Tech partner for NEH planning grant

By Susan Trolow

Cooperative planning among humanities faculty members at Virginia Tech has made it possible for the university to partner with the University of Virginia and the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH) to receive one of two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grants to plan for a South Atlantic Regional Humanities Center. NEH funded 16 such planning grants to establish eight regional centers in the U.S. and its territories. The $50,000 grant will be used to plan a South Atlantic Center for the Study of Regional Cultures. According to an NEH news release, the grants were awarded based on the ability to collaborate with other cultural institutions, support research on regional topics, document regional history, preserve cultural resources, develop K-12 learning opportunities, build college-level degree programs in regional studies, and foster cultural tourism.

“This is a shot in the arm for campus humanities,” said Anita Puckett, coordinator for the Appalachian Studies Program which is one of the Programs in the Humanities at Virginia Tech. (Provost) Peggy Meszaros went to Virginia for the Appalachian Studies Program which programs in regional studies, and foster opportunites, build college-level degree programs in regional studies, and foster cultural tourism.

“In academics, quality and accessibility should be focusing on a few themes.”

Steger settles in to new role

By Larry Hincker

Like the fading roar of a passing train, the thunder of Hokie Mania and Sugar Bowl hype are beginning to subside...but Charles W. Steger is just beginning to roll his engine down the track.

Steger quickly settled into the Burruss Hall “corner office” and is working his normal extended work days. “I’ve been amazed at the scores of well-wishers and notes of congratulations. But now the work begins,” said Steger, a man who obviously relishes work and university life. He usually arrives at about 7 a.m. each morning and remains long after the doors are locked.

During the first weeks of his presidency, Steger has plunged into the role, like all Virginia college presidents, focusing on the state legislature. “The General Assembly sessions are always important, but this one even more so. It’s the first session of the new bicentennial and the assembly will be considering record level appropriations,” Steger said.

Like his predecessor, Paul Torgersen, Steger will spend several days each week in Richmond. This year’s major project is the university’s new Bioinformatics Institute. “We have an advantage since the governor included funding for the institute in his budget, but we still need to shepherd it through the appropriation process,” Steger said.

In August, the university Board of Visitors approved a university plan to seek increased funding for research initiatives, info-tech activities focusing on instruction, and increased operating budgets. Capital-funding requests will include continuation of the upper-quad conversion, technology upgrades, the Ag/Forestry complex, the bioinformatics complex, and several other non-general-fund projects. [Editor’s note: Look for more detailed explanation of the university’s legislative initiatives in future issues of Spectrum.]

When asked what changes are in store for the university, Steger responded with a smile, “Not much, at first.” His immediate executive staff will be the same as Torgersen’s.

Steger said, “I want to build on the success and good feelings of the past several years. I’ve been having conversations with the deans, vice presidents, and others in university leadership roles. They have some ideas, I have some ideas...we all have ideas about where to take the university. I am not yet prepared to announce specific goals and objectives. That will take some give and take.” Though he is still delineating specific strategies, Steger said he will be focusing on a few themes.

“In academics, quality and accessibility should be focusing on a few themes.”

Astronomers announce discovery

By Sally Harris

Astronomers from Virginia Tech announced yesterday at the American Astronomical Society (AAS) meeting in Atlanta that a well-known, luminous cloud of gas in our galaxy called the Rosette Nebula is actually smaller than it appears.

Greg Toppana, a recent Ph.D. graduate of Virginia Tech, and professors Brian Denissen and John Simonetti used a special camera tuned to detect a particular wavelength of light emitted by hydrogen atoms, much like a radio tuned to receive a particular station.

Astronomers refer to this light from hydrogen as H-alpha. When they pointed their camera at the Rosette Nebula, they discovered that it appears larger than it actually is. The illusion is caused by scattering of H-alpha light from a dust shell surrounding the nebula, the astronomers said. This discovery means that when H-alpha light is used to view nebulae, one must take into consideration that there may be an illusion caused by scattered light.

A related process occurs in the Earth’s atmosphere, Toppana said. The sky looks bright during the day, he said, because sunlight is scattered from molecules and particles in the atmosphere. This is analogous to the Rosette Nebula, he said, because some of the light emitted in the hot core of the nebula is scattered by its surrounding shell. (See NERULA on 4)
**EVENTS**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 14, 2000**

**ACTIVITIES**

**Tuesday, 18**

Faculty Senate, 7 p.m., 32 Pamplin.

**Wednesday, 19**

AOE Program, 5:30-6 p.m., DBHCC: Robert Zubrin, Mars Society.

**Thursday, 20**

Staff Senate, noon, 1810 Litton-Reaves.

**Friday, 21**

Last Day to Add.

**Women’s Center Program**, 3:30-5:30 p.m., McBryde House: Midwinter’s Tea.

**Women’s Basketball**, 7 p.m.: At Temple.

**SEMINARS**

**Monday, 17**

Veterinary Medicine, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Heritage Room: Herman Staats, Duke.

**Tuesday, 18**

Geological Sciences, 4 p.m., 4069 Derring: Clark Birchfield, AAPG.

**Wednesday, 19**

ESM, 4-5 p.m., 136 Norris: Sergio A. Ambartsumian, Armenian Academy of Sciences.

**Thursday, 20**

Statistics, 3:45 p.m., 409 Hutcherson: Bret Alden Starnes.

**BULLETINS**

**Women Center tea scheduled**

The Women’s Center holds its annual Midwinter Tea on Friday, Jan. 21 from 3:30-5:30 p.m. at Price House (behind McBryde).

The public is welcome to come and enjoy food, conversation, and readings. Anyone interested in reading or performing should contact Josie McIntyre at 1-7108 or jmcelly@vt.edu.

**Conference to address NRV needs**

The Humanities Program in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies will present a conference titled “Preserving Community Identity and Place in the New River Valley: From Reflection to Action” Saturday, Jan. 29, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., at the Newport Recreation Center in Giles County.

The conference is free and is open to anyone interested in preserving and improving the communities of the New River Valley. Registration is required by Wednesday, Jan. 26.

This conference will provide an opportunity for critical reflection and dialogue on a variety of resources and methods communities can employ to address civic, cultural, historical, and environmental needs.

Participants at the conference will have an opportunity to discuss their needs and plans for their communities.

Students and faculty members involved in community service-learning projects will be on hand to listen and discuss ways they can help.

For more information, call Elizabeth Fine at 1-9959.

**Caregivers sought for interview**

Shannon E. Jarrott, an assistant professor in human development, is interviewing caregivers of seniors with memory problems for a study that is sponsored by the Alzheimer’s and Related Diseases Research Award Fund, an entity administered by the Virginia Center on Aging.

The study consists of two 30-minute phone interviews, approximately two months apart. All interviews are confidential. Interested participants can reach Jarrott at 1-5434 or via e-mail at sjarrott@vt.edu.

**BT increases service**

Beginning January 17, Blackburn Transit will increase the frequency of its service to the Oaklane community. From 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, the bus will run on a 15-minute schedule.

After 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and on weekends the Oaklane bus will run every half hour. The Two Town Trolley late-night service on weekends, which operated on a trial basis for the fall semester, will be continued as part of BT’s regular service.

For more information, contact BT at 961-1185, or Debby Barbout at 1-1757, debarbout@vt.edu.

**Center for Innovation in Learning calls for fifth round of grant proposals**

By Catherine Doss

The Center for Innovation in Learning (CIL) is seeking proposals for the fifth round of course-transformation grants, which will be awarded for the period of July 1, 2000, to June 30, 2001.

The deadline for submission is Feb. 14, 2000. Two proposal-writing workshops are being planned, one at the Blacksburg Electronic Village classroom at 840 University City Boulevard on January 24 at 3 p.m.

Established by the Office of the Provost in 1996, the CIL aims to develop on-line courses and provide related infrastructure, technical support, and assessment of results in targeted curricular areas. Its mission is to achieve the learning outcomes that describe independent, critical thinking, and technologically literate learners across disciplines.

Faculty members are invited to submit proposals to integrate technology into teaching in these four curricular areas: Distance-learning programs for graduate and professional students; core-curriculum courses with high student demand; upper-level undergraduate and professional courses with high student demand; and multiple-use courses that could be used for graduate and professional continuing education.

Successful proposals should include the following elements: emphasis on asynchronous, web-based course development; evidence of matching current operating support or cost-sharing; evidence that the module/course program can be offered to students on a recurring basis, plan for assessment of the program, report of activities and assessment, where appropriate (for those applying for continued support); and schedule of phased activities if applying for one year of potential multi-year project support.

Faculty members who have previously received grants for portions of multi-year projects are encouraged to apply for continued support as are teams of faculty and staff members who are proposing projects aimed at resolving particular specific curricular challenges of a college, center, or area of study.

For more information, visit http://www.edtech.vt.edu/cil or contact Anne Moore, director of information-technology initiatives, by telephone at 1-7108 or e-mail at amoor@vt.edu.

**Leffel named market research director for university’s Outreach Division**

By Catherine Doss

Linda G. Leffel has been named director of market research for the university’s Outreach Division. Leffel has been with Virginia Tech more than 25 years, receiving her doctorate in education here in 1973 and subsequently serving in various leadership roles in continuing education. Her most recent position was director of program development for the Division of Continuing Education, a job she has held since 1988.

“Linda’s leadership in Continuing Education has been extraordinary, and her unit’s accomplishments under her direction have been staggering,” said Ted Settle, director of Continuing Education. Since 1988, the program development team along with university faculty has completed nearly 5,000 continuing education programs that have generated over $46 million in gross revenue and more than $10 million in surplus revenue for Continuing Education and the colleges. The team developed the first multidisciplinary teleconference series for Virginia Tech, which served 33 states and 4,000 individuals at each of six programs. Also under Leffel’s leadership, the program development team developed a business plan that resulted in $1.2 million in funding and provided market research on the need for workforce technology training. This nationally recognized research resulted in the formation of the Masters in Information Technology at the Northern Virginia Center.

“Linda has made a name for herself in the area of market research in higher education,” said Clark Jones, vice provost for outreach. “There is no question she is one of the best in the field nationally.”

Leffel will be a featured speaker at the annual conference of the University Continuing Education Association in April. Her topic will be “Marketing Research as a Leadership Tool for...” (See LEFFEL on 4)
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LEFFEL
Continued from 2
Institutional Change.

The market research, which is a new position for the Outreach Division, was established to help spur growth and development of the various outreach units but also to maintain current programs and relationships.

“The Academic Agenda identifies outreach and economic development as a priority item for the next five years,” Jones said. “Therefore, we need to develop a strategic marketing plan that will help promote existing programs and services as well as identify and develop new initiatives and an overall direction for all areas within the Outreach Division.”

STEGER
Continued from 1
undeged everything we do. I firmly believe in the spirit of the land-grant mission. Virginia Tech should try to make a place for all those who qualify for admission. Yet, we also should be pleased that our ever-improving student-quality is raising the bar for admission.

“And that brings me to my second point. The U.S. Army made this expression into a cliche, but we should not be afraid to aspire for the very best in all we can be. That includes our faculty members and the quality of their research. It includes the quality of classroom interactions. And that includes the quality of our students. The pursuit of excellence is not trivial. I find it exhilarating.

After the legislative session, Steger plans to personally work on one broad mission. “If we are to fulfill the land-grant dictate, if we are to fully satisfy the role of the modern American university, we must focus on the research and graduate-education enterprise. Excellence, in music, in sports, in the arts, in science, can find a way to reverse sliding graduate enrollments and at the same time improve our standing among America’s great research universities,” Steger said.

At the undergraduate level, Steger is looking at several ideas including bolstering the honors program. He said, “I’m not sure yet what that will be, but among America’s leading universities, the honors program is like the soul of the undergraduate experience. It not only attracts the brightest young scholars, it serves as an inspirational beacon to the entire instructional enterprise.”

Steger’s continued emphasis on the topic of information technology. “So much of our world today revolves around information technology. The economic miracles in state of Virginia and the stock market, for example, owe much of their success to tech. In application to instruction is a natural. I think that information technology will be at the heart of a shakeout in higher education over the next decade. Information technology, e-commerce, and for-profit educational enterprises are putting increased pressure on traditional universities. Some colleges and universities will fail. I want Virginia Tech not only to be a survivor, but a leader in creation of information technology, or in course delivery, or as a supplier of qualified graduates to employers around the world.”

Noting that “knowledge generation is link closely to wealth generation than ever before,” Steger said Virginia Tech will find itself increasingly at the core of economic-development initiatives. The newly created Bioinformatics Institute is a case in point. “This new institute is a pure knowledge play. It could be more exciting and academically stimulating than gene mapping the world’s most important plants and animals.” Yet, this very action could be the source of thousands of job while it tackles vexing problems...like feeding the billions of new people on earth for the next century.”

Steger said that over the course of the next few months, in conjunction with the administrative and faculty leadership, he will formulate his long-term goals and strategies. He plans to discuss these goals at the Founders Day convocation (April 29), which will also double as his formal installation as president. In addition to topics mentioned earlier, he also plans to address Virginia Tech’s off-campus presence, outreach activities, international studies, diversity, and the university’s planning process itself.

As soon as possible, he will begin regular meetings with faculty, staff, and student leadership. Steger said, “We’ll meet with student government and other campus leaders soon. I especially want to have some informal sessions with campus residents later in the year so I can look forward to several ‘pizza sessions.’

Pondering the future of Virginia Tech, Steger reflected on its past. “Great universities are built on the shoulders of the men and women from its past. Its great presidents, its inspirational faculty members, the bright students launching productive careers, those committed alumni working to advance the alma mater, and staffs who embody the spirit of ut prosim...all lead the way for us to follow.

A Richmond native, Steger’s ties to Virginia Tech span four decades, beginning with his undergraduate studies in the 1960s. He received his bachelor and master of architecture in 1970 and 1971 respectively and a Ph.D. in environmental sciences and engineering in 1978, all from Virginia Tech. He was a project engineer and department head with Wiley and Wilson of Lynchburg from 1971 to 1974 and has consulted with organizations world wide.

When asked by a reporter shortly after his appointment why he has remained at Virginia Tech so long, Steger quickly responded, “the quality of the people at Virginia Tech, my strong belief in the value of public higher education, and the affection so many people have for the institution.” Steger’s answer has taken him around the world, but his trucks are etched in Hokie stone.

NEBULA
Continued from 1
The Rosette Nebula in the constellation Monoceros is about 5,000 light years from Earth and can be seen with a modest telescope. It has a symmetrical nose-like appearance, which gives it its name. A cluster of hot stars heats gas within the nebula’s core to nearly 18,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The gas is so hot that it emits light, much like a fluorescent tube. Much of the light emitted in the Rosette Nebula is H-alpha light from hydrogen atoms.

The Virginia Tech scientists used a special camera that they developed to detect H-alpha light and light from other atoms in space. The camera is located at a dark mountain site at Virginia Tech’s Horton Research Center. Toppana modified the camera to detect polarization of the light.

The research was sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the Horton Foundation.

When we found strong polarization in the H-alpha light from what appeared to be the outer parts of the Rosette Nebula, I knew we were onto something,” he said. “Just as scattered sunlight from the daylight sky is polarized, we found that scattering in the dust shell surrounding the Rosette Nebula also causes polarization.” Polarization is a common phenomenon usually present when light is scattered by tiny particles, such as the North American Nebula, so-called because of its crude resemblance to North America.

NEH
Continued from 1
her with the NEH announcement of the Initiative for Regional Humanities Centers, she contacted Robert Bates, the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, and Joe Menela to put together a team to submit a proposal. The support of the provost has been very welcome by those of us in the humanities.”

Meszaros said, “This grant will enable our faculty members and students to play a more prominent and visible role in the region. We bring many strengths to the table. I feel very strongly about support for the humanities and the arts as a region-wide to have a $20 million endowment to support regional humanities research, education, preservation and public programs.

The NEH also responded to the technology component in our joint proposal,” she said. “Through the work of Roger Ehrlich, Jack Carroll, and others in computer science, Tim Luke in political science, Jim Bohlhard in urban affairs, Len Hatfield and Dan Mosser in English, and the Blackhurst Electronic Village initiative, Virginia Tech has applied Internet technology to educational, humanitarian, and community-based learning.

The final grant to implement the South Atlantic Regional Humanities Center will be awarded in late 2000 or early 2001. NEH will award $5 million in matching funds to one institution, including consortia, to implement their plans. Each recipient must match this amount three to one, raising $15 million over seven years. The goal is for each of 10 centers nation wide to have a $20 million endowment to support regional humanities research, education, preservation and public programs.

The consortium is successful, the regional center will be based in the region-wide advisory board and staffed by the VFH. “All partners will collaborate to ensure that people will have access to the region’s complex and intriguing history by providing advanced Internet and computer programming at the center. In addition to its commitment to public programming and scholarly research, a strong focus will be placed on developing cultural-heritage tourism in the South Atlantic region.”

Faculty members interested in participating in the planning effort may contact Toppana at apptop@vt.edu.

OBITUARY

Mary Dills Taylor Pauley, 53

Mary Dills Taylor Pauley died Sunday, Jan. 9, at the age of 53. She was a Tech employee for 22 years, serving the Graduate School for 20 years.

Virginia Tech offers a vision of the humanities that is unique and valuable. The application process helped Virginia Tech humanities-program representatives "understand our resources and how we can collaborate—from curriculum development to outreach and policy development," said Packett, who is one of 14 regional Appalachian Program directors. “I am very much in favor of pooling resources across institutions. Information technology makes it possible to collaborate and it is crucial that we do so.”

She said that every aspect of the proposal can be addressed by Virginia Tech’s humanities resources, which include strong legacies in historical preservation and research, such as Bad Robertson and the Civil War Institute and Crandall Shifflett and the Virtual Jamestown Project, also funded by the NEH.

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The trio is carrying out a highly sensitive survey of hydrogen gas between the stars. Their camera produces digital images that can be manipulated in a computer. Toppana, who implemented the polarization technique for his Ph.D. thesis, will present the results at the AAS meeting early next year.

Toppana can be reached at 1-877-5 or via e-mail at toppana@galileo.phys.vt.edu.

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