs.

Emily has been an active participant in GEAR UP since 2006 when she entered seventh grade at Sugar Grove Combined School, a small school located in a community of about 1,000 people in rural southwestern Virginia. She continued her participation in the GEAR UP program at Marion High School. Emily says the middle to high school transition program helped her face some of the fears and challenges of moving from her close-knit community school to the larger high school where she joined 180 other students in the Class of 2012. “Suddenly there were as many students in my class as there had been in my entire school,” she says.

At Marion High School, Emily took advantage of nearly every GEAR UP program or activity offered. She participated in a number of college visits, tutoring sessions, and financial aid and college readiness workshops. While she found all the GEAR UP publications and activities helpful, and the trips to college campuses and cultural events exciting, Emily believes that it is the relationships she has built with her peers, administrators, GEAR UP coordinators, and Career Coach that have been the most instrumental in setting her course toward earning a college degree. “I have such a strong support system that failure is not an option,” she says. “Ms. [Linda] Ross is my GEAR UP Career Coach, my mentor, and most of all the kind of friend who supports me, but is always challenging me to do great things.”

As Emily entered her junior year, the entire GEAR UP team at Marion High School encouraged her to submit an application for the National Youth Leadership Summit (YLS). Emily's Career Coach, Linda Ross, took the lead in helping her develop the essay and the media presentation needed to complete the application. Emily's presentation was titled “What Could Help Us,” and focused on how drug abuse has impacted education in rural Virginia.



Emily (center) with other YLS participants.

Emily is quick to point out that most people think illegal drug abuse and drug trafficking are problems in urban areas and not in the mountains of southwest Virginia. “Boy, are they badly mistaken,” says Emily. “Given our heavy forested mountainous terrain, our sparse population, and our very depressed economy, there is no better place to find marijuana growing or a secluded meth lab than in our rural communities.” Emily believes that schools, law enforcement, and communities must work together to first acknowledge the drug problem exists and then find creative solutions to support students and parents. “It is no longer cool for school administrators or others to just look the other way and hope the problem will go away or someone else will deal with it,” states Emily.

Testing the West Coast Waters

In spring 2011, Emily learned she had been selected from among thousands of GEAR UP applicants as one



Emily poses in the fog at the San Francisco Bay Bridge during her first trip to the West Coast.

of 25 National Youth Scholars nationwide to participate in the Youth Leadership Summit (YLS) held in San Francisco in July.

Emily's parents, who have long hoped their daughter would be the first in the family to attend college, were thrilled and proud when they found out she had earned the opportunity to represent Virginia on a national level. Laughing as she describes their reaction to the news, Emily says, "They were like a couple of five-year olds who had overdosed on Sweet Tarts!"

Blending leadership development with the experience of participating in a professional conference, the YLS teaches participants how to be advocates for their schools and communities, empowering them to become the voice for their peers. Youth leaders, known as GEAR UP Scholars, work together to compile a Summit Report focused on what educators should consider as they design strategies and programs for increasing student achievement. The culmination of the Summit is the presentation of the report to the conference attendees.

"The staff worked with us day in and day out for three days to make us better speakers and motivators," explains Emily. "We hoped the audience would not be able to resist listen-

ing to our problems." Emily chose to share a personal story of how her first cousin and mentor had lost her life to drugs as she was preparing to be the first Matney to attend college. Following Emily's powerful presentation there were few dry eyes in the convention hall. This scene was repeated time and time again as other students shared their stories. The student presentations were a powerful reminder of the positive difference GEAR UP makes in the lives of students each and every day.

Although Emily spent much of her time in San Francisco participating in the Summit and attending the National GEAR UP Conference, her GEAR UP Coordinator Susan Lawson and Regional Manager Alice Funk made sure it wasn't all work and no

play. They asked Emily to do her own research about the city and make a list of the things she wished to see or do. The first priority on Emily's list was to put her toes in the Pacific Ocean. After a number of streetcar and bus rides and a fairly long walk down a steep hillside, just ahead of Emily were the bright blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. She shouted, "The water is blue and doesn't look anything like the ocean at Myrtle Beach," as she ran toward the water's edge. She soon discovered the differences between the Atlantic and the Pacific go beyond appearance when she put her toes in icy water. Emily was shocked by just how cold the water was in the middle of July, but she proceeded to fill plastic bags with sand that she would carry back to her friends and family in Virginia.

One Small Step in a Quest to Change the World

Emily has now returned to Marion High School, and in addition to her school responsibilities and her part-time job with the Virginia Parks System, she has

been busy sharing her YLS experience with everyone from her division superintendent to state and federal lawmakers. She is also writing essays and completing college and scholarship applications. She has been inundated with offers from various colleges and universities, but she currently plans to attend Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, and major in either human services or public policy.

"GEAR UP is very proud of Emily Matney and all that she stands for," says Dr. Gary Krapf, Senior Associate for Academic Affairs and Director of the GEAR UP program at SCHEV. "She is emblematic of the talented students in Virginia's graduating cohort. I am proud of Emily for all her accomplishments, and it's with gratitude that I recognize the strong guidance and support she received from her parents and the GEAR UP team."

Emily continues to work closely with her Career Coach and GEAR UP coordinators to complete all the necessary steps to arrive at college prepared

for success. She plans to apply for the GEAR UP scholarship to help her afford her long-time dream to be the first Matney to complete a college education.



Emily Matney poses at the 2011 NCCEP/GEAR UP Youth Leadership Summit with GEAR UP Regional Manager Alice Funk (left) and GEAR UP Coordinator Susan Lawson (right).

"The Youth Leadership Summit changed my life," Emily says. "It provided me with many life-long lessons that I look forward to sharing with my friends, family, and my community." Emily hopes that many more Virginia students become a part of the YLS experience. "I encourage all GEAR UP students to take advantage of this and the many other

opportunities the program provides. For me, YLS was a small step in my quest to change the world. I am truly appreciative of GEAR UP Virginia for all the opportunities it has given me to prepare for college and a successful future." ❖

Staff Spotlight: Lee Andes



SCHEV's Assistant Director for Financial Aid says the best career advice he ever got was from his father. Lee Andes was in high school and working for his Dad's house-painting business when the elder Andes said, "Son, you're a hard worker, but you're not fast enough to paint professionally. You should go to college." That's exactly what Lee did starting with a bachelor's degree in religion from Liberty University.

Lee moved back home after graduation and took a job as a lab research assistant for a military sub-contractor. The overnight hours were rough on his system and his social life, and while the work supplied a paycheck, it wasn't professionally fulfilling. Lee noticed his contemporaries with advanced degrees were moving along their career paths much faster, so he enrolled in Lynchburg College where he got his master's degree in public administration.

"I stumbled into higher education when I took a job at Liberty," says Lee, who held several positions during his ten years as a staff member. The jobs at his alma mater included Distance Learning Advisor, Associate Registrar, and Associate Director of Financial Aid. "I was often the person who had to deliver bad news to students. That was one of the toughest jobs in my career, but it prepared me for my current work."

Through his job in financial aid, Lee met Steve Merritt who was SCHEV's Financial Aid Director in 1997. "I applied to work at SCHEV as Senior Associate for Financial Aid on a whim, so I was surprised when they hired me," says Lee. What followed was a period of rapid change at the agency which resulted in Lee moving up the ladder quickly to his current position where he has oversight over state financial aid programs such as the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant

and the Military Survivors and Dependent Education Program. The confidence of his superiors and a commitment to his work were also major factors in Lee's success at SCHEV. According to Lee the job fits his personality: "I like research, analysis, law, and working with students and parents."

What does he tell those students and parents? "The financial aid process should be simple, but it's not. It's a multi-layered process. That's what they miss...how early and how persistent they have to be. They wait too long to start the process." He hopes to avoid these mistakes as he helps his 17-year-old daughter Heather navigate the college application process. Lee and his wife Karen also have a 15-year-old son named Christian.

The future of college affordability in America concerns Lee, specifically as financial aid funding struggles to keep up with the increasing cost of education. "On the federal level we have lost some important programs while funding for others has stagnated," he says. "Combined with a slow economy, families are becoming increasingly stressed to pay for college, even with recent funding increases from the state."

Along with his agency work, Lee is involved in several professional organizations that advocate for financial aid programs. He is one of the founding members of the Virginia College Access Network and served as its first president. He also served as president of the National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs.

Despite a busy schedule, that gets even busier during the General Assembly session when he is often called upon to testify in committee, Lee does manage to spend down time with his family. They all love the beach and spend as much time as possible at a family house on Chincoteague Island. After recovering from knee surgery in 2008, Lee started running with his wife and completed the SunTrust Marathon in 2010. "It took me a full year to recover from that surgery and it was a pretty incredible feeling to cross that finish line."

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Lee's parents are still supportive of Lee in all his pursuits whether professional or personal. "Dad thinks I made the right choices, but he doesn't understand exactly what I do," says Lee. "Every now and then he still thinks I'm a teacher and asks me what I'll be doing over the summer." He is no doubt relieved to know that it won't be painting houses. ❖



Lee with his wife, Karen, and their two children, Heather and Christian.