

VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Poetry at the Grove honors victims

by Austin Morton

At three o'clock on a sunny afternoon in April, members of the local community, as well as Virginia Tech students and faculty members, stormed President Charles Steger's home on Grove Lane with only one thing on their minds—poetry.

"Poetry at the Grove," an event held in honor of Holocaust Awareness Week and sponsored by the Office of the President and Multicultural Programs and Services, showcased the power of words in six readings on the topics that mirrored the theme of the week, "Voices of Faith and Memory."

The two-hour event, was organized into three groups of two readers with about a 15 minute intermission between each group for discussion. Those who read represented very diverse interests in the Virginia Tech/Blacksburg community, ranging from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Alliance (LGBTGA) to the Presbyterian Campus Ministry.

A half-hour into the program, Nat Kranowski, local Holocaust survivor and Hillel board member, was invited to share excerpts from a book of



personal reflections written by a friend of his who had also lost a family member to the Holocaust. Kranowski read first in French and then translated the passages into English.

When asked why he accepted the opportunity to speak, Kranowski said, "My parents were killed at Auschwitz and I think it's important for people to hear from people like me who have direct knowledge. Even though I was not in the camp, I was very definitely affected personally. And those of us who are in that situation are slowly dying out. It has more impact to hear it from someone like me than just to read it in a book."

Hillel, a Jewish student group on campus, has been involved in the planning of Holocaust Awareness Week every year since its inception. Alexis Bozzo, the SGA representative to Hillel's executive board, shared a poem she wrote in high school that received honorable mention from the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

Although not Jewish, Bozzo claimed to identify with the Jewish community as most of her friends growing up were Jewish. The last lines of her poem echo these feelings of understanding: "There are numbers on our arms but only one will remain in our minds always, SIX MILLION."

Young adults experience transition

The Virginia Tech on-campus transition program (VT/OCTP) was formed as a collaboration between Montgomery County Public Schools and Virginia Tech in the fall of 2004. The Office of Multicultural Affairs has served as the university liaison for the program working with Wayne Zellers, VT/OCTP coordinator, of Montgomery County Public Schools.



Ashley enjoys, "being able to ride the BT to go places on my own and not having to ask for rides."

Their current job placement, socialize, and participate in recreational activities.

A five-point star represents the program and the five areas that the VT/OCTP focuses on: Independent living, education, leisure recreation, community, and vocation.

Independent Living

One perk of being out of high school is getting to experience life as a young adult, which involves becoming more aware of your needs and how to meet those needs. Students in the VT/OCTP practice skills necessary to function independently, such as making and purchasing from a grocery

list, keeping financial records, cooking, and routine house cleaning.



When asked about the program, Mark said, "It's wonderful. I feel liberated. It's as though the cord from high school has been cut. Everyone sees me as an adult. I am allowed to be myself."

Education

Students in the program have taken such courses at Virginia Tech such as public speaking, floral design, horticulture, philosophy: morality and justice, human

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New friend leads to new opinions

By Amy Miley November 18, 2005 Volunteer Project Reflection

For my final project, I chose to work directly with a student with disabilities. I volunteered with the YMCA Buddy Program working with a student I will call Austin (Pseudonym used for confidentiality). He is 21 years old and is enrolled in the Montgomery County Public School System. He has severe Tourette's Syndrome.

Before this semester, I had never had the opportunity to be closely involved with anyone who had a severe neurological disorder. Once all of the arrangements had been made for me to work with Austin, I must admit, I was quite nervous and somewhat frightened. I was afraid that I would not be equipped to work with a student with that severe of a disability. I also was held captive by the common misconception of what

Tourette's is. When anyone mentioned this disability, what immediately came to mind was someone who screams out profanities at random and inappropriate moments. Although, this could be a symptom, the disorder is much more defined and complicated, which I learned through the research I did to be more prepared and also my time spent with Austin.

Throughout the semester, we have had basically the same schedule. Austin works at Burger King and this is where I would meet him every Monday and Wednesday morning. He is one of the YMCA students that is required to have an aid with him at all times. Emily, a student from Radford, and also staff with the YMCA, was Austin's

aid during my time that I was scheduled to be with him. On my first day, because I was nervous and I didn't really know who to look for or how to know who I was meeting, I arrived quite early. I bought some breakfast and sat down to read until it was time for me to meet with Austin and Emily. While I was having my breakfast, I could feel someone watching me and I looked up to see a boy (who I later found out was Austin) watching me intently with a joyous grin on his face. I smiled back, waved, and put my attention back on my breakfast and

book. My presence (as does everyone's, I was later to find out) fascinated him and I had his attention for most of my breakfast time except when he moved to a different table to clean it.

When it got close to 10 a.m. (the time I was supposed to meet with him), I walked to a different

area of the restaurant and saw a girl my age sitting alone and watching Austin. I asked her if her name was Emily and when she confirmed, I introduced myself. She then allowed me to introduce myself to Austin who greeted me with an embrace and began telling me about Star Wars. This began my relationship/friendship with Austin.

I was eager to really get to know him when my time began and asked lots of questions. However, I learned quickly, that he talks about the things that are on his mind and if my question didn't coincide, the reply I received was one that had nothing to do with the question.

The strictly social time that I was able to spend with Austin was

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"I was afraid that I would not be equipped to work with a student with that severe of a disability."

transition...

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development, and a few others. These students usually make progress comparable to their classmates. Being an active participant in college classes provides another



Becky's favorite thing about working is earning money so she can buy the nice things she wants. She likes to work hard and enjoys seeing all of her co-workers.

setting in which the VT/OCTP students can interact with their age-appropriate peers. Andrew, a student in public speaking, says that the class has helped him to speak clearly, make eye contact, and stay on topic. He says that everyone should take a class in public speaking.

Leisure Recreation

Students participate in a variety of leisure and recreation activities, including the Virginia Tech Break Zone for bowling and pool, the local putt-putt golf course, lunch with YMCA student volunteers, and visits to the War Memorial Gym for basketball and other forms of physical fitness. Brian enjoys “having fun with all of my great friends.”

Community

One goal of the VT/OCTP is to help each student access the many resources in their community, such as the public library, local stores and restaurants, public

transit, and volunteer activities. The students actively participate and contribute in various aspects of community life.

Vocational

Students in the program have jobs all over Blacksburg. Students are supported as they develop their vocational skills and become valuable employees.



Matt has recently moved into his own apartment and says that he enjoys “the freedom of living on my own and having the responsibilities of an adult.”

Students in the VT/OCTP stayed on Virginia Tech campus for seven days to experience what it is truly like to be a college student. During that week, students attended their daily jobs, accessed the recreational facilities on the campus, practiced independent living skills, and visited local areas of interest.

“The best part about living on campus was getting to be just like a regular college student and do all of the things college kids do. My favorite part was tie-dying T-shirts with my friends because I like art,” Andrew said.

For further information, Wayne Zellers, coordinator of the VT/OCTP, can be reached at wzellers@mail.mcps.org, or you can contact the Office of Multicultural Affairs at 231-1820.

Davis champions community

By Jim Ford

Angela Davis, political and social activist, and tenured professor in the History of Consciousness Department at University of California, Santa Cruz, spoke in Burruss Hall Auditorium on February 23rd.

National Public Radio broadcasts, “Virginia Tech, Invent the Future.” I’m suddenly reminded of February 23 and the words of Professor Angela Davis.

That evening she encouraged us to consider community, individualism, justice, history, death, and security in the context of Black History Month, and I imagined myself becoming part of the “future history” of community at Virginia Tech. She began and ended her message with a deep yearning for what she worried might be the fading power of community in our country; “that individualism may kill the good works of a generation of civil rights workers who are now dying.”

Her resonant voice then wove a powerful tapestry of troubling themes that totally engaged a large audience diverse in age, gender, and race and who knows what other invisible forms of living difference.

Davis reminded us that we are part of living history; that “past history, present history, and future history” is with us right now. “It has always been about politics for me,” she said, and then lamented what she saw as the co-opting of the recent passing of Coretta Scott King and Rosa Parks by an administration that stands opposed to their legacy; that their profound personal investments in non-violent social change were being sacrificed on the altars of individualism, security, and war.

Davis spoke emotionally about our sad living history of the death penalty and its roots in slavery. She shared that in historical Virginia murder was the only offence for which a Caucasian could be executed, whereas there were nearly 80 reasons to execute an African American. Davis then echoed the consistent message of both the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and Coretta Scott King, that justice is indivisible; that injustice for one is injustice for all. Or, as Davis framed it, our “equal right to be executed” may not be something to celebrate.

In lighter moments, she asked if we “felt more secure by taking our shoes off at the airport” and suggested that Bill Clinton may have been our “first Black President.”

Davis came to mind again this morning as the radio invited me to ponder my role, as together we “Invent the Future Community” at Virginia Tech.

Can debate be seperated from ethnicity?

by Nicole Eley

Last night was full of intense debates. Ashley and I covered a range of topics from international politics to social relations before coming to a full halt with U.S. affairs in regard to race and ethnicity.

A little background—Ashley is one of the most patriotic people I’ve ever met with equally committed philosophies: “if you don’t like it, than get out” or “put your trust in the government” mind-frames. In the heat of debate about limited access to opportunity in the United States, Ashley asked a series of questions that caught me off guard. “Do you even like being White? Are you more proud of your Black heritage than your other half?”

I don’t recall my answer, but I remember feeling hurt. Not because she asked these questions with cruel intent, but because our conversation had turned from a debate of the issues to an interrogation of my personal bias and framing of the issues. What do you say to something like that? Everyone brings their own personal opinions into a debate, but now mine were being questioned for their validity because of my ethnic background.

I am a fighter for civil rights. I learn about and debate the issues of those peoples who historically and statistically have limited access to opportunities and civil rights—a disproportionately large number of those being racial minorities, although the debate is becoming more focused on poverty than race today. Why does fighting for

these rights automatically make me not proud of half of my heritage? Having thought about her question again, I can say that I am proud of the struggle that my ancestors endured (and rightfully so), but this fact is irrelevant to our debate. I don’t fight for issues because of my pride. I fight because they deserve attention.

In some respect, I’m grateful that she *said* out loud what I’m sure many keep balled up inside. At Tech, I surround myself with people who fight for the same causes; so my arguments seem commonplace. But, with this conversation, I couldn’t use the same language, the same rhetoric. So, now the question becomes how to communicate the importance of such topics effectively, and to so many different types of people who must be approached in their own way? This very obstacle is where I fell in love with mass communication: Pictures speak where words fail. I wish I had a video camera now, because I feel like my words are losing their substance.

These past couple months I’ve been reminded of how hard it is to fight for a cause when you’re standing alone. There’s no doubt that I’ve been labeled by my peers—some call it “passion” while others... I don’t know because they only speak with their eyes. But, at times the long sighs and rolling eyes get so uncomfortable that I refrain from speaking entirely. This is nothing compared to the aversion endured by activists of the past, and yet I let it bother me. I admire their strength and perseverance. I can’t let mine falter anymore.

About 'The Conductor'

The Conductor is produced by the Multicultural Fellows and published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor

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The Conductor’s editorial board welcomes articles on upcoming multicultural events that are open to the university community. Articles should be under 350 words. Submit to Roxanna Link (rdlink@vt.edu). As space is limited, the board reserves the right to edit all submissions. Deadline for the next issue is July 31, 2006.

Diversity researchers win awards

By Ray Plaza

The Office of Multicultural Affairs is pleased to announce the recipients for the 2006 Diversity Research Grants for Faculty, and Graduate and Undergraduate Students. These grants are part of the Virginia Tech Diversity Research Initiative, whose goal is to stimulate and support diversity research by everyone, from the first year undergraduate to the most seasoned faculty member.

This Diversity Research Initiative is an effort by the university to focus its intellectual resources and research capability on critical diversity topics ranging from investigating and problem solving around issues of access, inclusion, and equity for underrepresented groups, to assessing the role and benefits of diversity, not only in higher education, but also in business and industry.

Benjamin Dixon, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs wrote the following when he first proposed the Research Initiative, “This effort acknowledges that some of this research is already underway on the campus, but we must do a better job in applying and disseminating information about the research findings. This can stimulate further research in areas that need attention, resulting in an increased recognition and celebration of the efficacy and legitimacy of diversity research across the board.”

Faculty Diversity Research Grants

Faculty diversity research grants are designed to address campus climate issues and the diversification of the faculty through effective recruitment, retention, and promotion strategies. This is the third year that this small grant program has been made available to support diversity research efforts that have potential for external funding and potential applicability across departments, disciplines, and colleges.

Recipients for the Faculty Diversity Research Grants are:

Laura Gillman, interdisciplinary studies
“CLAHS Faculty Mentoring Program for Institutional Change”

James Hawdon, sociology
“The University Community: Diversity, Integration, and Victimization”

Cynthia Bonner, student affairs
“Moving from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism with Student Affairs at Virginia Tech: An Assessment of Intercultural Sensitivity of Division Faculty and Staff”

Bobbie Potter, agriculture and life sciences
“Developing a Data Base to Guide the Decision Making on Future Strategic Activities for the Recruitment and Retention of Students of Diversity in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences”

Mary Connerley, management
“Influences on Attitudes toward Diversity”

Susan B. Asselin, education
“Universal Design: A Model to Reach Diverse Learners in Higher Education”

Shelly Nickols-Richardson, human nutrition
“Lack of African-American Students in Dietetics: Where is the Faculty Pipeline?”

The grants are for the 2006 calendar year. Reports must be submitted by March 2007. Information about

the 2007 Diversity Research Grants will be available in Fall 2006.

These grants have been made possible through the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the generous support of the Office of the Provost, Pamplin College of Business, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Natural Resources, and University Libraries.

Undergraduate Diversity Research Grants

The undergraduate diversity research grant is a collaborative effort between the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence, designed to stimulate and support undergraduate research on issues related to race, gender, culture, class, sexual orientation and disability. This is the second year that these grants have been awarded.

Recipients are:

Isha Mehmood, communication
“Biracial Women and Their Experiences at Virginia Tech”

Meghan Pierce, marketing management
“Communication Across Cultures: The Effects of Holistic Processing on Information Integration”

These students will conduct their research during this 2006 calendar year, and will submit a final report by 2007. In addition, they will be presenting their work at several conferences throughout the year. Funding for this grant is provided by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Graduate Diversity Research Grants

The graduate student diversity research grant is a collaborative effort between the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Graduate Student Assembly. The grants are awarded through the Graduate Research Development Program, which provides support for degree contingent research conducted by graduate students. This grant specifically goes to diversity-related research projects. This is the first year of this effort.

Cycle I recipients are:

Kayenda T. Johnson, industrial, and systems engineering
“Ethnicity and Computer Interface Design”

Soyoung Lee, human development
“Acculturation Among Korean Immigrants: A Community Capacity Approach”

Cycle II recipients are:

Sharnnia Artis, industrial, and systems engineering
“Design and Evaluation of a User-Centered Training Program for Latino Construction Workers”

Teena Felton, human nutrition, foods, and exercise
“Facilitators and Barriers to Selection of Dietetics as a Major by African-American Students”

The grants are awarded in two different cycles. (July 1 – Dec. 31), and Cycle II (Jan. 1–June 30). Funding for this grant is provided by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

New opinions...

Continued from page 1

during the walk or car ride from Burger King to the library. I initially thought that it would be difficult to really be friends with someone who had a severe disability because I had never had the experience. I was very wrong. I have managed to form a very good relationship with Austin. He gets excited about me coming to spend time with him and when I see him outside of my volunteer time, he stops and speaks to me, calling me by name.

When in the library, Austin usually has sentences that Emily has written in his notebook for him to type out in a Word document on the computer in the Special Services Lab in Newman. This may seem as though it is a very simple exercise; however, it is always a challenge to get him to stay focused long enough to type three or four sentences about his weekend or the day ahead of him or his time at work. Emily always made sure that the sentences were relevant to his life. I learned very rapidly, following Emily’s example, the questions/cues that could be used to get Austin’s focus back on his task.

As a result of certain circumstances, I was able to take on more and more responsibility so that Emily was only with Austin and me at the library. She stayed in the general vicinity while I worked with him, in case I needed her, but it was mainly just me and him.

Approximately one month ago, I began walking with Austin to the library by myself while Emily attempted to find a parking space, and I was also the only one with him while he typed his sentences. She then went to the other room during our internet time in order to help me to really feel the role. It was very rewarding to notice that the longer I worked with him and the more he became accustomed to me and vice-versa, the quicker his sentences were typed. Then we were able to surf the internet for whatever the interests of the day were for him.

I did learn that regardless of how comfortable we were around one another, he has good days and bad days. This is typical of all people, however with Austin, it could be an angry outburst or an emotional breakdown coupled with tears. This is also something I learned to be very aware of and I learned techniques to stifle breakdowns and be a support for him.

In conclusion, I have enjoyed working with Austin immensely. I feel as though I have not only gained valuable experience as an aid of a student with a severe disability but I have also gained a meaningful friendship. I have learned a great deal from Austin about looking at life optimistically. This volunteer time paired with EDCI 3144 has completely changed my opinions about the capabilities of students with disabilities. Austin is an exceptional learner and an exceptional person who, despite his disability, has a lot to offer the world around him, if only the world were willing to listen.

A guide for our journey Staff Diversity Development Group

Have you thought about the “Diversity Dimension” on your classified staff evaluation? The Staff Diversity Development Group (SDDG), a new “book club and beyond,” can help. The SDDG provides an opportunity for staff to participate in diversity-related books, videos, articles, and speakers. It also serves as an avenue to share opportunities about diversity presentations, performances, and forums on and off campus.

The SDDG meets bi-monthly on Tuesdays from noon to 1 p.m. in Burruss Hall. The group votes on materials used and meets to discuss a given assignment from a book, to view a video and then discuss it, or to read an article together and then discuss it. The SDDG is sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs which provides the leadership and books.

For more information or to sign up for the fall session, contact Robin Atkins at Atkinsrw@vt.edu or 231-1820.



Past selections of the SDDG

Zomparelli jumpstarts inaugural business session of “Voices and Visions”

by Jean Elliott



Wendy Zomparelli gave a notable address as the featured speaker for “Voices and Visions,” a special business and industry session in the third annual Mid-Atlantic Conference on Scholarship and Diversity. The President and Publisher of the *Roanoke Times*, Zomparelli discussed how her organization

has worked to build and sustain a diverse workplace.

The Diversity Road

Candid from the start, Zomparelli divulged that the *Roanoke Times* is still walking the diversity road and, “we have not gotten to where we need to go.” Inviting the audience to join her in mid-stride, Zomparelli said that “the diversity road takes you to places you didn’t expect to go. There are bumps, rough stretches, construction delays and dangerous curves. You may even come to a gap and no bridge has been built yet,” she added, “but the scenery is endlessly fascinating.”

Zomparelli then launched into an historic review. Landmark Communications, the parent company of Roanoke’s daily paper, was one of the first to recognize that diversity was crucial. Nearly four decades ago, company founder Frank Batten talked to executives about increasing employment of minorities throughout its work force.

“The only way to discharge this obligation is to make up our minds that it is going to be done and that the obstacles are going to be overcome,” noted Batten in 1968. “It will take courage, it will cost some money, and there will be risks, but the alternatives are unacceptable.”

In 1986, Batten told the Landmark editors that not enough progress had been made in the preceding 20 years. These were his remarks:

“We kid ourselves if we think to report a multiracial society through white eyes only. Or for that matter, through the eyes of any elite, whether it be racial, cultural, or ideological. To do our job well, we need reporting and editing staffs representing the broadest possible range of social and cultural backgrounds. The nation and our communities are growing more diverse, not less. Newspapers must do the same.”

Zomparelli, the first woman editor at the *Roanoke Times* and Landmark’s first female publisher, personally acknowledged “wonderful mentoring opportunities and developmental experiences.” She also noted that various

diversity initiatives were undertaken by former publisher Walter Rugaber. During his tenure, the *Roanoke Times*’ executive team became 55% female – “a big achievement,” said Zomparelli, “There are not many businesses in this area where half of the executive team is female. We also succeeded in hiring the first minority member of the executive team.”

Even though the *Times* made strides in diversifying their executive team, their workforce still did not reflect the diversity of the surrounding community.

Around the next curve...

In the summer of 2003, Landmark announced a new initiative called “Leveraging Difference.” This was not based on “any moral imperative,” said Zomparelli, “but predicated on a business case linked to our organizational capacity for innovation.

”True diversity goes beyond the differences we can see in one another, the differences of race, and gender, and age which are so apparent and cause such division in this country,” said Zomparelli. “Instead, ‘Leveraging Difference’ recognizes that we need to insure that our company includes people who are different in terms of their thinking styles, educational background, family structure, socioeconomic status, and life experience.

“This is an exciting approach,” continued Zomparelli. “Its not enough just to accept the difference. Real success comes from embracing those differences and actually using them in making the company stronger.”

Road under construction...

Last year, the *Roanoke Times* began annual training with its 400+ employees to start the conversation about difference. In phase two this year, the goal is to work through conflict and manage difficult conversations.

Zomparelli formed a council, a group “for external outreach as well as internal work.” This group acts as a bridgebuilder to minority communities (discerning issues as well as training constituents to use the community calendars, etc.) and also serves as an antenna for employee concerns. For example, when there were murmurings among white males about reverse discrimination, Zomparelli used it as an opportunity to address hiring with regard to population graphics.

The *Times* opened up hiring to include minority journalism pools. “We had 25% more minority hires in 2005 than in previous years,” said Zomparelli “but we have not reached demographic parity ... especially with regard to our growing Hispanic community.”

Where is the road going...

“We want to be more than a company that does not

tolerate difference,” said Zomparelli, “We want our diversity to be as attractive as our vacation package.”

While the *Roanoke Times* is a team-based company, Zomparelli said “it is disappointing to come to agreement all too easily... What we want is for someone to say, ‘well, I think this is a way to solve this problem;’ and then for someone else to say, ‘well that’s a good place to start but maybe it would be better to do this,’ and then for someone else to say, ‘wait a minute, that’s absurd, we should be doing this completely different thing.”

“You want ideas to clash and change, because then sometimes an idea can pop out of the top that is completely different from what any one person brought to the table... It’s the old thing about ‘more heads are better than one.’

“All too often we get attached to an easy solution instead of letting the conflict of ideas take us to new places. Conflict makes people uncomfortable. If I say something and someone criticizes my idea, I might take that personally and I feel like I’m getting dissed in some way. That’s why we need to train people that trying to improve on ideas is what we are there for and that, in fact, it’s the business of innovation and creativity.”

Zomparelli pointed to two areas that she referred to as bumps and barriers in the road: fear and comfort. “We need a moratorium on fear,” she said. “Most people, upon encountering difference, fear it.”

With regards to our own comfort, Zomparelli says that “when we see something that isn’t right, say something about it.” The *Roanoke Times* does not sponsor events that aren’t inclusive. It has withdrawn money from events where the organizing board has been all white males. When provided an explanation, the organizers were shocked that they hadn’t seen that before and grateful that it had been pointed out.

How will we know when we’ve arrived?

A McCormick Tribune fellowship case study indicates a continuum of thought on this issue. In a survey of minority fellows in journalism programs, Asian fellows projected a future in which no one would have to talk about race any more; whereas, African-American fellows projected a future where everybody would be talking about race all of the time. Clearly there are different ideas: some people hope it won’t be important to talk about anymore; some people think it will be so obvious that it will just be part of the normal conversation.

Zomparelli believes that we will know we have arrived “when we all feel valued for the people we are really are. When we can be our true selves at work, and talk about our interests and our hobbies in a way that we think people won’t be dismissive of – then we will have arrived.”

Virginia Tech instructor named Miss Black Virginia

by Jean Elliott

Takiyah Nur Amin, an administrator in the Race and Social Policy Research Center at Virginia Tech, has been selected as Miss Black Virginia 2006 by the Miss Black USA Pageant and Scholarship Foundation. The annual competition provides scholarships for state delegates to pursue and achieve their educational, career, and personal goals.



The national competition for the title of Miss Black USA 2006 will take place in October in Washington, D.C.

An alumna of Virginia Tech’s School of the Arts, Amin earned an MFA in arts administration in 2004. A student leader and activist, Amin has served as the coordinator for multicultural programs. Currently, she is an outreach coordinator at the Race and Social Policy Research Center in the sociology department. She has also taught in the Africana

Studies program and is a Multicultural Fellow.

Amin’s pageant platform as Miss Black Virginia USA 2006 was entitled “Shop Talk: Taking Black Women’s Health to the Streets.” Through this innovative educational outreach program, she will present workshops in Virginia beauty salons, barbershops, nail salons, and spas on the leading causes of death among black women—HIV/AIDS, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and stroke.

“I hope to have a positive impact on Black women’s health and to reach underserved populations who might not normally seek out information on these topics or be reached through traditional outreach efforts,” said Amin.

She began her “Shop Talk” presentations in Blacksburg, with five sessions scheduled at Chamar Gallery of Hair Design on Main Street in April.

“This is an excellent honor for Takiyah Nur Amin and speaks to her commitment to people and social change,” said Terry Kershaw, director of Africana Studies and the Race and Social Policy Research Center at Virginia Tech. “The long range agenda for both Africana Studies and Race and Social Policy is to help improve life chances and life experiences by going to the people and interacting with them on their level. It is

through people such as Takiyah that meaningful change can take place. She epitomizes scholar-activism and serves as a model for students and faculty by providing an example that the power of creativity and social commitment can co-exist.”

Amin’s academic research focuses primarily on the intersection of contemporary performance (i.e. dance, spoken word poetry, rap music) with politics and representations of race and gender. In February, she shared the stage at the Lyric in a multicultural performance called “Open the Window.” She has presented across the nation as well as in Mexico and Canada.

In addition to her work at Virginia Tech, Amin is the religious education assistant for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Blacksburg, and a dance instructor at the Center of Dance. She is an active mentor with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Southwest Virginia and a volunteer at the Interfaith Food Pantry. Her numerous memberships in community organizations include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Direct Resistance of Privilege Alliance (of which she is a cofounder), and Malika Kambe Umfazi Sorority Inc., a non-Greek lettered sisterhood.