

VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Jesse Jackson to speak at MLK celebration

This year for the first time, Virginia Tech officially recognizes the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday with no classes scheduled. A group of faculty, staff, and students have come together to plan a week-long series of events begin Sunday, January 15. The Reverend Jesse Jackson will be the featured speaker on Monday, January 16, at 7 p.m. in Burruss Auditorium.

Throughout the week there will also be service activities, brown-bag/teach ins, a poster session on diversity research, and the ninth annual Diversity Summit on Friday, January 20 from 2 to 5 p.m. More information on all of the events will be posted on the university web site and distributed widely across campus.

Columbia:

The Tragic Loss

By Alicia Cohen

On Tuesday, November 8, the documentary, "Columbia: The Tragic Loss," an examination of the 2004 Columbia Space Shuttle disaster and a poignant tribute to Colonel Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut ever to venture into outer space, was shown in Colonial Hall. This marked the end of a three-day Jewish Film Festival sponsored by multiple organizations and departments with leadership from Hillel, the Jewish student organization on campus.



Tom Tillar, Charles Steger, and Charles Camarda

The evening began with a presentation to President Steger from Charles Camarda. Camarda completed his Ph.D. in aerospace engineering at

Virginia Tech in 1990 and was aboard NASA's Space Shuttle Discovery mission in August, when it docked with the International Space Station.

One of the items he took with him on the Discovery trip was a Virginia Tech flag, which he presented to Steger. Camarda spoke briefly prior to the film about how tragic the event was and the "family" members he lost — fellow astronauts from his training class. After the film he joined a panel of Virginia Tech engineering faculty and a representative from NASA to answer questions.

The film was told through family interviews, and a wealth of archival materials, including never-before-seen

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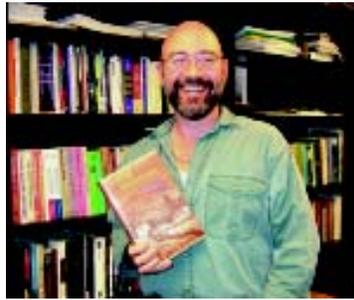
Artists share 'Gay in Appalachia' work

By Kaley Lentini

Two Virginia Tech professors, Jeff Mann and Carol Burch-Brown, presented their creative work regarding homosexuality in Appalachia in a program named "Gay in Appalachia," held in October in the Torgersen Museum.

The celebration opened with refreshments provided by the Women's Center and mingling among the students, faculty members, and community members who attended the event. Promptly at 7:45 p.m., amidst the rush to locate more chairs for the larger-than-expected crowd, the program began.

Mann, an English professor who teaches creative writing, literature and Appalachian studies courses, presented his most recent work, a collection of memoir and poetry entitled "Loving Mountains, Loving Men." Mann read excerpts from his book, published as part



of a Ohio University Press' series on ethnicity and gender in Appalachia, and talked about his experiences as a gay man in the Appalachian area.

"It is hard to balance both identities," he said. "It would be easier to be one or the other, but I insist on a difficult complexity ... I value both of those identities ... both sides of my personality, and I refuse to relinquish either one."

Mann's purpose in writing his new book was "to speak for a large group of people who have not been spoken for." He said, "At age 46, I'm very tired of living in a world where people make fun of gay folks and make fun of Appalachians." He wants his readers to know that "Appalachians and gay people are human beings like other human beings ... same concerns and same desires for love and safety."

"I think it would be nice to see an America that values difference instead of being afraid of it," Mann said. "The main thing I can do is push that progress along, and I'm eager to do it."

Of the extraordinary number of people who attended, Mann said, "This means a lot to me ... To see all these people here tonight ... This would be one of the high points of my career here at Virginia Tech."

Burch-Brown — a painter, photographer, and a book artist, as well as a professor of art and humanities — presented two multimedia shows. The first, about her family and its past connection to racism, was entitled "Pralines." The second presentation was a film Burch-Brown made to document The Shamrock Bar, a gay bar in Bluefield,

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Faculty book advocates culture-centered leadership

Multicultural competence, is essential for individual effectiveness and corporate competitiveness in today's diverse workplaces, according to management associate professor Mary Connerley.

"No matter how highly skilled, well trained, or intelligent you are—if you are making culturally inappropriate assumptions, you will not be accurate in your assessment, meaningful in your understanding, or appropriate in your interactions in the workplace," she said.

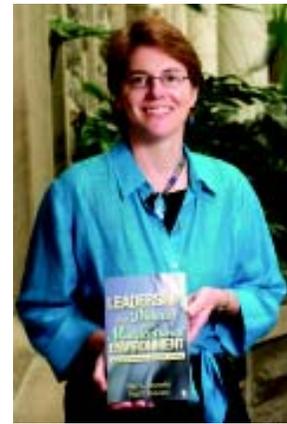
Connerley, who has co-authored a new book, *Leadership in a Diverse and Multicultural Environment* (Sage, 2005), says culture influences our thoughts, words, and actions in ways that are often unrecognized and that can lead to misunderstandings, missed opportunities, and less than ideal outcomes." Being multiculturally competent, she said, means being aware of the impact of different personal, organizational, or national cultures and having the knowledge and skills to work well with culturally different people.

Though multicultural competence is particularly important for leaders in an organization, Connerley said, all employees can "get more out of workplace relationships by being more culturally mindful." It can improve "a person's decision-making ability by accounting for the many ways that culture influences different perceptions of the same solution."

Her book, co-authored with multicultural counseling psychologist Paul Pedersen, advocates a culture-centered approach to leadership and training programs to develop multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, in that order. Counseling psychology, she said, is far ahead of the management field in the knowledge it has developed about multicultural training.

Her book discusses the three-step training model and such topics as white privilege, learning styles, identity models, and constructive conflict. Each chapter offers questions, exercises, and a "critical incident" for group discussion.

No training program can possibly teach all the skills needed in every situation, she said, "but developing multicultural awareness, accruing knowledge, and learning skills provide a solid foundation for



being multiculturally mindful."

Connerley herself has participated in diversity training and intercultural programs sponsored by the Society for Human Resource Management and the University of Hawaii. She has received two GM Sullivan grants to promote the Sullivan Principles of corporate social responsibility, and she serves on the Pamplin College's Diversity Committee.

Selected as a Virginia Tech Multicultural Fellow in

2000, Connerley found kinship in a small circle of faculty and staff members who are committed to furthering diversity on campus. Its members have great ideas, but also "a great frustration" with the slow progress at the university.

"We have celebrated diversity. We now have to move past the celebration — to acceptance and building on it. We have the pieces in place to be a truly functioning multicultural university, but there's room for improvement. And it has to start with top leadership, with not just words but action, including placing a greater value on the research and service that's done." Even for those who are passionate and dedicated, she said, "it's hard to continue to provide energy to move these things forward when there are no resources to back up the rhetoric."

Editor's note: Connerley and her new book are featured in a longer story in the winter (January) 2006 Virginia Tech *Research* magazine, published by the Office of the Vice President for Research.

GE leader talks about importance of diversity

By Sookhau Ho

During a visit to campus, GE Vice Chairman David Calhoun talked about how he came to value diversity.



In what ways did Virginia Tech educate you well?

I've always believed I graduated as a well-trained accountant and, if I wanted to do public accounting, I could have. I wanted to work on the industry side and proved to myself that I could do the job based on what I learned at Tech. So I feel that, technically, I was very well prepared.

Were there ways in which we could have prepared you better, things you wish you had known?

I wouldn't necessarily single out Virginia Tech, but the times didn't prepare people for the importance of inclusion and diversity. And in my view, there is no better environment to promote and to convey the importance of inclusion and diversity than on a college campus. To me, that's just a subject that ought to be front and center for everybody—faculty, school leadership, students. You can grow as a person in an enormous way if you're really using that diversity to your advantage.

That subject is one where I wasn't as prepared as I would've liked to have been. I don't think I walked out into industry with a thirst or a hunger to go seek out diverse people and to learn about them. I allowed myself to be isolated in that sense, and that turned out to be a big mistake. It really wasn't until I moved to Asia that this all came home for me. Once you understand just how big a deal it is and how important it is to the world and to our businesses and to our own personal development—that's when the lights go on. I wish I'd started that whole process 10 years earlier.

Yes, we are increasingly working in global organizations and multicultural workplaces, which demands multicultural knowledge and skills. How do you develop this expertise?

The academic community and others have built some wonderful tools to help folks of diverse orientations learn about each other's backgrounds and what they bring to a situation. Practicing those tools is very important, because I haven't met anybody yet who's great right out of the chute. And so it's really using these tools and practicing them—every day, somehow, some way.

How do you practice multicultural skills as a leader at GE?

We are always launching new initiatives in the company. The first day of any launch, you assemble team members. If you're smart, you'll have a diverse group of people—diverse in terms of discipline, geographic origin,

diverse in every respect. And on that first day, we use team-building exercises, tools that are used to explain what we're bringing to the table. We try to do that on the first day because, in my view, if you do it even a week late, everybody's already tried to figure out the other members of the team. They've already prescribed their behaviors, and eventually, it becomes a hurdle you have to overcome. And that's hard to do.

But, if on the first day, you let everybody know that diversity and inclusion are important to the way we're going to execute our jobs—on the first day, everyone has a chance to talk about why they come at this the way they do—all of a sudden, the barriers are way down and the setting is right to really develop an initiative the right way, with everybody's oar in the water. So, yeah, we practice it and practice it, literally every day.

Here on campus, we've had some incidents and developments in recent years that have been counter to the university's desire to be a diverse and inclusive place. What have been your thoughts and responses?

I have had fairly extensive discussions with university administrators on this subject. And I'm convinced that they are serious about the subject and serious about improving. And I have to say it's very important that we do. But I am convinced that this administration knows exactly what the issue is, and they're very serious about doing something about it and are. If I wasn't convinced of that, I wouldn't be as active as I am.

Why Virginia Tech Principles of Community matter

By Ben Dixon



Kimble Reynolds at the spring 2005 commencement

Well, Diversity, indeed, does matter! So say every major constituent group within the Virginia Tech community. Representatives of the board of visitors, faculty, staff, and student groups, plus the presidents of the university and the alumni association have all spoken as if with one voice, "Diversity does matter! It matters enough that the community

Did you ever think Virginia Tech and the university would ever make such a declaration as the VT POC?

KR: Frankly, No. When I heard about Virginia Tech's efforts to make a declaration such as the Principles of Community I was very surprised and pleased.

BD: I can understand you being pleased with what was happening, but what surprised you?

KR: This was not the university's traditional approach to responding to issues pertaining to diversity. Instead of waiting out the storm of negative publicity, Virginia Tech engaged the entire university community in a commitment that publicly states its willingness to be progressive in this area.

BD: Why

should every alumnus be interested in how the VT POC are implemented or addressed by the university?

KR: The strength of our university lies within its people. The Principles make sure that we respect and appreciate each other by recognizing the importance of the diverse experiences

expressed its expectations for itself in the Virginia Tech Principles of Community." One of the early and consistent voices speaking about the importance of endorsing the Principles was Kimble Reynolds, former president of the alumni association. In an interview with Ben Dixon, vice president for multicultural affairs, Kimble recounted his comments about the Principles at the 2005 undergraduate graduation ceremonies.

The following is an excerpt from the 2005 undergraduate graduation speech given by Kimble Reynolds.

"Virginia Tech needs to do a better job at creating a more diverse and inclusive community. This is the case at all levels—administration, faculty, and students. Our priority level on this issue has shaken my own allegiance to the point I question whether I should remain in this honored position of President of the Alumni Association. But it was the activism of our student community that renewed my hope for our future leadership.

Your protest on the drill field was an encouraging course of action from principle. You held a revolutionary spirit that was determined to negotiate with those who had been selected as the stewards of our conscience.

...Keep the positive tension in our university community, that will help our university leader's rise from the dark depths of our past to the majestic heights of an inclusive community."

BD: Kimble, you were one of the signers of the VT POC, representing the alumni association, and you have spoken out on several occasions about their importance. At the Spring 2005 graduation ceremonies you admonished and challenged the university community to embrace the Principles as a rallying point for making Virginia Tech a more welcoming institution for all.

and talents that a person offers our university community. Trying to understand differences and respecting a person is not only part of the educational experience, it is simply the right thing to do. Every alumnus should be concerned about how these Principles are implemented or addressed because it is a reflection on each alumnus and ultimately the Principles add value to each degree.

BD: I agree. Most people would at least acknowledge that it's the right thing to do. But, what about those of us who want to see some practical benefits from a focus on cultural diversity and inclusion?

KR: As our world becomes smaller and we have an even more global economy, Virginia Tech should be in a position to be competitive on all fronts including research, faculty, and campus life. To change and move forward Virginia Tech must make sure that these Principles become interwoven in the fabric of our university culture. After all, if the intellectual, cultural and economic playing fields are going to be even more complex in the future, we should make every effort to insure that every student, faculty, staff, and administrator have a chance to become more competent in global diversity matters.

About 'The Conductor'

The Conductor is produced twice during the fall and twice during the spring semesters by the Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Please submit articles to the editorial board at multicultural@vt.edu.

Back issues are online at <http://www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor>

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Salem Times Register

Gay in Appalachia...

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W.Va. Her documentary, "It's Reigning Queens in Appalachia," incorporated pieces of interviews she conducted with the bar's owner, "Miss Helen" Compton, and pictures of drag queens at the bar.

Burch-Brown decided to embark on this project because she wanted to preserve and document the history of the bar. "I hope that (viewers) think that it's funny in places, outrageous ... poignant," she said.

"I want to make people feel some of the loneliness that Helen talked about," Burch-Brown said. "(Helen) said gay life is one of the loneliest lives you can lead, and I think she's right."

Burch-Brown wants people to know that gay life "is not abstract; it's real."

She also wants people to take a better look at is homophobia. "It's an abomination ... It doesn't really take that much to keep people from speaking out," Burch-Brown said. "If violence against ... your group doesn't matter to society, then it's like saying you don't matter."

"I learned more about Appalachian culture and realized that homosexuals are still discriminated against a lot," Doug Ryan, a sophomore engineering and physics major, said of the presentation.



Carol Burch-Brown shown here with some of her students' artwork.

Teresa Chen, a sophomore university studies major, was shocked, surprised, and angered by the presentation. "I didn't know (homosexuals) were prosecuted and oppressed," she said.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Caucus of Virginia Tech sponsored the event, and many other organizations, including the Women's Center, were involved in planning the event.

Ellen Plummer, director of the Women's Center, said she "absolutely wanted the Women's Center to be involved." Plummer said "It's part of the fabric and the community of Virginia Tech ... The Women's Center is very committed to being a part of the community that supports the LGBT community." Plummer believes it is very important that different organizations come together and support minority and majority groups because "it's the only way we're going to make Virginia Tech a welcoming and supportive place for everybody."

Courtesy of the *Collegiate Times*

Tragic Loss ...

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footage from the mission, and Ramon's own diary, miraculously retrieved from the crash debris. It was an incredibly moving documentary with clips going back and forth from interviews with NASA professionals to home videos of Ramon and his family to the Columbia crew during their trip.

What was most evident in the clips of the Columbia crew was their sense of camaraderie and the joy they experienced from being in space. They spoke daily to their family members and talked about how striking it was to see the moon in three dimensions and the beauty of the sunrise from their vantage point. One got the sense that even in their tragic loss, family members could find some comfort in knowing that their loved ones died doing something they loved and that was important to them. We could all learn a lot from them about dedication and determination.

Conference focuses on diversity

By Jane Ann Williams

Minority recruitment and retention, inclusion, and diversity management are some of the key issues to be addressed at the *Third Annual Mid Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity (MACSD)* to be held at the Inn of Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center on Feb. 2 - 3, 2006. The program celebrates diversity and critically analyzes events that affect campuses, corporations, and countries. This year, the conference will include the First Annual Business and Industry Session, *Voices and Visions: Building and Sustaining a Diverse Workplace*. Abstracts of proposals are still being accepted for MACSD and registration for both conferences is underway.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs anticipates MACSD presentations from business leaders and scholars on a wide range of topics, such as language policies in the workplace, gay and lesbians in rural communities, tenure, and parity. Students and graduate fellows will also participate, giving the Millennial Student perspective of campus climate issues.

The conference is drawing internationally acclaimed experts in the fields of equal opportunity, law, scholarship, publication, and corporate leadership. Plenary speakers, roundtable discussions, and poster sessions address socioeconomic issues relating to diversity and multiculturalism. MACSD opens Thursday, Feb. 2, at 1 p.m., with keynote speaker, Robert Jones, senior vice president for system administration at University of



Poster session at last year's conference.

Minnesota, who will speak on *Recruiting and Retaining Minorities in the Workplace*. The conference concludes with a presentation by Lucinda Roy, an Alumni Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech.

The *Voices and Visions* session focuses on critical issues affecting sustainability, growth, and retention in the workplace. This session is of interest to human resources managers, division managers, EEO officers, disability managers, and business leaders. Presentations and panel discussions will explore multicultural leadership skills and inclusion strategies that sustain and promote a robust workforce.

The keynote speaker for the *Voices and Visions* session is publisher and editor of the *Roanoke Times*, Wendy Zomparelli. The *Roanoke Times* has been proactive in implementing hiring policies to reflect the diverse community it serves.

Virginia Tech Professor Mary Connerly will also share strategies for effective management in a diverse environment.

The morning session will conclude with a roundtable discussion on the challenges and benefits of *Building and Sustaining a Diverse Workplace*. Panelists include Ben Davenport, rector of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors; Dan Smith, editor of the *Blue Ridge Business Journal*; Kevin McDonald, director of Virginia Tech's Office for Equal Opportunity; Letitia Smith, human resources director of the *Roanoke Times*; John Wright,

Virginia Tech coordinator of disability outreach and advocacy; and Mary Connerly, author and Virginia Tech professor.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs is also organizing a week-long artists in residence program that will culminate in an interactive *Diversity through the Arts Presentation* Thursday evening, February 2 in Donaldson Brown Graduate Center. The activities will coincide with the third annual Mid Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity and Black History Month.

Visiting artists include two brothers, Maurice and Carlton Turner, who perform as M.U.G.A.B.E.E., Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction, M.U.G.A.B.E.E. Musicians, singers, rappers, songwriters, producers, engineers, poet, and teachers, M.U.G.A.B.E.E. does it all, and they do it very well. Their venues are wide in scope: hip hop, jazz, spoken word, rhythm and blues, rap, soul, reggae, and classical. The Turners will offer workshops to students, faculty, and community organizations. OMA is actively seeking collaboration with others to support and enrich this venue. Other artists also include Elise Witt and Ann Kilkelly.

The *Third Annual Mid Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity* is open to all individuals and groups.

The event presents current research, best practices, and enrichment through the arts in the areas of diversity and multiculturalism.

Voices and Visions: Building and Sustaining a Diverse Workplace

Thursday, February 2, 2006 8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Mid Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity

Thursday, February 2, 2006

1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Friday, February 3, 2006

8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Diversity through the Arts Presentation

Thursday, February 2, 2006

7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.



2005 Undergraduate Diversity Research presentations

To register or to submit a proposal for the conference, visit <http://www.conted.vt.edu/macsd>.

For information on the artists in residence program or *Diversity through the Arts Presentation*, contact Office of Multicultural Affairs: (540) 231-1820 or janeann@vt.edu.



Beverlyn Samuels, Dual Career Employment Coordinator, at last year's conference

While looking to the past, Royal ushers in a new age

By Nicole Eley

All is quiet on Virginia Tech's historic Upper Quad as a distant sunrise prepares to warm a cool November morning. A gentle wind rocks several droplets of dew on a blade of grass; a nearby tree shivers from the breeze; and a group of men and women stand firmly at attention, watching the American flag wave the night goodbye. Just like every cadet before them in the past 130 years, these men and women stand as part of a rich history of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets at morning formation. Now, in 2005, a cadet standing among them has made history again.

Cadet Col. Christina Royal, the highest-ranking cadet in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, commands a regiment of more than 700 men and women. Royal is the fourth female to achieve the rank of cadet colonel and the first African-American female regimental commander of the Corps.

"To be in this position is a great blessing and great honor to me," Royal said. "But I also try not to look at it as I'm a Black female in this position, but that I'm a leader just like any of my counterparts or peers would be."

Richard "Rock" Roszak, a retired United States Air Force colonel and former cadet who advises the corps, agreed that he didn't see gender or race as part of Royal's accomplishments. He commended Royal as one of the top cadets he had seen since returning to Virginia Tech in 1994.

"She is a cadet who has demonstrated good decision-making techniques and has great work ethic," Roszak said. "That is the type of person you look for in a leader and the type of person you want to follow. Yes, she is the first Black female regimental commander, but I see her as a regimental commander."

The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets is a leadership-training program for cadets, run by cadets. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week are dedicated to training and service. Cadets have the option of participating in one of three Reserve Officers Training Corps, or ROTC, programs: Army, Navy/Marines and Air Force. ROTC cadets are eligible to be commissioned as officers in the United States armed forces upon graduation. Royal will be commissioned in the Air Force as a second lieutenant upon graduation this spring.

"I love everything about the Air Force," Royal said. "They are very family conscious and family oriented."

Family has a special meaning to Royal. She is one of seven children raised by a single parent. She describes her family bond as unbreakable. Her mother, also named University Parent of the Year in 2004, has been one of the most influential women in her life.

"There hasn't been a day that's gone by [since Freshman year] that I haven't talked to my mom."

Royal credited her mother for her strength, but her Corps family fueled her passion to serve.

"The Corps is an experience unlike any other," Royal said. "It's selfless service and service before self... in everything we do."



Cadet Col. Christina Royal (left) and her Regimental command (right) prepare for Morning Formation.

to a cadet. The English translation, "That I may serve," has served the Corps of Cadets as a primary virtue since the university adopted the motto in 1896.

"You begin to think beyond yourself because you are part of a bigger whole," Roszak said.

As a whole, the Corps is made up of 710 students. According to the deputy commandant for recruiting, Maj. Jeffrey Fawcett, 18 percent of cadets are racial minorities and 15 percent are women. Female enrollment decreased by 5 percent in 2005. Fawcett said the decline could not be attributed to any specific event, but added that the program historically had been a leader in the recruitment of minority cadets.



The Virginia Tech Pylons

Virginia Tech was the first military college in the nation to open its doors to female cadets in 1973.

"We are not perfect in the Corps," said Fawcett. "The military is not perfect, but in my opinion we are way out in front; in our attitudes; in how we train; and how opportunities are afforded to minorities."

Lt. Col Denise Greenfield, appointed as the first female regimental commander of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets in 1987, vouched that women in the Corps continuously filled leadership roles.

"When you look at the role played by women in the Corps, specifically the number of women holding leadership positions, and compare it to the role played by women at say VMI, Texas A&M, and even the service academies, I think you'll find that our women are placed in positions of leadership at a higher percentage," Greenfield said.

Texas A&M is the largest uniformed student organization in the nation. According to Media Relations Coordinator Christi Voelkel, in 2005 10 percent of Texas A&M cadets were women, and 18 percent were racial minorities. Four women were appointed to leadership positions in 2005. For the Virginia Military Institute, statistics are slightly lower. In 2005, VMI enrolled 71 women (6 percent of the cadet population), and 139 cadets of racial minority background (11 percent of cadet population). Women were not allowed to attend the institute until 1997 following a ruling by the Supreme Court.

"At first I was interested in the academies, and then I considered all the opportunities available to me at a senior military school like Tech," Royal said. "You have the everyday lifestyle of the military, but I'm also on a civilian campus, so it's the best of both experiences."

Fawcett agreed that the Virginia Tech Corps produced a well-rounded military officer because of the cadets' exposure to civilian life.

"They witness anti-war protesting on the Drillfield, they see the diversity of civilian life," Fawcett said. "And in today's world, you're not just a war hero; you're a diplomat, an ambassador, and you need to be flexible and need to see other people's perspectives and backgrounds."

Fawcett said the Corps had successfully recruited a well-rounded and diverse group of cadets each term, but admitted that administrators were continuously striving to improve the numbers.

The university joins Fawcett's mission to improve

diversity on campus. Tech's vice president for multicultural affairs, Ben Dixon, said the university continues to take an active stance in the recruitment of talented minority students, and added that Virginia Tech had been in the "diversity business" since 1920, when it admitted its first woman.

Current figures show that racial minority students make up 13.4 percent of the university, of which 4.8 percent are African-American students. Compared to state demographics in the 2000 census, African Americans comprised almost 20 percent of the population. Dixon said that as a public university, Virginia Tech needed to increase opportunities for deserving underrepresented groups. That change, however, would take time and a universal commitment to diversity from the community.

"There is a legacy here that cannot be overcome overnight," Dixon said. "The bottom line really is how do we remove the barriers that prevent access to the talent that this university needs and wants to accomplish its mission."

The numbers fluctuate every year, but Dixon reported a continuous improvement of campus climate, and agreed that the university has come a long way since women first entered the Corps of Cadets.

The first 25 women in the Corps were segregated from their male counterparts by uniform and residence hall; they were organized into L Squadron. Cadet Cherly Butler, the first African-American woman in the Corps, was among the original 25 women.

L Squadron quickly became one of the prominent squadrons of the Corps. It was awarded the Kohler Cup for Outstanding Marching three consecutive years in a row and the Beverly S. Parish Award for top

squadron in 1978. Nine years later, cadet Denise Shuster, now Lt. Col. Greenfield, earned the highest rank of regimental commander. She was first female to achieve this honor.

"I'm both proud and honored to have had the chance to lead such a fine organization," she said.

Royal said the foundation set by Greenfield and influential leaders of the past allow female cadets to be viewed as equals today.

"Our male peers hold us up to the same standard as they would the next guy," Royal said.

Royal confirmed that a freshman female cadet undergoes the same training as a freshman male cadet, giving both the opportunity to earn rank. He credits the Corps' equal and non-biased training program for the tight knit bonds that form between cadets.

"They are brothers and sisters," Roszak said. "I don't see resentment from males because females who are commanders are generally highly competent and tough as nails...There is a healthy respect there."

Royal agreed that she and her cadets are like family, and that she strives to give each of them respect and encouragement regardless of rank.

"Yeah, I'm up here [regimental commander] as far as rank," Royal said. "But we're all cadets, we're all students at this institution."

Royal hopes she has been a leader of consistency and optimism. She said a positive attitude and the guidance of her mentors and family were the keys to her success.

"I am who I am because of all those people," Royal said.

...you need to be flexible and need to see other people's perspectives and backgrounds...

Courtesy of Planet Blacksburg