Conductor, a twice a semester thought piece, captures a variety continuous dialog on diversity in the campus community. The aim of their first project, barriers to diversity and that the lack of healthy dialog results in community for all.

Fellows Program. With funding from Office of the Provost, the Dean of Students Office, the Office of the Vice President for Multicultural Affairs, and the political science department joined forces to find an answer. The response to the October 1998 call for applications for the Multicultural Fellows Program confirmed that the answer is an overwhelming YES.

Forty-one individuals submitted applications to be fellows. This response indicates that there are many faculty members and staff interested in helping Virginia Tech continue its journey of becoming a welcoming and positive learning community for all.

The first class of 10 fellows has met once a month since February 1999. Their focus is how to move beyond "preaching to the choir." Fully recognizing that there is no panacea for the barriers to diversity and that the lack of healthy dialog results in stagnation, their desire is to find a way to provide all members of the community with current and relevant information on diversity. The aim of their first project, The Conductor, is to promote continuous dialog on diversity in the campus community. The Conductor, a twice a semester thought piece, captures a variety attitudes to support equal opportunity endeavors, and would be educational.

"The Fellows program appeals to me because it has the potential to improve the quality of life for everyone in the university community, certainly those who have traditionally felt disenfranchised, but also members of the majority culture."

"My primary area of interest includes the recruiting and retention of minority and women faculty into the College of Engineering. Also, I am interested in issues of campus climate."

"I am proud of Virginia Tech as an institution and as a community of faculty and students it has attracted. I believe that a diversity of backgrounds, interests, and viewpoints is healthy, especially in an atmosphere of intellectual exchange."

"I have a fundamental belief in equity and human rights for all people. This belief in equity and human rights is grounded in my personal relationship of students, faculty, and administrators but also fosters an environment in which those diverse populations can feel safe and comfortable."

"I have a strong desire to be a multicultural fellow because I want to be a positive influence in the university community and want to be part of the solution, not a part of the problem."

"The honor would make my activities in support of the EOAA committee official, would broaden my opportunities to support equal opportunity endeavors, and would be educational."

"It is our responsibility as university members to take ownership and actively look to improve Virginia Tech by challenging our ideas, questioning our status quo, and looking for ways to incorporate new ideas and alternatives into the 'system.'"

"I have a fundamental belief in equity and human rights for all people. This belief is grounded in my personal experience of being denied the right to attend public schools for four years because of resistance to desegregation."

"I have a long-standing interest in helping to make Virginia Tech an institution that not only includes diverse populations of students, faculty, and administrators but also fosters an environment in which those diverse populations can feel safe and comfortable."

"I am a proponent of multicultural education, Powers came across a poster seeking submissions for the design of a memorial. Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial. He saw the design of a memorial that represents a champion of multicultural cooperation can only be conceived through multicultural cooperation."

The skills necessary to complete the project - building, recognizing multiple perspectives, managing conflicts, seeing differences as not necessarily deficiencies - are skills central to any effective learning community, within and beyond the Virginia Tech campus. Powers has attempted to create what he calls a "beloved learning community," after King's concept of an harmonious, inclusive, nonviolent society.

Please see ‘Learning community’ on page 3
**What do you think?**

*by Richard Conners, associate professor of computer and electrical engineering*

Well, things did not go exactly as planned. The web page was not properly set up to record any comments you may have wanted to make in response to the first column. Since there are no responses to report on in this issue, we will move on to a more controversial topic that was in the news just a few weeks ago. As before, I hope we can generate responses from across the spectrum of possible views. To respond, go to the diversity forum web page (www.diversity.vt.edu/forum.html) and click on "Join the discussion now." Then click on the title of this column. I have been assured that you will be able to record your responses and I will give selected excerpts in the next issue of *The Conductor*. Good topics are critical to this column’s success. If you have suggestions please send them to multicultural@vt.edu.

As you may be aware, there has been a good deal of debate in the commonwealth about the admissions policies of the University of Virginia. This debate resulted from some comments that were made by a member of that institution’s board of visitors. It quickly escalated to the Governor’s office. The debate is centered around U. Va.’s use of race as a factor in making admission decisions and the constitutionality of using this as a factor.

Efforts to diversify university campuses across the country nearly always seem to generate alarm about admissions standards for students and hiring standards for faculty members and staff. In response to the debate, the faculty senate at the University of Virginia passed a resolution. The purpose of this column is to solicit comments about what is contained in this resolution, which is at the top of the page.

What do you think about the resolution? In particular, what is the value of diversity in the classroom and throughout the university? Must or should affirmative action be one of the stated goals of higher education? What might the impact to the nation be if it is not? Should race be a factor in admissions/hiring policy? Must it be used to create a good learning environment? What about the Constitution and its guarantees for equal treatment under the law? Any other comments about this resolution would also be appreciated. Please, no “yes” or “no” answers. People can have varying views based on the consideration of different factors. Hopefully this topic will generate some interest and provide us with a diversity of views.

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**The Virginia Tech Conductor**

Publisher: Office of Multicultural Affairs

Staff: Multicultural Fellows

and anyone who is interested

Contact: Ben Dixon, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs

332 Burruss Hall

Blacksburg, VA 24061-0176

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**Perspective**

**U. Va. makes the case for affirmative action**

*University of Virginia Faculty Senate Resolution: Regarding the University of Virginia’s Current Admissions Policies, October 4, 1999*

*(On October 9, the statewide Faculty Senate of Virginia endorsed the resolution and altered it to make it relevant to higher education in Virginia.)*

The Faculty Senate recognizes the value of diversity in the classroom and throughout the University and underscores the importance of maintaining that diversity. We also recognize U. Va.’s successful history of minority recruitment, retention, and graduation. Equal opportunity must be one of the stated goals of higher education. The consideration of race, as one of many factors for admission to the University, is both appropriate and justified. The University’s policies which have led to these achievements have created a rich and diverse educational environment absent from the one-gender, one-race classrooms of the past. Consequently, we endorse the educational goals of equal opportunity and diversity.

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**Yes, Virginia, we are different**

Here are excerpts from University of Virginia President John Casteen’s remarks on affirmative action, presented to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors in August.

Those who read last week’s *Inside UVA* know that I have profound concerns about both the biased terms of the ongoing debate about affirmative action and its possible impact on our student body and on our faculty. There are several points to be made.

One is a fundamental historic fact that few nowadays want to remember: This state spent some 25 years in and out of court asserting that it would not adopt affirmative action as a policy for admission to its public colleges. In the desegregation plans endorsed by every governor since 1970, and indeed still in the state budget, Virginia committed not to affirmative action but instead to equal opportunity in recruitment. Why does the point matter? It matters because management by goals and timetable, which is the mechanism of equal opportunity, as opposed to affirmative action’s quotas and deadlines, has in truth been Virginia’s approach from the beginning. The debate about affirmative action oversimplifies both Virginia’s legal history and the fact of what has been done here to build success in the last quarter century or so.

Second, a morally responsible view of Virginia’s history, and specifically of actions taken by the state itself in defiance of law, must acknowledge a second reality of Virginia’s actions in our time: Alone among the American states, the Commonwealth of Virginia seized, closed and locked public schools in 1958 rather than desegregate them in accord with orders of the United States Supreme Court. The General Assembly abolished the compulsory attendance law, disbanded lawfully elected local school boards when they attempted to comply with the law of the land, and made grants from tax dollars to allow students to attend segregated private schools — all with the articulated goals of keeping Black children and White children from attending school together. In one school district, the schools remained closed for six-and-a-half years.

So a unique question needs to be addressed before anyone assumes that our Virginia concern about academic access for minority students is the same as all others: What effects linger across generations when children grow up in a culture where a matter of defiant law the General Assembly and the Governor chose to close schools and deny education over allowing those children’s parents or grandparents to study in classrooms open to every child, regardless of race?

Regardless of lawyers’ debates, however, the moral imperative is that Virginia and persons who care for her and her children, all of her children, must assume an ongoing commitment to remedy the consequences of actions well within living memory. This moral imperative belongs peculiarly to Virginia. No other state did what Virginia did. And until Virginia finds a moral resolution to its history of abandoning education itself, much of the national debate is all but irrelevant to Virginia’s moral problem.

This is not easy. The legal guidelines are all but hopelessly ambiguous, and the most recent case involving racial preferences compounds the ambiguity. Regardless, we have a powerful moral motive to take every lawful step to assure that the stream of talented, highly qualified, successful minority women and men who have moved successfully from here into Virginia’s and the nation’s mainstream, continue to flow. These students are an asset of value to the University, to the Commonwealth, to the Nation.

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**A reflection on planning and luck**

*by David H. Radcliffe, professor of English, Virginia Tech*

Educational testing and affirmative action, like so many products of modern social science, are sad illustrations of the rule of unintended consequences. Both have achieved limited results — enabling children of talent to compete with children of privilege, and enabling minorities to penetrate the professions — but only by introducing new inequalities. Advocates of the one rightly point to the evils wrought by the other. From educational testing we learn that college aptitude is not equally served. Fourth, colleges exerted pressure on high schools to raise terms of moving students from local high schools below to employers and professions above, a system that encouraged colleges to respond less to educational elites and more to the demands of the communities they served. Fourth, colleges exerted pressure on high schools to raise standards.Diddling with admissions policies is presently much less affirmative than going after failing school districts hammer and tongs.

A century of failed progressive social policies ought to persuade us that there are no easy, and certainly no universal ways of addressing the competing human goods of liberty and equality. But if America has been more successful than other nations in coping with these conundrums it is surely because we have been more willing than most countries to work from below, to experiment with alternatives and to recognize failure as well as success. It makes perfect sense that Americans would support affirmative action but hate mandates and quotas.

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**It makes perfect sense that Americans would support affirmative action but hate mandates and quotas.**

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Statistical sampling. Second, differences in the educational missions, regional character, and admissions policies of colleges afforded more substantial choice than in a system stratified by testing. Third, instead of measuring success against a peer group, colleges measured success in terms of moving students from local high schools below to employers and professions above, a system that encouraged colleges to respond less to educational elites and more to the demands of the communities they served. Fourth, colleges exerted pressure on high schools to raise standards. Diddling with admissions policies is presently much less affirmative than going after failing school districts hammer and tongs.

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What might we do to make our community more welcoming

Prepared by Charlotte Veggenece, safety engineer and Multicultural Fellow

Every student is a valued customer. They pay a lot of money to get an education here. Even for those on full scholarships, somebody has to pony up the dough. They want their money’s worth. Although many staff don’t directly support students, they support faculty and staff who in turn support the students. Faculty and staff are valued customers by association. How would you treat someone who bought from you an association. How would you treat

As a staff member and a mother of two, I feel Virginia Tech should open a full-time on-campus daycare for children of faculty, staff and students. It should be run with full-time salaried employees and have hours comparable to those of local daycare facilities. This reality would cut down on absenteeism, use of whole blocks of sick leave due to the distance our children are from us and their doctors, stress of trying to find quality and affordable care, etc. It would also give the students who are majoring in the human development areas more of a chance to fit experience into their class schedules. This idea might not benefit “all” but it would definitely benefit many.

Robin Atkins
Administrative Staff Assistant
Office of Multicultural Affairs

Learning community ...

Continued from page 1

Powers’ efforts appear to be working. The class offers an opportunity for a dialogue, he reports, that is all too often missing. In an attempt to arrive at a collective understanding of the meaning of King’s life and message, students have asked one another about cultural differences they have long wondered about but not felt comfortable broaching (interestingly, Powers says that whites and blacks often ask the same questions about each other). Another goal of the class is to enhance students’ sense of empowerment; Powers has tried to give students a voice so that they feel their perspective is taken seriously. Students have commented about the novelty of being asked what they think, from their perspective. As one sign of students’ commitment to the class, when the deadline for submitting designs to the national competition was changed from Dec. 1 to May, all but two students agreed to prolong the class until the end of the semes-

Milko V. Maykowskyj
Senior Programmer Analyst
Library Systems

The reasons individuals volunteer as Multicultural Fellows vary. Several have worked on diversity issues for many years and the program provides them with a way to join forces with others of like mind. Some see themselves as neophytes when it comes to diversity but have a strong desire to make a difference. The fellows program provides them with the vehicle they need. Others want to enhance their understanding of diversity and learn new tools for recruitment and hiring.

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We reported Sandra Griffith’s title incorrectly in the last issue of The Conductor, when she responded to “What might Virginia Tech do to make the campus a more welcoming community for all?” She is assistant to the director of the Office of Minority Engineering Programs. We left out “to the.” We apologize.

Taj Mahon-Haft
Undergraduate Student, Architecture

There are only two things that universally offer comfort and welcome: food and music. We indicate welcome by smiles and open handed gestures. We show welcome by removing our hats to show ourselves unarmed. We remove our coats to show trust. We at Virginia Tech are known for excellence in sports and academics; we need a cultural identity. I think we should create a choir for those of us who cannot sing. So that we can build a new sense of community. And make everyone welcome.

Nikki Giovanni
University Distinguished Professor

Just as no reasonable human being has ever been able to hold on to their prejudices while united with other cultures towards a common goal, so we must find that perfect medium, be it class, club, or social activity, that brings all Tech students to work together among diverse groups of their peers.

Taj Mahon-Haft
Undergraduate Student, Architecture

If one thing should be improved it should be the size of the classes, especially lectures. Many lectures are so big that they are intimidating, and it also limits interaction with the professor. Therefore, a good suggestion is to create smaller groups so students can interact with each other. Basically, all it boils down to is the one nice person you meet at school, whether it be a residential advisor, professor, or peer.

Tahnia Mendez
Undergraduate Student, English

We as individuals and a collective group must make the choice at every level of service to embrace and celebrate diversity, thereby absorbing the talent that individuals contribute to Virginia Tech now and into the next century. This choice involves a commitment to “continuous assessment and improvement of university-wide efforts to create and sustain a more diverse and inclusive community of learners”. I believe we can all make this commitment if we set aside stereotypes, prejudices, and phobias and make the choice to participate in our Shared Governance system in a positive manner.

Tahnia Mendez
Senior Programmer Analyst
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Join the discussion at www.diversity.vt.edu/forum.html

Calendar

Compiled by David R. Winston, Extension dairy scientist

Cultural Celebrations

Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights that commemorates the revolt of the Jews in 165 BCE. It is an eight-day celebration that will begin on December 4 and conclude on December 11.

Christmas is the Christian community’s celebration of the birth of Christ and is observed on December 25.

Kwanzaa is the African-American celebration of family and community. It was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966. It is celebrated with various rituals over the seven days following Christmas. There are seven principles associated with Kwanzaa: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day will be observed Monday, January 17. Dr. King was a minister and civil rights leader.

Black History Month is celebrated during February.

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**Affirmative action in admissions to higher education - whose rights?**

by Richard Shingles, professor of political science

Affirmative action in admissions to higher education is supposed to be limited to race-sensitive, active steps to identify and consider qualified minority applicants. However, reports that some colleges and universities admit minorities with lower college entrance examination (SAT) scores than whites have led to concerns that affirmative action lowers standards, promotes unqualified persons, and is unfair to White applicants. This unease is understandable, but it is based on several assumptions that do not withstand close scrutiny. The former presidents of Princeton and Harvard universities respectively, William Bowen and Derek Bok, address many of these assumptions in their book, *The Shape of the River* (1998).

**Affirmative action in college admissions is rampant.**

The fact that race conscious admissions occur at all leads some to assume that they happen all the time, that most minority students get into college through affirmative action, and that most whites are victims of “reverse discrimination.” The opposite is generally true. Most schools do not accept blacks or other close acquaintances, employment histories, and other factors are used in deciding who is admitted. Of the 700 graduates from the 1976 entering class who would have been rejected, more than 225 went on to earn doctorates or professional degrees; nearly 125 became business executives; and well over 300 became leaders of civic organizations, a much higher proportion than for White matriculants. “Generally speaking, the more selective the school, the more the student achieved subsequently” (B&B: 281).

Students who have high SATs have a “right” to admission. There are several problems with this assumption.

White dominance of higher education is by no means threatened by minorities. African-Americans continue to be highly under-represented in nearly all colleges and universities, other than historically Black institutions. Higher combined SAT scores (1098) than the national average for White test-takers (B&B: 18-19). Compelling evidence of the competence of Black students admitted through affirmative action is provided by a profile of Black matriculants from the 28 schools who would not have been admitted with race-neutral admissions. Of the 700 graduates from the 1976 entering class who would have been rejected, more than 225 went on to earn doctorates or professional degrees; nearly 125 became business executives; and well over 300 became leaders of civic organizations, a much higher proportion than for White matriculants. “Generally speaking, the more selective the school, the more the student achieved subsequently” (B&B: 281).

**Segregation, Desegregation, Re-Segregation’ examined**

*by Alicia Cohen and Ben Dixon*

Virginia Tech was the site of a symposium on “Segregation, Desegregation, Re-Segregation: Lessons Learned about Equity in Our Schools.” In the first session of the three-part symposium, Peter Wallenstein provided an historical review of the impact of public education policies including facilities, teacher salaries, and curricula during the era of school segregation from the period 1870-1950. Jacqueline Eaves and Marcy Schnitzer reviewed the history of the Christiansburg Institute (CI) as a case study illustrating the positive and negative impacts the transition from segregated to desegregated public schooling had on an institution with a long history of providing for the educational needs of the Black community.

Battle and Delores Scott provided reactions during the first session. Battle, a graduate of CI, spoke of her memories as a child who attended the all Black school. She remembered a school supported by the Black community where teachers instilled pride and a “can do” attitude in everyone. Scott recalled growing up in Prince Edward County. In 1959, local officials closed the public schools in this county as part of the “massive resistance” movement in Virginia. School children were sent off to relatives and parents in other states to continue their education. Others were educated in churches and homes where teachers continued to teach despite the school closure.

The second symposium session featured Andrew Lewis, professor of educational research. Lewis presented a historical account of Phi Delta Kappa in cooperation with the Montgomery County Human Relations Council. For more information, visit [http://box.vt.edu:10021/chre/elps/EPI/SYMPOSIUM/index.htm](http://box.vt.edu:10021/chre/elps/EPI/SYMPOSIUM/index.htm).