

VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

'ASSIST' fosters psychology students' success

Mentorship program meets needs of minority undergraduates

by Kirsten Bradbury, Ph.D. student in psychology

Providing an optimal learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds is among the most important goals of the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech, according to department chair Jack Finney. In an effort to better meet the needs of minority students, the department initiated the ASSIST program (Academic Success through Support, Involvement, Skills, and Teamwork) in 1998-99 with funding from the dean's office in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Open to all African-American undergraduate psychology majors, ASSIST provides social support, networking opportunities, academic guidance, and professional development through a mentorship system. African-American graduate students in psychology serve as mentors to participating undergraduates, meeting with them individually and leading group activities to achieve the program's goals. Program participation is voluntary, and all ASSIST services are provided free of charge.

This year, 75 percent of the 40 African-American undergraduate psychology majors chose to participate in ASSIST. Four graduate students—Kemie Alexander, Felicia Bowser, Lisa Kaiser, and Chris Sanders—currently serve as mentors.

Many students meet weekly with their mentors. The one-on-one meetings provide targeted individual attention. Group activities, such as the ASSIST receptions, socials, and picnics held throughout the year, are open to all African-American undergraduate psychology majors and have been well-attended. Other ASSIST activities have

included large-group meetings, dinners honoring ASSIST students with GPAs of 3.0 or higher, and luncheons. For students at all levels, ASSIST functions provide opportunities for positive engagement in academic life and social interaction with fellow minority students in a supportive context. For advanced students, ASSIST social events provide important networking practice as they begin the transition from student to professional.

Preparation for graduate school and professional life is an important focus. Recently, ASSIST sponsored a panel presentation on "African American Professionals In Psychology," which was attended by students and faculty members from Virginia Tech and Winston-Salem State University. Panelists were Bonita Sims Gude of Montgomery County Public Schools and Dwayne Norris of the American Institutes for Research, Washington, D.C., along with Virginia Tech faculty members Scott Johnson, associate professor of human development, and Myra Gordon, associate dean of arts and sciences.

ASSIST mentors have also worked with advanced undergraduate research interns for the past two summers, and ASSIST students have participated in several professional-development activities, including a Graduate Transition Retreat sponsored by the Minority Recruitment Office and co-hosted by ASSIST mentors.

Opportunities for ASSIST students to

provide feedback and suggestions to program organizers have been arranged. Open information exchanges, brainstorming, and idea generation were encouraged in group meetings, with participants providing many useful and substantive suggestions for ASSIST activities. In response to one such suggestion, greater attention was focused on career planning in the program's second year.

Systematic feedback has been requested of all ASSIST participants at the end of each semester. Almost all of the students reported their comfort with their mentors to be "excellent," and the quality of the academic and career counseling provided were also evaluated

See ASSIST on page 3



ASSIST students, graduate mentors, and faculty members attended a dinner honoring student academic achievements. Shown here are, in front, Jack Finney and Rosell Jeffries; and in back, Felicia Bowser, Kemie Alexander, Athena Evans, Lisa Kaiser, Katrina Watson, Chris Medley, and Thea Green.

Making a Difference

One student's experience shows one faculty member how to help many



Virginia Fowler

by Virginia Fowler, professor of English and a Multicultural Fellow

When I heard Math Professor Monte Boisen speak last spring at a forum on diversity issues in graduate education, I knew I would like to talk with him and learn more about the program he has developed in the math department. *The Conductor's* new "Making a Difference" profiles feature gave

me the perfect opportunity to showcase a committed faculty member and learn something more myself about his successful mentoring program for graduate and undergraduate African American math students.

Boisen first became interested in the potential impact of a mentoring program through an experience he had with a student in 1993. A graduate of Hampton University, this student had been recruited to Virginia Tech to do her graduate work in math, but she was failing her classes, including the one she was taking with Boisen. After he repeatedly entreated her to come by his office, she finally did. What he learned from her appalled him: she was doing poorly in all her class work and was totally miserable at Virginia Tech. She felt isolated and alienated, and yet she also had a strong sense of independence and wanted to be able to succeed on her own.

The outcome of this encounter reveals Boisen for the extraordinary individual he is: unlike many who might



Monte Boisen

have assessed the student's situation far differently, he recognized that she was failing not because she lacked training or ability, but because she was frightened by, indeed drowning in, what seemed to her a sea of Whiteness. No one was helping her make the transition from an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) to a majority (i.e., predominantly White) institution, a transition that is, Boisen said to me, "very difficult." The cultural shock which inevitably accompanies such a move is intensified when the classroom is not an inclusive and nurturing place.

After that first conversation, Boisen began to meet with this student almost daily, and gradually her grades in all of her classes started to improve; by the end of the semester, she was doing very well. His experience with her made him realize that, with just a little support and encouragement — with, that is to say, just a little mentoring — our Black students can enjoy success in their academic programs. Nor are they unique in that regard, for all students require, and most receive, some level of mentoring. The difference is that not all students have the same background or the same experience; Boisen told me that he tells his colleagues who say that they treat all of their students the same to "stop it—because the students are not all the same."

Boisen insists that we as an institution must examine our goals and our language. He worries, for example, about terms like "recruitment" and "retention," since such terms can point to a greater concern about the well being of the institution than about the success of the student. He prefers, he says, to "center on student success," even when student success may not mean a degree (or a degree from our university). The mentoring program he has developed focuses on providing African American math majors the tools and support that will help them succeed. His assumption, however, is not that Virginia Tech has much to give African American students, who should be glad for the gift, but that we as an institution need African American students and the gifts they bring to us. Similarly, in our

See Boisen on page 2

In this issue

- Find a new mascot for the new millennium — page 2
- Hokie Justice or Just Us? — page 3
- Meet the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay, Faculty and Staff Caucus — page 3
- Unpack your assumptions about who gets financial aid — page 4
- A new 'What Would You Do?' — page 4
- How would you make the university community more welcoming for all? — page 4

Find a new mascot for the new millennium



James C. Klagge

by James C. Klagge, chair, Montgomery County School Board, and Multicultural Fellow

Blacksburg High School's mascot is the Indian. The Indian has done yeoman's service at BHS for 70-some years. I know all of us hope to retire by the time we are 70! It's time to retire the Indian and move on. This doesn't have to be a defeat, or a victory, for anyone. It can simply be an acknowledgment that times change—and what better time than now to acknowledge that? It's time for a new mascot for the new millennium.

A lot of attention has focussed on abuses of the mascot—stereotyped cheers and gestures, caricatured faces, and disrespectful terminology. To the great credit of BHS, these have either never been a part of their use of the Indian mascot, or have been eliminated over the last year. I want to be sure that this is recognized and credited.

Many people have felt that this should be the basis for a compromise position—the Indian mascot would be retained, but the abuses would be avoided. At first I thought that might be a possible compromise, but now I don't think that will suffice. Perhaps this can best be explained by a story:

"There was once a certain man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead." You may recognize that as the setting for the story of the Good Samaritan, in the Gospel of Luke. But I want to depart from the biblical story at this point, and follow the robbers. For, in fact, having stripped the man, who happened to be a fireman, they took his uniform and went on to a party in Jerusalem. As it was a costume party, one of the robbers decided to dress up in the fireman's uniform and pretend to be a fireman. The others liked this idea, and year after year one of the robbers, and eventually their descendants, to whom they bequeathed the uniform, would dress up in this stolen uniform and pretend to be a fireman. Some of the party-goers thought this was great fun. Eventually some of the descendants, who felt guilty about the robbery, started to wear the uniform as a way to honor the poor man who was robbed. The costume got passed around, and sold to other party-goers, but, year after year, for one reason or another, the fireman's costume kept being worn to the party. Once, after many years, some descendants of the firemen

happened to show up at the party and recognized the uniform of the fireman — and they asked that it stop being worn. They really weren't interested in why it was being worn, they simply wanted it to stop.

I think they were justified in asking this. Folks, that's where we find ourselves today.

Perhaps it wrecks a story to spell out its meaning. Jesus usually left it by saying, "Anyone who has ears for listening should listen." But here's what it means to me. The story is told from the perspective of the Indians — for they were attacked, beaten up, and left half dead, for centuries. Not by us, but by people whom many of us are descended from or have, in one way or another, benefited from. The Indians feel that most everything was taken from them — except their proud identity. The fireman's costume represents the Indians' identity. And now they find that someone else is even trying to assume that identity. It doesn't really matter why we are trying to assume the identity — for honor or for fun. It is, in a sense, the only real part of their original inheritance that they still own — and they feel that even that is being appropriated. I think we need to stop wearing the fireman's uniform to a costume party, and we need to stop pretending to be Indians. Whether it be for fun or out of respect, it's just not appropriate.

I know that these points have been made on other occasions with a lot of judgmental moralizing. But I don't think that's necessary for us to see the point. In fact, maybe that has sometimes prevented us from seeing the point, because we were too busy defending ourselves. All good stories are open to interpretation. I hope this story is rich enough to provoke dialogue about this issue — rational dialogue, which has been in short supply.

Why am I raising this issue in a publication aimed at the Virginia Tech faculty and staff? After all, no one is complaining about the Hokie mascot! Because most of us are members of the Blacksburg community, and as members of that community we help set the tone in which this issue gets considered. The Montgomery County School Board has tried to steer a path according to which this issue would be handled at the school level—as a dialogue within the Blacksburg community. Rather than forcing a change, we have tried to encourage an open discussion that engages all parties and all points of view.

I think it is time to retire the Indian mascot, and begin looking for a new mascot for a new millennium. I also think it is time to engage in a dialogue that will help us struggle through this difficult issue. I hope this article will be a helpful step in that direction.

Boison ...

Continued from page 1

efforts to provide the kind of environment in which African American students—and all students—can succeed, we can, he says, learn a great deal from the HBCUs and their strategies.

The math mentoring program had modest beginnings: the first year, Boisen sought and received financial support from his department to take all of the math majors out for pizza. They met in the Black Cultural Center. His goals were "primarily social"; many of the students were surprised to discover that there actually were other African American math majors. The program was never, however, simply social; it also aimed to educate the students about career opportunities. To that end, he began inviting Career Services to talk with the students. "Career Services is really terrific," he says.

Because he wanted the students to feel that being African American and a math major is "a good thing," Boisen decided in the very first year of the program (1994-95) that the group should take a trip somewhere, the purposes of which would again be both social and professional. That first year, he took the group to Northern Virginia, where they attended a Tech-Rutgers football game and met with people from a broad spectrum of different industries. In subsequent years, the group traveled to Atlanta and Charlotte as well as back to Northern Virginia.

Last year, Boisen's mentoring program received a grant for \$10,000 from the College of Arts and Sciences Diversity Committee and \$1,000 from the provost's office to host a conference, held in Richmond because of its proximity to several HBCUs. Focusing on "Opportunities for African Americans in Mathematics in the New Millennium," the conference brought in African Americans from the corporate world whose disciplinary training was in mathematics. In at least one instance, the speaker, a female corporate executive from IBM, was flown in from Colorado at IBM's expense, which Boisen sees as the first

step toward corporate sponsorship of future activities. In addition, several mentoring program alumnae, who now enjoy successful careers, spoke at the conference. The keynote speaker was Myra Gordon, associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, who delivered an "excellent" speech on the history of Blacks in mathematics. Boisen was especially pleased by the vertical networks that developed at the conference.

He attributes much of the success of the program to the mentoring provided each year by an African-American graduate student whose assigned GTA duties are to work with the program. Because this graduate student is close in age to the other students in the program and usually shares some important life experiences with them, he or she is trusted more readily by the students than would be a

math majors at Virginia Tech. Indirectly, they have also had an impact on recruiting. The year the group traveled to Atlanta, for example, Boisen had decided that the Tech students needed to reach out to other African American math students; so he arranged a visit to Spelman, where Tech students met with some Spelman students; afterwards, Boisen and his students hosted a lunch for the Spelman students. Today, there are three Spelman graduates enrolled in Tech's graduate programs in math. While Boisen does not claim credit for all three of these students, he feels that the goodwill from the visit was a contributing factor.

Currently on a research leave in Japan, Boisen has ideas and plans for further developing the mentoring program when he returns. He'd like to see groups of

departments work together and find funding to initiate more programs.

His work in diversity began with his simple concern as a teacher for the academic difficulties of one of his

students. His discovery from working with her was that there are indeed ways to help African American students succeed at Virginia Tech. But those strategies work only when faculty members acknowledge and understand the cultural barriers encountered by Black students on our predominantly White campus. To be a successful mentor requires us, as Boisen says of himself, "to be an advocate for Black students."

He tells his colleagues who say they treat all of their students the same '... the students are not all the same.'

faculty member; consequently, the mentoring becomes more personal and effective. Sometimes, when appropriate, he or she can "get tough" with students in a way a professor could not.

How have all these activities been paid for? To date, Boisen has received financial support from his own department, from the Diversity Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, from the provost's office, and from his own pocket. The rule is that all of the planned activities of any trip are free to every student who goes. And what of the time required? Asked if he had received any released time for what has become an elaborate mentoring system, Boisen responded that he had never been given any time for this—but that he's never asked for any, either. His department, however, does provide the GTA to work with the program and the math department pays for tutors when they are needed.

The time and money invested in the program are bringing about positive results for the African American

About 'The Conductor'

The Conductor is produced by the Office of Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Submit articles to acohen@vt.edu or to any fellow. Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu.

The next issue is February 2, 2001.

Hokie Justice or Hokie 'Just Us'?

Guard against bias in policy development and enforcement

by Jeffrey Cullen, director of Judicial Affairs, and Edward Spencer, assistant vice president for Student Affairs

The recent release by the Office of Multicultural Affairs of the University Diversity Plan 2000-2005 should prompt many faculty and staff members to reflect on the ways we impact campus climate. The conscious and unconscious attitudes and behaviors exhibited by university staff and faculty members can substantially affect the quality of a student's experience. When examined by race, gender, disability status and sexual orientation, Virginia Tech students do have differing perceptions and experiences of various dimensions of our campus climate. As individuals and members of the Virginia Tech community, we can be powerful facilitators or inhibitors of the multicultural character of this campus.

In our efforts to create a diversity-positive environment, it is important that we look honestly at the practices, interventions, policies, and structures we create and sustain and ask ourselves some questions:

- Do our policies or practices impact students differentially when examined along racial, gender or other social identity variables?
- Do our structures promote or inhibit social justice?
- Are our interventions truly non-discriminatory, or do we unwittingly manifest unequal opportunity?

The university has created a number of "forums of adjudication" that are charged with determining whether or not students have violated a policy or regulation. Various honor systems (undergraduate, graduate, Corps of Cadets, College of Veterinary Medicine) adjudicate cases where students are alleged to have cheated, plagiarized, or falsified data. Our student conduct systems (the University Judicial System and variants thereof such as the Corps of Cadets system) adjudicate cases involving alcohol and other drugs, disorderly/abusive conduct, and weapons violations, among others. While not equivalent in standing or process to the criminal courts, university forums like the



Jeff Cullen



Edward Spencer

honor system or the judicial system do have the ability to suspend or dismiss a student from the university for cause. So, the outcomes are potentially serious.

Critics are quick to point out that the criminal justice system may not be all that "just." Walker, Spohn and DeLone in their book *The Color of Justice: Race, Ethnicity and Crime in America* find that the

criminal justice system is characterized by obvious disparities based on race and ethnicity. Statistics clearly indicate that a disproportionate number of so-called minorities are arrested, imprisoned, and, in capital cases, placed on death row where they await execution.

Taking our cue from attempts to quantify the problem of discrimination that seems to exist in the criminal justice system, we are currently asking ourselves the following questions:

- Are minority students referred to the judicial system in numbers disproportionate to their campus demographics? If the rates of referral are different, why are they different?
- Do minority students, compared to majority students, have similar or different perceptions of the fairness of these forums of adjudication?
- Are minority students found not responsible or, conversely, found responsible and perhaps suspended or dismissed more frequently or less frequently than their majority student peers?
- Do the numbers of students referred for certain categories of violations vary by gender or racial group membership? If there is variance, what are the possible explanations for the difference?

The questions are not merely rhetorical. Earlier this year, a former student filed a \$10.5 million suit against the University of Virginia alleging racial discrimination when her degree was rescinded by the UVa Honor Committee.

The Virginia Tech Judicial System has not historically charted its inputs or outcomes with respect to race or

gender, but we have come to the conclusion that it is time we ask ourselves critical questions and seek out data that will help us obtain answers—even if those answers make us uncomfortable.

As people of good faith, we try to identify discrimination when we see it and take corrective action. We recruit diverse student membership for our review committees, we weave diversity training into their on-the-job education, and we include appellate processes where discrimination could be corrected before a judicial decision is implemented.

No institution is perfect. But we all ought to strive for perfection. An organizational audit is one way to develop an empirical base of information regarding the climate in your unit. So, just as we are asking ourselves tough questions, you might consider the following:

- Do your mission and goals clearly address issues of diversity?
- Are members of underrepresented groups found in positions of leadership in your organization and in appropriately representational numbers?
- Are the policies implemented by your unit non-discriminatory in their intent and their effect?
- Are there systematic, ongoing training opportunities regarding the development of multicultural competencies available in your unit?
- Do the artwork, posters and other visual displays in your unit reflect an appreciation for diversity? Is your unit physically accessible and attitudinally welcoming to students with disabilities?
- Is there a systematic assessment of your practices, policies, interventions, and structures to ensure that they are non-discriminatory?

Clearly it is better to have voluntarily asked the right questions, collected data, and implemented appropriate solutions when and where there are perceived problems than to have to do so when there is litigation or a court-ordered mandate. But even more fundamentally: we should embrace a diversity-positive environment, not merely out of concerns for liability or because "it's the law," but rather because social justice is the right thing to do and now is the right time to do it.

ASSIST ...

Continued from page 1

positively. Many participants indicated that ASSIST helped them to feel more comfortable at Virginia Tech and increased their awareness of campus resources.

As ASSIST participant Christopher Medley put it, "My experience in the ASSIST program has been nothing but positive. Being able to meet other Black psychology majors has been very helpful, not only in the academic arena, but also in my social environment. I have about 20 psychology friends and four mentors that I know I can call upon anytime for help. I advise any Black psychology major who is not yet a part of this program to join. This is an opportunity that should not be passed up."

Finney reports that the department will continue to expand the program's activities, due in part to the favorable response from ASSIST students. In addition to working with current undergraduates, ASSIST mentors participate in recruitment efforts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Finney considers ASSIST to be an integral part of the department's comprehensive effort to meet inclusion goals crucial to Virginia Tech's mission. By helping to attract and retain African-American undergraduates and successfully meet their educational, professional, and interpersonal needs, the ASSIST program aims to optimize the educational environment for all members of the department and the university.

Voices from Our Community

Meet the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Caucus

(The Multicultural Fellows invite university organizations to tell the community about their organization. Send items to The Conductor in care of Barbara Pendergrass, dean of students, at bpender@vt.edu.)

The Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Faculty and Staff Caucus at Virginia Tech was formed in 1992 as an affiliate of the Women's Network. The caucus's purpose is to improve the working and learning environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of the Tech community.

By bringing concerns about retention, classroom climate, or other issues to the attention of the administration, providing educational programs to the larger community, and co-hosting public events with other campus groups — such as the LGBA (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Alliance), the undergraduate student group, and other groups within the Women's Network, the caucus aims to foster an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding at the university, thereby improving productivity and quality of life at Virginia Tech for all employees and students.

In the past, the caucus hosted a workshop on domestic partner benefits and productivity issues related to homophobia. The speaker described differences between tolerance and approval, discussed the responsibilities of supervisors in providing a safe and tolerant working environment, and provided information on ways to resolve conflicts created by homophobia. This event was co-

sponsored by many organizations, including the Office of the Provost, the Women's Studies Program, and the Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Office. A videotape of the program is available through the EOAA office.

The caucus works closely with the Dean of Students Office, the Division of Student Affairs, and Residential and Dining Programs to plan programs and increase awareness of diversity at Virginia Tech. Other activities sponsored by the caucus include Women's Week presentations, National Coming Out Day programs, speakers for classes, and opportunities for members and guests of the caucus to share experiences and strategies.

The caucus sponsors social gatherings such as the LGB Community Picnic to foster community wide connection and support for members of the groups that make up the lesbian, bisexual, and gay community in Blacksburg and the surrounding communities.

Caucus membership is open to all faculty and staff, graduate students, and individuals who support the objectives of the caucus. Monthly lunchtime meetings are held in downtown Blacksburg and are open to all interested people. For more information, e-mail lgbcaucus@vt.edu; call Carola Haas at 231-9269 or Tom Brobson at 231-2806; or visit www.rdp.vt.edu/~kbelcher/lgbcauc.htm. There is an electronic mailing list for members for business, information, and social events.

Unpack your assumptions

Do minorities get all of the university's financial aid?

by Barry Simmons, director of scholarships and financial aid

I always attempt to dispel the ongoing myth that minorities get more aid than non-minorities simply because of minority status.

We all know that back room discussions take place among colleagues in any organization about contemporary social issues: sexuality, ethnic diversity, the environment, religion and a host of other topics that are ripe for discussion. Colleges and universities are no exception to this practice. From time to time, faculty members or administrators will ask me about the nature of scholarships and financial aid when it comes to affirmative action or favoritism to minorities. There are a few minority-based state aid programs, but not the plethora that we hear about in the back rooms. Let's see what back-room reaction will greet this attempt to dispel the myth around campus that minorities receive all or most financial aid.

While the matter of scholarships and financial aid is complex, confusing, and often illogical, it is the mainstay to establish and maintain financial access to higher education. The operative key here is "access." Finances are often a barrier to students from all ethnic groups, especially if a student is the first generation to go college in his or her family, regardless of race, color, or creed. The complexity of financial aid blocks financial access equally across all classifications (complexity due to the competing goals of a myriad of public policy initiatives at the state and national levels). Public policy makers are now introducing two other elements of confusion, merit programs and tax credits, neither of which enhance access. We won't discuss the old or new complexity other than to again emphasize that the goal of financial aid is to create access to higher education.



Barry Simmons

At Virginia Tech, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans and American Indians are in a great minority when compared to the Caucasian-American student enrollment. But the financial aid figures will be a surprise to many. The data used for this column is from the 1999-2000 academic year. We analyzed the entire Virginia Tech student population who applied for need-based financial aid. (This protocol excluded international students.) We did not distinguish between need and merit aid dollars or between state resident and non-resident. We concentrated on students who provided family financial information that would reflect their degree of financial access to study at Virginia Tech at the undergraduate or graduate/professional levels. As we build a data warehouse in Banner, we will be able to do more sophisticated analyses. Please note the percentages quoted below will not always add to 100 percent due to the structure of the data and the populations studied.

Our minority population comprises approximately 13 percent of our student body and receives about 18 percent of the dollars going to students furnishing family financial information. Twenty-six percent of the neediest students are minority. Non-minority students account for 80 percent of enrollment and receive about 80 percent of the aid. On the other end of the spectrum, affluent students (as opposed to neediest) were 90 percent majority and 10 percent minority.

So, be dispelled, darn myth! Majority and minority students receive similar proportional amounts of aid where we have family financial information. Minority students demonstrating greater financial need and less affluence account for the difference between the two groups. There is no operational rule, written or tacit, that gives overall financial aid preference to minority students. Remember, the key is financial access for all, regardless of race, color, or creed.

How can we make Tech a more welcoming community for all?

Charlotte Waggoner, safety engineer and Multicultural Fellow, traverses the campus to photograph those who respond to the question, "How can we make the university a more welcoming community for all?" To respond, e-mail ren@vt.edu.



Virginia Tech can make the campus a more welcoming community for all by seeing the big picture. The university should be embedded in the surrounding region, such that all citizens have a sense of ownership or at least a partnership with the university. That kind of relationship

will then open the door to establishing a diversity-rich and culturally welcoming infrastructure in the surrounding region and on the campus itself. If students and faculty believe the surrounding community is not accepting and educated about diversity, then no matter what the campus climate becomes, there will always be a sense of discomfort. But if the faculty and students see the university as a change agent within a larger region, then the campus climate will be perceived more favorably and people will feel more comfortable.

Tonya L. Smith-Jackson

Assistant Professor of Human Factors Engineering

Promoting university spirit and pride among students, faculty, and professors is definitely one way of letting the community know that we love their presence at Tech. By showing our love and appreciation of the campus, it creates the ideal atmosphere that would make any outsider feel like a Hokie.

Cadet Deborah Daley, Freshman, Biology



If we could improve the relations between minorities and the other students on this campus, we would be stronger as a community. We are all striving for the same goal. We are all here to serve humanity whether it is in the United States military or in the corporate world. Communication, unity, and learning to help each other is the only way we are going to be successful. It's not the material items that make a school great; it's how the people work together within it.

Cadet Dianalyn Curtis, Sophomore, Chemistry

One does not have to go far from campus to find communities set in the ways of the past. These populations must also come to grips with the changing face of our Nation. Community outreach with a diverse cultural flavor is a good start. As a land grant institution, we must make this one of our priorities. *Ut Proxim*

Cadet Ernest L. Cage, Junior, Psychology



To enrich your understanding of the diversity of religious and cultural traditions involving holidays celebrated in December, check out the PowerPoint presentation on the Religious Studies Program homepage: www.cis.vt.edu/rel

What would you do?

Campus Climate for Gays, Lesbians, and Transsexuals

by Richard Connors, professor of computer and electrical engineering and Multicultural Fellow

First, an update: Childcare remains an area of much interest on campus. I received seven responses to my last article on this topic. This is the second most responses I have received on any topic; and the most responses were from my earlier article on the same topic.

Most support the thoughts in the last issue. Two people pointed out that childcare is an area problem; therefore, any response to this problem should be a cooperative venture among Montgomery County, Blacksburg, and Virginia Tech. In fact one reader pointed out the need for childcare in Floyd and Riner. Perhaps this area view allows a number of interested parties to come to the table where each has some resources that might be made available to address the issue.

The last response I want to mention brings a completely different view to the topic. This person points out that we all are basically underpaid here at Virginia Tech. His concern is that if the university channels money into addressing child care, this could further reduce the rather small raises we have all been getting. He points out that raising children is a matter of choice and that one should accept the consequences for the decision to have a child. While I do not agree with this position, I think it is important to express all sides of an issue.

Now, I want to bring up a new topic — one that many of us might feel uncomfortable addressing. But because of recent events, there is a timeliness to this issue that is hard to ignore. I am sure that if you have been following the news you are painfully aware of two unfortunate events that occurred locally. The first is the shooting in a Roanoke bar. The second was the forming of a club at Blacksburg High School. Both events involved members of the gay, lesbian, and transsexual communities. Obviously, the unfortunate nature of the Blacksburg story is not because a club was formed by some lesbian and gay students, but rather because the students perceived they needed this club to help them cope with their high school experience.

Actually, a third unfortunate part of this story is even closer to home. Associate Provost Pat Hyer has recently completed a report detailing the perceived campus climate at Virginia Tech for undergraduate and graduate students. While their numbers are admittedly low, gays, lesbian, and transsexual students have a very different perspective of this campus than I, a white heterosexual male, do.

I believe that we within the university community should, without question, provide a positive educational environment for all our students. I believe this is the only way our students get the most out of their education. All of our students should have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness during those hours when they are not studying to improve themselves.

I would like to hear from the readers on this issue. Do you think the campus climate for gays, lesbians, and transsexuals is bad? Are there ways you think we might be able to impact the climate? I would appreciate any thoughts on this matter at all.

E-mail rconnors@vt.edu, phone 231-6896, fax 231-3362, or send your notes via campus mail to me in the electrical and computer engineering department, mail code 0111. Respondents names will be kept strictly confidential.

I hope you all had a very happy Thanksgiving.



Richard Connors