New center will focus on energy-deregulation issues

By Soohan Ho

A new research center has been established in the Pamplin College with a $200,000 grant from the Dominion Energy Clearinghouse, part of one of the nation’s largest energy producers, Richmond-based Dominion.

The Dominion Center for Energy Modeling and Optimization will conduct research on business techniques, technologies, and strategies to address current and emerging challenges in the deregulated energy marketplace, said center director Cliff Ragsdale, associate professor of management science and information technology.

“Deregulation will increase competitive pressures throughout the power industry,” Ragsdale said, “requiring energy companies to optimize the use of their physical and financial assets.” Research, he said, may help utilities and other states avoid the problems plaguing California, the first state to deregulate the purchasing of electric power.

“We will bring state-of-the-art business theories and information technologies to bear on the challenges brought about by energy deregulation. We will apply the power of business research to the business of power.”

“A new industry with new rules requires new business strategies,” said Thomas A. Capps, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Dominion. “We’re pleased to join with the outstanding faculty members and students at Virginia Tech to study marketing and operations strategies for the changing energy industry.”

The center, he said, will work with energy-related businesses and government agencies to analyze and design effective solutions to problems associated with the efficient generation, transmission, and distribution of energy products.

The center brings together a multi-disciplinary group of faculty members and graduate students with knowledge and skills in operations research, computer modeling, supply-chain management, financial-risk management, and information systems and technology. “The faculty members have also conducted training sessions for and consulted with various organizations in the energy industry.”

The center’s research activities cover a broad range of topics, Ragsdale said. Current research topics undertaken by faculty members associated with the center include simulation optimization, financial instruments for risk management, spreadsheet-based decision support systems, supply-chain management, statistics, machine learning (genetic algorithms and neural networks), multi-criteria decision making, information visualization using virtual reality, knowledge management, and intelligent agents for autonomous negotiation.

The center supports Virginia Tech’s educational mission in several other ways, Ragsdale said. “Faculty members associated with the center are available to conduct seminars and training sessions for organizations on a variety of business and information technology topics. The center actively seeks to involve students in its research activities. ‘Information gathered in conjunction with the center’s research may also be used to create case studies and examples for classroom discussion.’ The center works with employers in the energy industry to create co-op and internship opportunities for students. It also maintains a listing of energy-related educational and research resources available on the web.”

While many Virginia Tech students have benefited from their international experiences at the CESA, this is the first opportunity for educators from that city to visit the Blacksburg surroundings and study American programs. (See SWISS on 4)

Swiss educators visiting Tech campus

By Jean Elliott

Thanks to the College of Human Resources and Education (CHRE), seven teachers from Riva San Vitale, Switzerland, will be visiting the United States from February 24 through March 3.

Hailing from the home city of Virginia Tech’s Center for European Studies and Architecture (CESA), these educators will arrive in Washington, DC tomorrow. The initial groundwork for this visit was established when students from CHRE’s child-development program studied at Riva last summer. It was then that Dean Janet Johnson, along with faculty members Victoria Fu and Lynn Hall, began the dialogue that led to this exchange.

“Every time we visit Riva, the teachers at one of the elementary schools just open the doors and let us in,” Hill said. “It’s amazing how generous they are. After touring with us last summer, Dean Johnson felt the need to reciprocate the generosity. She returned and figured out a way to make this exchange happen.”

BOV to meet in Northern Virginia

By David Natter

The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors will hold its quarterly meeting in Northern Virginia March 4-5, as the 15-member governing body conducts a comprehensive tour of the university’s extensive facilities in the region.

The full meeting of the board will be held on Monday, March 5, beginning at 1 (See BOV on 2)
**CEUT offers March programs**

Fifteen Socialization Strategies, Thursday, March 1, 2-30 p.m., Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center. Peter Doolittle will discuss how socialization can be used to create learning communities, foster academic risk-taking, enhance learning, and promote student engagement. This session will explore the implementation and appropriate use of 15 socialization strategies using a series of interactive activities and modeling. Register at www.ceut.vt.edu.

**Faculty as Skillful Presenters,** Wednesday, March 14, 2:30-30 p.m., Hillcrest large conference room. Research indicates that the impact on learners in any instructional setting is heavily dependent on the way the presenter behaves. Margaret Hable will present information about audience awareness, body language, voice tone and inflection, presentation structure, and more. Register at www.ceut.vt.edu.

Follow-up of Large Classes 1/24: Solutions that Work, Wednesday, March 28, 3:30-4:30 p.m., Hillcrest large conference room. Participants from the January 24 workshop are invited to re-convene to discuss the experiences, activities, concerns, and successes they have had with their large classes since attending the session. The agenda will be determined by those who attend and coordinated by Hable. Register at www.ceut.vt.edu.

**Consultation with Margaret Hable,** Thursday, March 29 and March 30, Hillcrest small conference room. The CEUT staff will be available to plan workshops for specific departments, individuals, or faculty groups. The staff can customize any of the workshop topics, develop activities around other topics, and consult privately with faculty members. Call 1-4254 to make an appointment with Hable to discuss any aspect of teaching.

BOV Continued from 1 p.m. in room 214 of Virginia Tech’s Northern Virginia Center, 7054 Haycock Road, Falls Church.

The board will consider, among other business, approval of the 2001-2002 tuition-and-fee package; the 2002-2008 capital-outlay plan; a resolution on the south end zone and west-side stadium expansion; appointments to the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute Policy Board; and will consider other initiatives to expand information technology, research, teaching and outreach.

The committees of the board will meet Monday morning at the following times and locations in the Northern Virginia Center: the Buildings and Grounds Committee will meet in executive session at 8:30 a.m. in room 217 and the open session will begin at 9; the Finance and Audit Committee will meet in room 219 for an 8:30 a.m. executive session—the open session will begin at 9 a.m.; the Academic Affairs Committee will meet in open session at 8:30 a.m. in room 113. The executive session will begin at 10 a.m., followed by a tour of the center.

The Student Affairs Committee will meet at 8:30 a.m. in room 106. The committee will interview candidates for the student positions for the Board of Visitors. The committee will then meet in executive session 10 a.m.

On Sunday, March 4, the board will tour Virginia Tech facilities including the Equine Medical Center in Leesburg, the Alexandria Research Institute, and the Virginia Tech Washington-Alexandria Center.
Marshall scholar Airey selected by USA Today

By Liz Crumbley

Computer engineering student Sarah Airey continues to find ways to merge her interests in art, technology and the human condition into acts of discovery, and soon she will head off on a quest to revolutionize the computer and Internet use in developing nations.

In September, Airey will travel to Great Britain to begin graduate studies in artificial intelligence, funded by a $50,000 British Marshall Scholarship. She is only the third Virginia Tech student ever to receive the Marshall, the third to make the USA Today First Team, and the first to be selected for both.

Through research in artificial intelligence, Airey hopes to learn how to design software that will facilitate the incorporation of computers and the Internet into the cultures and daily life of developing countries.

Airey, a senior in the Bradley Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, realized the need for this type of research during the summer of 2000 when, as Virginia Tech’s Daughtrey Scholar, she traveled to Ghana to study African art and culture and to teach computer use in a village.

Airey believes that computers and the Internet can help developing countries alleviate illiteracy, provide better medical care, find markets for commerce and native art forms, and reduce depletions of natural resources.

As an artist and a student of art, Airey plans to combine the aesthetic powers of artistic expression with the power of artificial intelligence to create computer technology that translates into many cultures. “My challenge,” she said, “is to integrate the talents of artist and engineer to guide technological development.”

Airey plans to attend the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, where a number of students, or on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. Any having questions concerning discrimination or at- mosphere regarding the programs described in this newspaper should contact the Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Office: 540-231-7760 (v), 540-231-9460 (TTY).
Survey shows funding resource web site useful

By Susan Traill

A month-long survey of users of the Research Division’s Opportunity Update (OU) alert service and Funding Opportunities Resource (FOR) has demonstrated that these resources are useful and provide a valuable complement to national services of this type. OU is a weekly online listing of new funding opportunities for faculty members, post docs, and graduate students, according to system administrator Liz Ackerman. Virginia Tech faculty and staff members subscribe to the weekly e-mail notification that tells them that a new edition of the OU is available at the FOR web site, which contains links to databases, alert services, federal sponsors, foundations, fellowship information, early career awards for junior faculty members, the flight schedule for researchers traveling to Washington, D.C., and other information.

Members of the OU list serve were invited to respond to a survey regarding their use of OU and FOR, the services’ usefulness, and the users’ suggestions for improvements. Of the 377 subscribers, 49 people or 13 percent completed the survey—88 percent of those were faculty members.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents reported that notices in the OU have led them to a funded project. Twenty-nine percent of respondents use the Opportunity Update as their primary source of funding information. Of the rest of respondents 79 percent rely on information directly from funding agencies, personal contacts, networking, word-of-mouth, and Internet sources, including databases and alert services such as Community of Science and IRIS. (IRIS is a database of funding opportunities updated daily. It currently contains more than 8,000 federal and non-federal funding opportunities in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities, compiled on the basis of information provided by the sponsors themselves This database is available to Virginia Tech users via a Research Division subscription.)

“Rather than attempt to corner the market as the primary source of funding information for our faculty members, we plan to renew our efforts to get more faculty members to rely on these primary resources and to enable them to conduct their own searches for funding,” said Gene Brown, associate provost for research program development. “Community of Science and IRIS were mentioned several times as primary sources of information so we will focus on increasing participation in these resources.”

Regarding the Funding Opportunities Resource web site, 34 percent of subscribers to the OU also use the FOR web site monthly; 63 percent have used the site to get information on funding programs; 40 percent have used the site to locate forms; 51 percent have used the site to discover program deadlines. The OU, funding resources, and federal-sponsors pages were rated as the most useful components of the web site. Fellowships, research flight schedules, and Early Career awards were rated as least used.

Brown expressed concern that “young faculty members seem to be one of our underserved groups.” In response, “We have updated the Early Career awards web page to include more information, and have added detailed directions to assist young faculty members in conducting database searches of Community of Science (COS) and IRIS.”

A recent search of the IRIS database turned up 484 funding programs targeted specifically at junior faculty members, Ackerman reported. A COS search returned 164 programs.

Brown said, “Survey respondents made many good suggestions for improving our services and we will be working to implement some of them over the next few months. We would like to encourage more people to take advantage of the services that we provide in our web site,” he said. “It’s important for researchers to sign up with alert services, and we encourage them also to sign up with Community of Science through the Virginia Tech Expertise Database web site (http://vetid.vt.edu).”

Virginia Tech faculty and staff members and graduate students can subscribe to the Opportunities Update list serve by sending a note to lizacker@vt.edu. FOR is on line at www.rgs.vt.edu/funding/.

Additional survey results are available at www.rgs.vt.edu/funding/survey.html. Brown will respond to questions or comments about the services at efbrown@vt.edu.

Giddings named associate dean

By Jean Elliott

Valerie Giddings has been named interim associate dean for outreach and external relations in the College of Human Resources and Economic Development.

Giddings’ new position includes outreach, continuing education, alumni relations, and providing leadership to the dean’s ambassadors. She will also oversee 19 advisory boards and serving leadership to the dean’s ambassadors. Continuing education, alumni relations, and providing leadership to the dean’s ambassadors.

Giddings developed outreach efforts with inroads for Virginia Tech users via a Research Division database. “I believe this will help us to get more faculty members to rely on these primary resources and to enable them to conduct their own searches for funding,” said Gene Brown, associate provost for research program development. “Community of Science and IRIS were mentioned several times as primary sources of information so we will focus on increasing participation in these resources.”

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Reporting structure changed for extended campuses

By Clara B. Cox

Interim Provost James R. Bohland has changed the reporting lines for Virginia Tech’s extended campus directors.

The directors, who formerly reported directly to the provost, will now report to the dean of the Graduate School.

In a letter to the directors informing him of this decision, Bohland wrote, “I believe this will provide you with more supervision and support than has been the case reporting to the provost directly.”

The university has graduate facilities in Falls Church, Hampton Roads, Roanoke, and Abingdon.