

# VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

## In this issue

Pages 1, 2 & 3 - Presentations from the Face to Face Conference

Page 4- Randy Grayson offers suggestions for increasing diversity.

## Reflections

### Is the N-word ever okay?

By Michael Hunt

*The following is a Presidential Campus Enrichment Grant recipient journal entry.*

Today I got into a very heated discussion with a kid in one of my classes about the use of the word Nigga in the Hip Hop Culture. Now immediately when he brought the subject up I was almost offended because I was unsure if he was asking me because I'm black or because he thought I had the answer. If I had known it had been just because I was black, I would have very quickly let him know that these days I listen to considerably more punk, rock, and ska music than I do Hip Hop. But I calmed myself down and tried to put those thoughts out of my mind as I gave him the almost text book answer of "it is a way of taking the power out of the word by changing its meaning and using it in ways that have multiple meanings." This obviously only served to confuse him because to anyone with a brain that doesn't really make sense and the idea of using the N word as a term of endearment is absolutely absurd.

I explained to him that though the N word was said to be used in the Hip Hop Culture to be a term of endearment that that wasn't necessarily the case. If, for instance, a white man were to go up to a large group of black males and say "what up my niggas?" They would not hesitate to beat him down. But if the same situation were to happen with a black man instead of a white man the results would undoubtedly not be the same. He asked me, "why is that?" I explained to him that in many people's minds it is perceived to be used in a racist manner when the word is used by a white male, which is a double standard, but that's the way that it works. The double standard is a very ignorant thing, which in this case is ironic because the very word

See N-word on page 4

## President tells Board of Vistors: Hate crimes cannot be tolerated

*Charles W. Steger, issued the following statement at the November 8, 2004 meeting of the Board of Visitors.*

I would like to take this opportunity to comment further on the recent hate crime perpetrated on our campus against the student NAACP chapter on September 26, 2004. This heinous act, and others like it--such as derogatory remarks written on bathroom walls--cannot be tolerated. Virginia Tech will not become a sanctuary for this despicable behavior. If our investigations result in the identification of the person or persons responsible for these acts, those persons will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

I approved the steps that were taken by the university in response to the NAACP incident. This includes the official written statement by three vice presidents in my stead, the immediate corrective and supportive actions taken by our Student Affairs Division, and the discussions about climate issues facilitated by several faculty members in their classes.

There are two realities impacting us at Virginia Tech and the larger community.

- First, when one group in our community is attacked, as in the case of the NAACP, we all become victims, because it is not only students of color who are the target, but our community as a whole.
- The second reality is that this violence--and that's what it

is--is more likely to increase if the community remains silent. So, join me in condemning these acts collectively and individually--indeed there is tremendous power when we all join together.

We must also take steps to come together as a community and ask ourselves--"Are we doing enough?" Are we doing enough to create a welcoming climate for all students...for all faculty and staff? I am confident that the university community shares my revulsion that acts like the NAACP hate crime still happen in this day and age. We have been investing considerable time, resources, and emotion in addressing climate, in improving underrepresented enrollment and access, and in increasing people of color among faculty and staff. Earlier today, The Academic Affairs Committee heard a report on our efforts.

Now, I am calling on my vice presidents and on others in their respective areas of responsibility to continue to exercise their authority to respond in a timely and thorough manner should there be any acts of this kind in the future. Further, I would expect the new Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity to be fully engaged in matters of institutional climate. However, I believe the most important thing we can do is to remain vigilant as a community to not tolerate these kinds of acts. Even one such act at our university is too many.

## Face to Face:

### Speakers urge vigilance to stop hate

Face to Face: Stop the Hate — Expressions of Hate at Virginia Tech & What We Can Do About It — This conference, open to the entire Virginia Tech community, focused on the examination of historical, political, and legal perspectives surrounding hate crimes and free speech; the creation of dialog between students, faculty, staff, and various cultural groups; and the exploration of collaborative approaches to fighting hate on campus. The main speaker was Ellington Graves, assistant professor of sociology.

The Face to Face Initiative was established in 2003 by a group of committed faculty, staff, and students at Virginia Tech who saw the need to create a space to foster cross-cultural dialogue and sharing to address specific needs and concerns. Organized by the UUSA Office of Leadership Development, the conference this year featured "voices" from many sectors of the university community, including three administrators whose remarks are reprinted in this issue of the Conductor: Tom Brown, dean of students; Patricia Hyer, associate provost; and Kurt Krause, vice president for business affairs.

#### Tom Brown

My charge is to share with you an overview of campus climate from the mid 90's to present day. I wish I could tell you that I can't remember many things that have made a negative impact on our campus climate over these 10 years -- quite frankly, I initially listed more instances than I could ever summarize for you in 10 to 15 minutes.

But first, what is it we mean by "campus climate?" Climate - we often comment on the Blacksburg weather and how if you don't like it, wait 10



Tom Brown

minutes and it will change. Not unlike campus climate -- huh? Things can happen so quickly and unexpectedly on campus to influence our climate. Most of us pay attention to the weather on a daily basis -- I wonder what would happen if we pay attention to our campus climate on a daily basis as well.

If you turn to your trusty Webster, you'll find that campus means the grounds of a university, college, or school. One definition of climate -- and not definitions specific to the weather -- is the prevailing environmental conditions characterizing a group. Put those together and we have "the prevailing conditions that characterize our university."

Campus Climate -- We have seen this term in the world of higher education for years, but occasionally, students will stop and ask -- climate? What do you mean by that? So, we need to be sure when we start dialog about campus climate that we make no assumptions about the meaning of the phrase.

To simplify even more -- campus climate -- the events, messages, symbols, core beliefs, feelings, and much more, which make this a welcoming environment -- or not -- for all.

Begin thinking about what makes any of us feel welcome -- or unwelcome -- on this campus? What makes you feel unwelcome? What have you seen that makes others feel unwelcome? I am going to share some examples of things that have made various members of our community feel un-welcomed, to say the least.

- A professor commented that if he had his way, all the girls would be rounded up and put in liberal arts -- where they belong. Another female student asked her faculty member for help -- the professor responded that he could teach the topic to a dog.

- An "ebonics loan" application was circulated widely over campus Email -- the loan application listed possible responses to questions such as:

Source of income: theft, relief, unemployment, and/or welfare

Place of birth: back alley, cotton patch, zoo

Employment history: evangelist, VD spreader, hubcap salesman, rapist

See Face to Face on page 2

## Respect will strengthen university community

*Kurt Krause at the Face to Face dialog*

My responsibility at Virginia Tech is to lead the areas that support the infrastructure of creativity, of knowledge, and of sharing. To do so requires a clean and safe environment and a well-trained and satisfied workforce. As a community participant, I want to share my views and suggestions as to how we can create a healthier climate. Fundamentally, these views are the same as the business values I have learned over time and hope to reinforce here at Virginia Tech.

There are many business values that I have had the opportunity to learn along the way. However, there is one truism, if you will, that has resonated with me more than others, "Success is a journey and is never final." Therefore, maintaining a commitment of continuous improvement is crucial. That being said, let me share a few of these values.

### Respect, Caring, and Trust

I suggest that we take genuine care of the people we work with and that in turn they will take care of others in our community. I stress this fundamentally more with management as it is key to delegating work and responsibility. Taking care is not only having a personal interest in your co-workers but also making sure that everyone has the tools to complete their task.

Secondly, we should always treat our staff, students, and faculty with respect. We all come from different backgrounds and cultures which provide us unique and sometimes dissimilar points of view. Only with respect will these attributes strengthen our community.

We should all strive to establish and promote a working environment of trust. This is not a one way street as everyone must participate in this value. To accomplish trust, it is essential that we look at caring and trust as fundamental building blocks.

### Integrity, Excellence, and Honesty

I suggest that we all conduct our daily affairs and interactions of business by employing our very best judgment. To do so means to seek the very best information from credible sources. By affectively scanning our environment we will have reliable data to employ our best judgment. Further, with this information we should strive to achieve the highest quality results in each task we undertake. As mentioned earlier, success is never final; recognizing that mediocrity is the consequence of complacency. I would also hope that when we do conduct transactions we do so with honesty.

From these business values, a concept of Savvy Service was created. Supporting this service strategy are four fundamental pillars that also have significant application to an improving climate of diversity. The four pillars are: Inviting Sense of Welcome, Personalized Service, Crisp Conduct and Language, and Random Acts of Kindness. While all four have their importance, I offer that we need to create an environment of welcome first and foremost. Taking the time to greet each other, to look each other in the eye, and to provide a sense of warmth and place are critical to our future atmosphere. By delivering random acts of kindness, we just may turn a hazardous attitude into one of positive intent. The greatest compliment to respecting each other is delivering the unexpected pleasure.

While each of the above mentioned characteristics are focused on the positive, one can also look at eliminating the negative. Avoiding downward spirals of interactions are critical to our future state. The body of literature suggests that we should steer clear of such concepts as criticism, contempt (the intent to insult or psychologically wound), defensiveness (which eliminates or damages our listening skills), and stonewalling (otherwise known as shutting down).

Clearly we have much work ahead to be successful and to create a more diversified community. I would offer that following some if not all of the concepts above will provide a course for improvement.

## Face to Face...

*Continued from page 1*

- In the days following 9/11, a group of students appearing to be from the Middle East were taunted and harassed as they walked along the drillfield with such comments as, "Go home," and "Why not blow up some buildings, so we don't have to go to class?"
- An African American student and her family checked in for summer orientation at Cassell Coliseum. After completing the check-in process, and seeing no other family that looked like them, they walked back to their car and went home.
- Our LGBTA students have been harassed constantly – flyers posted on campus which advertise their events are – more often than not – ripped down within hours. In one academic building on campus just this week, LGBTA flyers were removed from bulletin boards daily. Two weeks ago, a gay student faced hateful graffiti and urine on his res hall door.
- An application for a redneck driver's license made the rounds on Email. Some of the offensive questions included: Name: Billy Bob, Billy Joe, Billy Ray, Billy Sue, Billy Mae, or Billy Jack. Do you own or rent your mobile home? And, how far is your home from a paved road?
- And this Email: Technology for country folk – "log on" is to make a wood stove hotter, "download" is getting the farwood off the truck, and "modem" is what cha did to the hay fields.
- A student with a documented learning disability was told in front of her classmates that if she needed extra time on a test that Virginia Tech would be too tough for her and she should think about leaving.
- Deaf parents of a new student never heard a word during the opening session of summer orientation. Our staff "forgot" to use the captioned video that day.

And, we are familiar with other recent examples of disgusting racial messages on the NAACP office door, restroom walls, and another message in a dining hall restroom that said, "kill the f\_\_ing n\_\_s."

All of these things happened on or near this campus. I did not make this up and have not embellished any of the stories. What can each of us do when we witness anything that makes someone feel unwelcome? Think about the list I just shared. What could you do?

I often think more members of this community need to hear about these things that some people "don't think could happen at a place like Virginia Tech." More to the point, there are many who need to hear from the members of our community who have felt unwelcome. We have folks on campus who are good people and just don't know better when it comes to climate. If we take the time to explain and point things out – often we begin to feel some change.

We have much to think about – and, if you will – much to juggle, when it comes to improving campus climate. We are many people with many backgrounds and, of course, it is often hard to see other points of view when we have our own "stuff" to overcome. There is something about each of us that is different.

So, what is it we need to juggle? What influences climate that requires us to keep our eyes open, our minds open, and our ears open? How do we remain ever vigilant to keep climate indicators front and center?

Some backgrounds that make us different ...  
Race – Sexual Orientation – Religion – Speech and Accents – Disability – Gender – Socio Economics – Geographic Origin

You will find a bag of balloons on your table. Please remove the balloons, discard the bag, and each of you hold a balloon. Now, please stand and begin to keep the balloons afloat among your table members – much as if you are playing volleyball. If a balloon hits the table or floor, retrieve it quickly and put it back in play.

Try to keep the balloons representing race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, gender, and socio-economic background afloat.

Thank you and be seated.

Ponder a few questions while you hold a balloon – Was that easy?

Did you always know what others were thinking?

Did some balloons hit the table or floor more often?

Do you know which balloons apply to those at your table?

Are there some issues that we keep afloat on a more regular basis? Are there some that we let slide from time to time? Do some of us care more deeply about some balloons over others? Can we keep all factors that influence campus climate afloat?

I suggest we can with vigilance and dedication and by never taking our eye off the balloons.

Often, when we gather on campus to talk about these things, we are quick to lament that we are talking to the choir and this won't help. It does help to talk, explore ideas, and, if the choir leaves here today stronger, then this is time well spent. As a member of the "choir," I have come to realize over time, in this work, that all of us can become more informed and progress on the never-ending journey to our tolerance and acceptance of everyone. When the choir moves father along the journey, choir members can help others along the path to a more welcoming campus.

As people who care about this, our influence is more powerful than we think.

Now, you will find some straight pins on the table – pop your balloon and you'll find a small slip of paper. Take a moment and read the message to yourself. Now, please take out your wallets and place the slip of paper inside for safe-keeping and constant reference.

The people we tolerate the least – often have the most to teach us.

That is the message I leave with you. Take those words to heart and your contribution toward a positive campus climate for all – and your influence on others – will make a difference beyond belief.

## Save the date Diversity Summit

January 21, 2005, 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Owens Banquet Hall.

### About 'The Conductor'

*The Conductor* is produced twice during the fall and twice during the spring semesters by the Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Please submit articles to the editorial board at [multicultural@vt.edu](mailto:multicultural@vt.edu).

Back issues are online at <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/vtpubs/spectrum/>

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The next issue will be in February 2005.

# Many people have worked for diversity



Patricia Hyer

*Patricia Hyer at the Face to Face conference.*

The Face to Face planning committee asked Patricia Hyer to give a glimpse of the big picture of diversity at Virginia Tech and to provide a long-term perspective on change at this institution. She was also asked to share information about her role as associate provost.

I have responsibility for faculty personnel issues, policy, and governance, and I am very involved in a variety of diversity initiatives, and I have been for many years. I arrived in Blacksburg in 1978 – 26 years ago. Years before most of the undergraduates in this room were born. Many years before anyone had a personal computer, and many, many years before Email or instant messaging became constants in our lives. Years before the football team was any good or that the women's basketball team attracted any audience. Virginia Tech was a very different institution at that time.

I like to think that Virginia Tech is a very different institution in 2004, not only because the world around Virginia Tech has changed, but also because the faculty, staff, and students *WITHIN* the university community have helped create that change over the years. If I can give you anything this morning, I want to share with you my conviction that institutions can change, and they do change by the investments of time, energy, and commitment that persistent people make to achieve a vision of greater inclusiveness.

Although I was a college student during the 1960s, I was on a small college campus in Michigan where students were not politically active. My life as an activist began the day that we left the University of Michigan in 1974 and drove south to Old Dominion University, where my husband, with his newly minted Ph.D., had obtained a position as a faculty member in engineering. The 1970s was a period of enormous social change, yet it felt to me that I had not just moved south when we drove the U-Haul truck over the Mason-Dixon line, I had gone backwards 15 years. While I grew up in an era where women's options for a career consisted of teacher, librarian, nurse, secretary, or stewardess, I had always expected to work. In Tidewater in the 1970s, that was not the norm for women. I eventually found employment in my field at Old Dominion University. The mere act of seeking professional work was a statement of activism, and I soon became very involved in leading change on behalf of women students and faculty on that campus.

In 1978, we moved to Blacksburg, and confronted a whole different set of challenges. The legacy of Virginia Tech is all male, all white, and military, and this legacy profoundly influenced the campus culture at that time. There were only a handful of senior women faculty in the late 1970s, almost all of them in what was still called Home Economics. The first black tenure-track faculty members had just been hired. A number of new, junior women faculty members had been hired from more progressive institutions in the Midwest, bringing with them a willingness to risk confronting the administration about the lack of women faculty members, unequal pay, and the need to create courses in women's studies. Although I was actually a graduate student at the time, I was part of the leadership of this group when we met with male administrators and tried to introduce them to a great many things they had not heard about. This was during the early

1980s when the women's movement had been in full force for more than a decade, seemingly everywhere but here. Progress during this period was exceedingly slow. I should point out that none of the junior women faculty members from that era remained at Virginia Tech — some were denied tenure, some left in exasperation about the hostile climate. These were difficult and frustrating years.

A major opportunity for change came in 1987 when Jim McComas was hired as president. We finally had a president who could spell the word diversity, and who was committed to bringing change on these issues to Virginia Tech. That was only 17 years ago — your lifetime. Let me just remind you of what has happened over those 17 years through the hard work of many people, including students, who continued to press for changes they wanted to see:

- The earliest student support programs for black students were created and nurtured by Joyce Williams Green in the provost's office, who began about 1983 or so. These programs have grown and expanded many fold and now exist in a variety of forms, but in particular the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence, headed by Karen Sanders.

- Although Women's Studies courses were taught on a volunteer basis beginning in the early 1980s, the Women's Studies program received its first allocation of resources in the late 1980s. Similarly so for the Black Studies program, which is now called the African Studies Program. More recently we have added Appalachian Studies, Judaic Studies, and American Indian

Studies to broaden our academic coursework and scholarly inquiry into other areas previously ignored or neglected in the curriculum.

- The Black Cultural Center, the Multicultural Center, and the Women's Center are all units that are only about a decade old and have added immeasurably to the richness of campus life and to the support of women and students of color. Cranwell International Center is just a bit older. The Center, a gift to the university by the Cranwell family, opened in 1986 to serve international students and scholars.

The Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program started in 1993, thanks to the activism of several African American faculty members working with legislative friends they nurtured in the Black Caucus of the General Assembly. That program has grown tremendously and continues to provide scholarships and graduate assistantships for first generation and underrepresented groups. Last summer, 50 students from all over the country participated in the 10-week summer research internships under the mentorship of faculty on campus.

- The Center for the Enhancement of Engineering Diversity is a creature of the 1990s as well. Those programs, which serve primarily students of color and women majoring in engineering, have helped to increase the participation and graduation rates of these groups. Bev Watford is the long time head of the center and associate dean of engineering.

- In 1998, President Torgersen established the Office of the Vice President for Multicultural Affairs. This was a major commitment of real and symbolic resources to diversity issues, and Ben Dixon has given leadership to a number of initiatives since his arrival. To mention just one, he is the reason we have the Presidential Campus Enrichment Grants, a scholarship program designed to enhance diversity at Virginia Tech.

We have also written grants to expand our efforts. Miya Simpson manages a very successful McNair grant designed to increase the number of underrepresented and first generation, low income students to complete their baccalaureate degrees and go on to graduate school. Nini Smiley is managing a grant from the National Science

Foundation to increase the participation of underrepresented students in science, engineering, and mathematics. Ed Smith in the College of Agriculture is principal investigator on a grant from the National Institutes of Health designed to increase the number of underrepresented students pursuing graduate degrees in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. And there are more.

We have increased the number of African American, Asian, American Indian, and Hispanic faculty members. We have increased the number of women faculty members. We have increased the number and proportion of students of color; and the graduation rates are also better than they were a decade earlier.

These things did not just happen over the last 17 years. They are the results of committed faculty members, administrators, and students whose passion and commitment for change meant they were willing to take risks, devote their careers to making change happen, and looking for the ways to make it work. And there have been so many people involved.

But we have a long way to go to make this the inclusive community that all of us in this room dream of, a place where trust abides, where civility and respect abound, and where diversity is valued and celebrated.

I want to end my comments by sharing with you the strategies that Provost Mark McNamee, just shared with the Board of Visitors at their November 8 meeting. This material is available on the provost's web site at: [www.provost.vt.edu/web\\_pages/diversity.html](http://www.provost.vt.edu/web_pages/diversity.html).

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## I had not just moved south when we drove the U-Haul truck over the Mason-Dixon line, I had gone backwards 15 years.

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We are adopting the view that transformative change requires changes in policy, pedagogy, personnel, and programs — the four p's. The strategies that we are committed to pursue include some under

each of these major headings. We are so very encouraged by the board's extremely positive reaction to this presentation. The rector has asked for a resolution that the board can approve at their March meeting that will make clear to internal and external audiences their strong commitment to an inclusive community where diversity is valued and nurtured.

Initiatives already under way, include:

- The provost and president have committed more than \$1.3 million over the next two or three years to expand pipeline programs, add more resources for admissions so that they can reach more students from underrepresented groups, and increase scholarships available through the Presidential Campus Enrichment Grants.

- Significant budget increases have been approved for the Office of Multicultural Affairs. I am especially looking forward to a new emphasis on training for faculty, staff, and students that Dr. Dixon hopes to initiate next year.

The list of initiatives is broad, as has been our approach to diversity all along. It is important to address the many facets of diversity, those that contribute to the richness of the educational experience for all students and those that help us recruit and retain an excellent faculty of widely diverse backgrounds.

There is surely a place for students to help move the institution forward. There are opportunities for student voices to be heard and for student ideas to be pursued. There is room at the table for more people willing to work for change. And you should not be surprised that the administrator sitting next to you is an old activist at heart who shares your vision of a more diverse and inclusive community. Transformation is difficult work and sometimes you can only see progress by looking backwards to see where you have come from. As a participant and a witness to change at Virginia Tech over many years, I can assure you that we have become a more inclusive and diverse community than we were. It has not been a straightforward journey, nor is it likely to be so in the future. But our willingness to explore common ground is the best place to start in working toward a better, more inclusive campus community of the future.

# The commonwealth is our campus, says Grayson

By Richard Connors

This is the second of a two part article from an interview with Randy Grayson, founder and the director of MAOP, the Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program. He founded the program in 1992 and since that time this program has impacted the lives of more than 1,200 students. In part 1 of this article, I asked Prof. Grayson to tell us about the history of MAOP and what he thinks were his major accomplishments during his years as director of this very fine program.

In part 2, we get his views on an important issue facing Virginia Tech—achieving diversity. As director of the MAOP program, Prof. Grayson spent a good deal of time visiting minority institutions in an effort to get students at these institutions to apply to one of the many programs MAOP offers. He spent a good deal of time talking to his interactive off-campus partners. Consequently, I think he knows a good deal about how Tech is perceived in the minority community.

**Connors:** Randy, what do you think Virginia Tech has to do to diversify its student body and its faculty and staff?

**Grayson:** There are no easy answers because, as I said before, changing the face of Virginia Tech is more than just a matter of getting people from different ethnicities and colors on campus. In fact, I want to change the face of not only Virginia Tech, but also the face of the state of Virginia and this nation. As a scientific and technological society, we cannot afford to leave 40 percent of the population behind. This 40 percent of the population are the under represented, low income, first generation people who make up the economically stressed population of this country; and they include whites, blacks, blues, greens, and anybody else.

What does the university need to do? As I said before, the university needs to make well structured connections and interactions, true interactions, in and with the minority communities of this state. If that is done, then the university will get a true idea of the positive things that these communities have to offer and the problems that are there. What is the university for if not to be a problem solver? It is supposed to be a servant of the people. It should be a pipeline used to address the issues that we find in the various communities around the state. Virginia Tech has a big sign at the Roanoke Airport that says, "The commonwealth is our campus." Well, if the commonwealth is our campus, then where do you think those communities are located? They are located on the campus. If you are going to have this type of PR, then mean it or take it down.

Another thing that needs to be done is to hire more minority faculty, staff, and administrators who will become part of the hierarchy of this university. There is more to it than that. You have to hire individuals who are not like yourself. So many times in academia, I don't care what the race or ethnicity of the person is, they want to get a person that holds the same viewpoint as the members of the hiring committee who represents the department, college, or administration. If somebody comes that has a different thought, a different something than what they have had contact with, then the committee starts not to support that person. The committee members start to fear that individual. They want to reject that individual. They don't want somebody with, perhaps, a creative approach. They want to hire people that are "like us." It is like a tire spinning in the mud. You are going to have the same outcome regardless of the skin color of that person. So it is the psychological and mental thing that has to be overcome and not just the physical

appearance of the individual.

The third thing that needs to be done is that the university needs to become more proactive relative to promoting the academic achievements of students, in particular, minority students, at this university if we are going to overcome racial and ethnic stereotypes. This university has no problem in using the newspaper to publicize what the football or basketball team achieves or what bowl game they may go to or may not go to. If someone achieves something out there on the sports field, look how much space it takes up. Well, what about the students here, minorities or not, who do "great things." When we have had these negative things dealing with the sports scene and those individuals have in some cases been minority students, the newspapers and everybody else have no problem talking about that and getting a university spokesperson out there in front of the TV camera. Why not have the same individual come out and talk about students' and professors' academic achievements at this university? Again, it is a mind-set that needs to change. The fact that this university is in Southwest Virginia, I think, has very little to do with our diversity shortcomings. This excuse is used much too often.

Another thing, some people at this university say we can't change what we are as an institution. Oh yes, we can change what we are. How did we become what we are? We had to go through some changes. So don't tell me we can't change. Changes can take this university to where it should be as a total educational institution. This university should be more responsive to the needs of the entire state and to this nation, and not just to its own class and socio-economic culture. It is no secret that we have some individuals who are elitist and would like to see Virginia Tech move away from the land-grant tradition. Whether it be by design or default, the university seems to be moving in that direction based on statistics indicating it is becoming more and more difficult for disadvantaged students of all ethnic and racial groups to enter Virginia Tech.

I want to make it clear that I am aware of some recent initiatives by the university to increase diversity. These range from new investments by the provost's office, new emphasis upon recruiting strategies, and recent enhancements to the Multicultural Office. The big question is whether these initiatives can move from concepts on paper to reality. The recruiting, retaining, and graduation strategies of MAOP have a proven track record.

I believe some other important factors that will impact diversity are the following:

- Diversity depends upon leadership. People who get involved in this area for the wrong reasons can hurt programs for disadvantaged students, such as leaders whose selfish interest is only to further their careers based upon position, power, and control at the expense of the students in the programs. This is the root of many "turf" battles that have occurred here and at other universities.

- If Tech is going to live up to its motto, it needs to not only [increase numbers] but also embrace and reflect the diversity of opinions, races, and cultures in all of our courses. Inclusiveness needs to move from the rhetorical level to the reality level in our classrooms. How many textbooks and course materials in biology, chemistry, physics, education, and other courses across this campus embrace and reflect the contributions and perspectives of non-whites to these fields and this country? Where is this inter-cultural competence and appreciation of other cultures that is stated in the university administrative documents? The truth is that there is very little intellectual inclusiveness at this university. If we cannot develop an acceptance and appreciation of cultures in

our own country, how can it be developed by expanding to a global focus?

- What are Virginia Tech's "core values?" The Virginia Tech Strategic Plan has one set of values and the Diversity Strategic Plan has another set. What is very interesting is that the Virginia Tech plan does not even list "Diversity" as a core value! This implies confusion and a big difference in the real priorities of this university. You cannot or should not speak out of both sides of your mouth. This is a glaring omission on the Virginia Tech website and defeats all the rest of the rhetoric. I am sure potential minority applicants will pickup on this quickly as an indication of the "real" Virginia Tech.

- Last but not least, is the fact that Virginia Tech's outreach programs relative to serving minority communities and meeting their needs ... are not reflecting or responding to the problems and challenges of those communities. I have not seen Tech experts engaged with the non-profit community organizations that are struggling so hard to address the issues these communities face. What I have seen is a few Tech graduate students who run into these communities to gain information for their theses and then never go back. If you don't know and understand the communities, how are you going to comprehend the background, perspectives, concerns, and problems of their students so as to serve them better?

Grayson concluded, "Virginia Tech has a long way to go and a short time to get there. The university needs to start by first removing its own "leg chains." After all, it will not be the people you have at the university now that are going to take it into the "top 30." The university leadership must really understand and accept a multicultural mind-set in order to cease viewing and interpreting everything through their own dominant cultural and racial filters."

What can I say? Should you have any comments about the positions stated in this article, please send them to me at rconnors@vt.edu. Please remember that I am retired. Hence it may take me some time to get back to you.

## N-word...

*Continued from page 1*

itself was used originally as term that stood for ignorance.

He could tell by this point that I was spouting off the thoughts and ideas of other people, so he asked me what I thought about the whole thing. I explained very simply that I felt that the word would be better left dead and buried. It is important to remember the past but true progress can not be made if you continue to hold that shadow of the past as a dead weight on your back. I also don't agree with trying to change the meaning of the N word, because if it is said to me by anyone it still has the same meaning it did over 100 years ago and will only show me their ignorance in its use. So that being said anyone can be a Nigger in my mind, simply because of the ignorance that is inherently implied by the word.

Will I ever understand such an ugly word and why we as black people insist on keeping it around? I thought I did at one time understand the importance of its continued use, but this too has become foolish to me. I must say that to talk it through with one of my classmates was one of the most enlightening experiences I've had with the word. I got to get inside of my own head and into his a little bit. I realized that though there seemed to be miles in between us culturally that we still had the same thoughts on the issue and similar questions. I am very thankful for this encounter and the effects that it has had on me.