Session begins series of ‘consultative conversations’ on Core Curriculum

By Richard Lovegrove

Virginia Tech’s Core Curriculum is now more than 10 years old, and while some think it is functioning well course-by-course and serving its purpose of giving students a well-rounded education, others think the “system” and support for it need fixing.

Those were some of the opinions heard March 28 when about 140 people gathered in Torgersen Hall to start identifying and discussing major areas of concern relating to the Core Curriculum. They heard from President Charles Steger, Provost Mark McNamee, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education Ronald Daniel, and Gary Fenstermacher, a former Tech faculty member who is now a philosopher of education at the University of Michigan.

“They (students actually do) know what the core’s all about,” McNamee said. “I think the individual components of it are already pretty good—better than most.” But, he said, there are things that can be done better.

Steger said when Virginia Tech was founded, it concentrated on certain vocations but also embraced the notion of improving the world. “I think it’s important for every student to study something outside his or her own major.”

Fenstermacher said a core curriculum is part of the “battle” between liberal arts and the professions. “And it is a battle.” A few who attended the session echoed this later when they commented that one or two colleges at Tech still do not seem to “buy into” the Core Curriculum.

Fenstermacher said when the university considers redesign of core studies, it needs to look at five maxims. First, it needs to “backward map” the Core Curriculum by looking at whether students did actually learn what they should have from it. Second, the university needs to attend to the teacher just as much as the student. “Who teaches the course is just as important as the content of the course,” he said.

“We often staff them (the core courses) with the person who drew the short straw.”

Third, mark the line between goals and ideals and realize that ideals, while critically important, are not the sole goal in teaching. Fourth, the core needs to be as much a matter of community as a matter or courses. And fifth, the Core Curriculum must bridge that divide between liberal and professional studies.

Several faculty members who attended expressed concerns that the Core Curriculum is a mass of separate “things” and doesn’t focus enough on integrating all into a cohesive system. For instance, said Lud Eng, head of the Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology, the university has any number of molecular biology courses that teach procedure and technique, but the ethical, religious, and moral implications are taught in a separate course. “You could make the argument that it should be a part” of the regular courses, Eng said.

Many who attended thought the system was broken in terms of staffing. The departments that carry the heaviest Core Curriculum loads don’t have enough resources, and the people who teach those courses are so overloaded that they don’t have time for research.

Bill Snizek, an alumni distinguished professor in sociology, said teaching core courses is not seen as very professional or scientific, and that the material has little relevance for grants or research. The university, Snizek said, must find better ways to reward those who teach the courses.

Fenstermacher told the group that, in his opinion, few large universities “can boast as much consideration of undergraduate studies” as Virginia Tech can. “This is a tough nut, as you well know,” he said. “This time what I hope Tech will concentrate on is getting people to salute the flag before you run it up the pole.”

Daniel said this session is not the end of the process but “the lead event in a series of consultative conversations.”

Graduate-engineering program ranked among top 30

By Liz Crumbley

The graduate program of the College of Engineering is ranked among the top 30 in the nation in U.S. News & World Report’s “America’s Best Graduate Schools for 2004” survey released today. The university’s industrial-engineering program is ranked in the top 10.

The engineering college’s graduate program was ranked 26th overall among the 168 programs included in the magazine’s survey. The college is tied at that ranking with the engineering schools at Columbia University and the University of Florida.

According to the survey’s peer and recruiter assessments, the Tech graduate-engineering program was ranked 19th nationally by both corporate recruiters and engineering-school deans.

In addition, the college’s industrial-engineering graduate program was ranked ninth in its field by the survey of engineering deans. Several more of the college’s programs are expected to appear in expanded specialty rankings to be released soon.

“Engineers learn to read any measurement, such as these college rankings, with the appropriate error bars and with a sober consultation,” said Hassan Aref, dean of the College of Engineering. “The college’s programs remain strong, vibrant and attractive, our financial challenges of declining state support notwithstanding.”

In last year’s survey, the Tech engineering graduate program achieved an overall ranking of 23rd. “This slight drop in rankings for Virginia Tech likely is something we will see more often as state support for higher education in Virginia continues to erode,” said Larry Hincker, associate vice president for University Relations.

CGS president to speak at spring Graduate Commencement exercises

By Julie Kane

Although we live in times of unrest, Friday May 9 will be a cause for celebration for Virginia Tech students graduating from the Undergraduate and Graduate Schools.

Founders Day 2003
Annual Convocation Marking 131 years of Virginia Tech Tradition
Friday, April 25 at 3 p.m.
Burruss Hall Auditorium

CSGS president to speak at spring Graduate Commencement exercises

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Future of World Trade Center site to be topic of visiting NYC speaker

By Sarah Newbill

The public is invited to attend a free lecture featuring Alexander Garvin, vice president for planning, design and development for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.

The event will be held in the Shaftman Performance Hall of the Jefferson Center in Roanoke on Saturday April 5, at 7:30 p.m. Garvin has been coordinating the formulation of comprehensive development plans for the World Trade Center site and the surrounding areas of Lower Manhattan, seeking input from the various individuals and organizations that have an interest in the process. The event is sponsored partly Virginia Tech’s College of Architecture and Urban Studies and Department of Architecture.

Garvin will discuss the process under way to rebuild the former World Trade Center site. Following the lecture, he will answer questions from the audience. Attendees are invited to stay for a reception in Fralin atrium.

Auschwitz survivor to speak during Holocaust Awareness Week

By Clara Cox

Edith Eva Eger, a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II, will be the keynote speaker for the 2003 Holocaust Awareness Week, which will be observed April 4 through 9. Eger will give her talk on April 8 at 7 p.m. in the Donaldson Brown Hotel auditorium. The event is open to the public and is free.

Eger, who has lectured throughout the world, uses her past as an analogy to inspire people to tap into their full potential and to shape positive and productive destinies. Her message is one of healing and growth, of freedom from self-imposed limitations. She speaks of transforming adversity into advantage, of finding meaning and purpose in life.

The keynote address is sponsored by the Holocaust Awareness Week Steering Committee. For information, contact Kimberly Philpot at 1-3787.

The week of observance will begin on Friday, April 4, with the showing of the movie Schindler’s List, which highlights the life of a man who saved thousands of Jewish people from genocide. The movie will be shown 5:30 until 9 p.m. in the Black Cultural Center in 126 Squires. It will be repeated at the same time on Saturday, April 5. The movie is free. For information, contact Nathan Mitchell at 2-1288.

Other Holocaust Awareness Week observances include a “Reading of the Names” ceremony on the Drillfield from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Monday, April 7. The names of those who died in the Nazi camps during the Holocaust will be read and acknowledged publicly. For information, contact Jason Rubin at 449-3082.

For more information, call 1-8472 or e-mail dbratcl/vt.edu.

Math Awareness Month talk set

Helaman and Claire Ferguson will present “Mathematics in Stone and Bronze” Thursday, April 17, at 7 p.m. in the Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center auditorium.

This presentation is sponsored by the Department of Mathematics in celebration of Math Awareness Month.

Helaman Ferguson’s sculptures in stone and bronze celebrate ancient and modern mathematical discoveries, melding the universal languages of sculpture and mathematics. Using slides and video, Helaman and Claire Ferguson trace his creations from initial conception through mathematical design and computer graphics to their final form. The Fergusons will discuss the innovative computer technology used to create tori and double tori, trefoil knots, wild and tame spheres, Moebius strips, and Klein bottles.

Reynolds and Claire Ferguson received the 2002 Joint Policy Board for Mathematics (JPBM) Communications Award, established in 1988 to reward and encourage journalists and other communicators who, on a sustained basis, bring accurate mathematical information to non-mathematical audiences.

For more information, contact Susan Anderson at 1-8041 or anderson/math.vt.edu.

Two departments holding reunions

The Department of Biochemistry will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a program on Saturday, April 5 from 2 to 5 p.m. at the Donaldson Brown Hotel auditorium.

Contact Sheila Early at smealy@vt.edu for more information. Faculty and staff members and students are welcome to attend.

The Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics will celebrate its 75th anniversary with a program on Saturday, April 5 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel.

Contact Shirley Baber at babers@vt.edu for more information. Faculty and staff members and students are welcome to attend.

See AUSCHWITZ on 5
Go Team Virginia links NASCAR, universities

By Richard Lovegrove

Governor Mark Warner has unveiled the Hermione Sadler “Go Team Virginia” race car, which will feature the paint scheme of Virginia Tech and three other state universities during the 2003 NASCAR season.

“Needless to say this will be an incredible financial opportunity for each of the schools, but it will also be a chance for great national television exposure during races,” said Locke White, director of licensing and trademark administration for Virginia Tech. “In addition, this is a fine educational opportunity for students who will be involved.”

Sadler, who drove the Virginia Lottery car last year, approached Virginia universities with the idea for the Go Team Virginia car several months ago. Each of the four universities involved—Virginia Tech, James Madison University, the University of Virginia, and Virginia Commonwealth University—will take turns having its design on the car. Tech is featured at least twice during the March 23 race at Martinsville and the October 19 race at Martinsville. The Tech car could get a third race if enough Hokie fans join the Go Team Virginia club at www.goteamva.com.

The car serves an educational purpose. A team of Tech and graduate students worked to attract sponsor associates. The team is also planning a “pit-crew challenge” as a post-race promotional. The students will work on merchandising and licensing of products and will also write a paper on what they’ve learned.

“This experience has been an incredible one,” said Jessica Neal, team leader. “We have had all the chance to apply marketing and what we have learned in the classroom to the real world. And I will admit it is not as easy as the books make it sound. I think this has been very educational for our entire team.”

Sponsors will also earn royalty money from sales of licensed goods and from associate partners on the car.

Full-time employment

Laboratory Specialist Senior, 008045M, PB 4, PPWS.

Laboratory Specialist Senior, 002610M, PB 4, CVM.

Medical Technologist, 002666M, PB 4, VTH.

Medical Technologist, 006771M, PB 4, VTH.

Postal Assistant/Meter Operator, 000500A, PB 2, UMA.

Powerline Assistant, 006523F, PB 3, FES.

Program Support Technician, CCCC00C, PB 0, VTF.

Sous Chef, 002946H, PB 3, RDP.

Systems Administrator, 001986F, PB 4, University Bur. 

Unit Manager, 007961H, PB 5, RDP.

Part-time employment

Barn Manager/Assistant, W023201M, PB 3, ARS/USDA.

IGU Veterinary Technologist Large Animal, W022182M, PB 2, VTH.

Lab Assistant, W023536M, PB 3, HNEF.

Large Animal Husbandry, W022155M, PB 1, VTH.

Relating Editor/Assoc. Managing Editor, W023428, PB 3, Sociology.

Office Assistant, W023538M, PB 1, VTH.

Radiologic Technologist, W022238M, PB 3, Schiffert Center.

Small Animal Veterinary Technician, W020101M, PB 4, VTH.
Tech ranks in top 25 for alumni serving in Peace Corps

By Katie West, University Relations intern

Virginia Tech has been ranked in the top 25 nationally on the list of large colleges and universities with alumni currently serving as Peace Corps volunteers. The list is compiled annually and represents the 42 Tech alumni currently working as volunteers with the Peace Corps.

Tech has its own recruiting office, headed by Doug Appler, a graduate student in Urban and Public Affairs, who recently completed a Peace Corps experience in Guatemala. Appler is part of Tech’s Masters International Program (MIP), a degree program set up between the Peace Corps and the university to allow students to make a volunteer experience with the Peace Corps part of earning a master’s degree. This program is set up in over 40 schools across the country to allow students to link a Peace Corps experience to their 30s and 40s or even older is wonderful also because they have life experience to bring to the program,” he said.

Both Browder and Appler emphasized that an experience with the Peace Corps is a transforming experience. “After going to a country where virtually no one speaks your language and amenities are in very short supply and you still feel that you’ve made a difference, this gives you the confidence to come back to the United States and try to make a difference here also,” Appler said.

Three faculty members selected Diggs Teaching Scholars

Andrew Becker, associate professor of foreign languages and literatures, Elizabeth Bloomer, instructor of English, and Tonya Smith-Jackson, assistant professor of industrial and systems engineering, have been selected as the 2003 Diggs Teaching Scholars.

The Diggs Program was established in 1992 to recognize and foster excellence, imagination, and innovation in linking scholarship and teaching. Each recipient is presented with a plaque, and a cash award goes to both the recipient and their department.

Becker teaches Latin, Greek and Classics courses, including one he has developed for the European Studies Program in Riva San Vitale on ancient and modern poetry. He is also actively involved in outreach to high schools and has been a teacher and director of the Governor’s Latin Academy for many years. His students cite his high energy and passion for teaching. He is recognized for his ability to instill an appreciation for classical languages and other cultures.

Bloomer has taught primarily first-year writing courses in the English Department, but also higher-level courses in creative writing. She is known as a powerful teacher who influences her students’ lives long after they leave her classroom. She has been a long-time GTA advisor and currently directs the GTA Advising program, where she works with the department’s newest teachers.

Smith-Jackson has taught a variety of courses at all different levels in industrial and systems engineering, with an emphasis on human factors. Last year the students awarded her the Best Lecturer and Most Dynamic Professor Award. She is described as an energetic and enthusiastic teacher who is dedicated to improving the learning environment in the classroom. She has also been instrumental in diversifying the ISE curriculum. She has been awarded two Student Success Grants to help students understand how diversity applies to engineering problems and a CEUT Teaching Grant to study cultural ergonomics, which involved travel to the University of Ghana-Legon to study safety and culture among workers in West Africa.

The new Diggs teaching scholars will lead a discussion of topics related to their teaching at the annual Diggs Roundtable, to be held in the fall. Becker will present his teaching framework, which he calls the three R’s: reaction, recovery and renovation. Bloomer will talk about motivation and how to bring students back to the joy of learning they knew as children. Smith-Jackson will discuss the use of cultural schemas and the Paideia method in engineering education.