

November 3, 2006

VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY, AND EFFECTIVENESS

SPANISH FOR A GREEN INDUSTRY

by Michael Sutphin



Photos provided by Josh Armstrong

Barbara Kraft, a Spanish instructor, had no idea what to expect when Virginia Tech's Department of Horticulture contacted her. Now, five years later, Kraft has made ex nihilo a curriculum like no other in the nation that combines horticulture with an innovative lesson plan on language, culture, and politics.

Industry officials requested the course, Spanish for the Green Industry, after they noticed recent horticulture graduates were unprepared to work side-by-side in a predominantly Spanish-speaking workforce. Over the years, the course has evolved from a one-credit elective to a three-credit requirement for all horticulture undergraduates.

"As far as I know, the class is the first of its kind in the country," Kraft says.

College administrators in Georgia, Michi-

gan, and Pennsylvania have contacted Kraft about using Spanish for the Green Industry as a template for similar classes at their schools. Because foreign language departments already exist in most large universities, many of these schools have instructors qualified to teach the course's backbone: the Spanish language.

"This is a very targeted language class," Kraft says. "We learn basic grammar, but most of the class is conversation-based with the vocabulary targeted specifically for the green industry."

She teaches in a classroom adjacent to Virginia Tech's greenhouses, occasionally bringing shovels, wheelbarrows, and gardening tools to her lectures so that students can visualize words as they learn them. Even though each of the three class sections—which Kraft caps at 16 students each to allow for more student-teacher interaction and smaller discussions—are identical in content, individual students have different levels of familiarity with Spanish.

"I have students from zero language experience to fluency," says Kraft, who not only speaks fluent Spanish but has also lived in Mexico and Venezuela.

To teach the material she wants to cover in 15 weeks, Kraft replaces typical vocabulary on furniture, household items, and anatomy with lessons on the workplace, health and safety, and gardening equipment.

But Kraft says the teaching is not just one-way. "I learn so much from my students," she says.

Before developing the course, Kraft had no prior background in horticulture, but she knew from conversations with green industry officials the importance of teaching the Spanish language and cultural awareness.

"About 85 to 95 percent of the labor force in the nursery and landscaping industries is Spanish speaking," says Greg Miller, who manages Willow Spring Tree Farms in Montgomery County, Va.

Two decades ago, workers from Puerto Rico began filling jobs in the United States that Americans left unoccupied. Academic programs such as the one started at Virginia Tech, Miller says, are filling the cultural gap between horticulturists and the Latino community.

But horticulture students are not the only ones who might benefit from such a class.

Green Industry, page 2

DIVERSITY: NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT



Dixon at World Ageing and Generations Congress, Switzerland. Photo by Augustin Saleem

In August 2006, Dr. Benjamin Dixon, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs formally announced that he would retire on December 31, 2006. His impending retirement marks the end of his eight-year tenure that began in fall 1998. Here are his responses to some questions posed to him.

What attracted you to Virginia Tech?

Frankly, it was the very creative and candid job ad in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that initially attracted my attention. I was intrigued with the fact that a university was willing to publicly state both its shortcomings and its aspirations so candidly.

How has Virginia Tech changed since you arrived in Fall 1998?

Fundamentally, I think the change has been that the campus community has become less uptight about discussing diversity issues openly, especially with regard to climate. I was amazed when I first got here how difficult it was to organize a forum where differing views about race, gender, religion, etc. could be shared.

March 2003 is seen by some as a turning point for the university. As you reflect back on the actions of the Board and the subsequent protests and retraction of the Boards' decisions, what did we learn as an institution?

Indeed, there were many lessons learned, both personal and institutional. I'm hoping that the university learned, once and for all, that creating and sustaining diverse communities is hard work. I also hope we learned that silence, inaction, or wait-and-see-if-it-will-go-away responses to climate issues are usually ineffective. When the university's core values are challenged like they were in 2003, responding this way is a sure way to make the situation worse.

Finally, I hope we learned that as long as we

Diversity, page 3

DIVERSITY

SPOTLIGHT STORY

Journey toward Excellence, Equity, and Effectiveness

ARTIST'S RESIDENCY TO CULMINATE WITH REVELATIONS



Carrie Nobel Kline will serve as an artist-in-residence at Virginia Tech for four days, culminating with a staged reading on Friday, Dec. 1 at 7:00 p.m. in Torgersen 3100.

Revelations was written and produced by folklorist Carrie Nobel Kline, Spring 2001 Rockefeller Fellowship recipient and Scholar in Residence at the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia.

The focus of Kline's research is on resiliency, especially Appalachian resiliency. "Revelations focuses on people's paths to hard won self-acceptance," said Kline, "and their journeys toward a fuller sense of humanity."

In Revelations, Kline interweaves oral testimonials of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender West Virginians. She illuminates an Appalachian determination in a way that is worthy of respect and admiration. "As the characters reveal their paths toward self-acceptance," says Kline, "audience members will glean a fresh perspective on concepts of gender from people who have

Revelations is a theatrical presentation about Appalachian resiliency in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Thanks to campus-wide support, the playwright, broadened their own views through complex intellectual and spiritual journeys."

Presented by the LGBT Faculty-Staff Caucus, Revelations is sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Office of Equal Opportunity, the Office of the Provost, the Department of Theatre Arts, the Women's Center, the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, the Department of Music, and Appalachian Studies. It was also selected for a Women and Minority Artists and Scholars Lecture Series grant.

"I consider Revelations as this year's sequel to Gay in Appalachia: A Celebration, which featured Virginia Tech's own Carol Burch-Brown and Jeff Mann last year," said Jean Elliott, co-chair of the LGBT Caucus. "That was a widely popular event that filled Torgersen Museum. This year, I am very happy with the responsiveness and resources provided by various offices of the University's administration. In addition, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences continues to be a champion of social justice, diversity and multicultural issues."

The production includes a variety of characters from their teens to their 70s. Among them are an elderly gay black man, a chemical worker who had a sex change operation, and a cross dresser. This hour-long artistic portrayal also includes live music.

According to an NPR interview, Kline "saw common threads in people's stories. Most talked about being raised to be stubborn and independent as well as deeply religious and attached to the land. She weaves the stories into a play where the characters, whose names have been changed, talk to each other and the audience. They share memories of discovering they were different, dealing with family and community, and eventually

accepting themselves."

Jeff Mann, assistant professor of creative writing, has seen Revelations and highly recommends it. "Carrie Kline has collected a wonderfully memorable batch of true stories," said Mann. "Poignant, painful, thought-provoking, and funny, Revelations gives us a clear sense of the self-reliance and strength that LGBT Appalachians have needed to survive."

With Michael Kline, Carrie Nobel Kline is co-owner of Talking Across the Lines, LLC, a folklife documentation and audio production company (www.folktalk.org). Revelations has played in several venues, including Huntington (WV), Charleston (WV) and St. Mary's (MD).

In addition to holding auditions and fine-tuning the production, both Klines are available to speak in history, sociology, English, theater, communication, women's studies and/or psychology classes on issues of gender, Appalachian Studies, oral history and folklore.

The reading performance and celebration is scheduled for Dec. 1, the final day in AIDS Awareness Week. The performance will be followed by a reception in the Torgersen Museum. The LGBTA student organization's Club Red Ribbon will cap off of the evening in the Commonwealth Ballroom. Club Red Ribbon brings the urban club scene to Blacksburg, complete with DJ and laser lights.

Readers needed!

No lines need to be memorized, as this is a staged reading. Auditions will be held on Monday, Nov. 27 from 7-9 p.m. in Torgersen 1060. Both the production and auditions are free and open to the public. Practices will be held Tues-Thurs (6:30-9:30 p.m.) that week.

Green Industry continues

Kraft has already begun collaborating with Virginia Tech's Sloan Foundation Forest Industries Center to develop a similar training program for forestry employers.

A majority of Kraft's students have previously worked in the green industry, whether from a family business or an internship. They already know that post-college life may involve working 10 hours a day with the Latino community, she says, and many of



them understand the relevancy of Spanish for the Green Industry before attending the first class.

"Spanish for the Green Industry has helped me by expanding my 'farm' vocabulary, my skills to think and translate quickly, and my views on migrant culture," says Theresa Long, a junior agriculture sciences major.

Long lives and works on a vegetable farm that employs a Spanish-speaking labor force. She says the class provided her with skills she will use well after graduation.

"Although I am not a horticulture major, I am pleased that the university requires Spanish for the Green Industry in the horticulture department because in today's horticulture industry, as well as the future of horticulture, it is and will be a necessity," Long says.

Kraft asks her students to read *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* by Luis Alberto Urrea. The book explores different perspectives on illegal immigration by charting the journey of 26 unemployed Mexicans who cross the Ari-

zona border in hopes of finding a better life in the North. Less than half of them survived the actual event.

"It gives you a story behind a heavy issue," Kraft explains.

Discussions about legal and illegal immigration can replace stereotypes, myths, and exaggerations with actual facts and perspectives on a critical issue. In one lesson, Kraft brings campaign posters mentioning immigration from last year's gubernatorial race to show how it affects Virginians. She says students in her class cut across the political spectrum, from open border advocates to those wanting a moratorium on immigration.

"We have some intense discussions in the class," she says. "This class has a little bit of everything in it."

Because Spanish for the Green Industry depends on shifting demographics, Kraft says the course is always adaptable and open to change. For example, in recent years the Czech community has burgeoned into Virginia's green industry.

compartmentalize our diversity strategy and initiatives we are going to get compartmentalized results. There are a lot of best practices in diversity recruitment, retention, training, etc. being piloted on this campus. However, these programs are under-resourced and remain so small in scope that their impact across the university is almost unnoticed.

There have been other challenges over the years. What advice would you give others about ways to manage these challenges? How did you manage them?

I have often said, "Diversity is not a spectator sport." When the peace and productivity of our community are threatened by intentional acts of bias and intolerance, none of us can afford to sit in the stands waiting to see how things turn out. Each and every one of us, must get in the game. That's what happened in 2003, when the students, faculty and staff made it clear that their campus was going to be inclusive and tolerant of the cultural differences that enrich the experiences of all.

Managing or optimizing diversity, while effectively celebrating our commonalities can be a challenge, but not impossible to achieve. My strategy for meeting the institutional challenges of my job includes three simple principles: Engage in partnerships as often as possible to get things done; never identify a problem without offering a viable solution; and, invest heavily in people, because ultimately they are the ones who will embrace change and move the institution forward.

What do you believe has been your greatest accomplishment(s) in the role of Vice President?

This is really hard to determine, because so much of what we have done in OMA has been done

through partnerships and collaborations with other university units and external institutions. Personally, I believe my greatest accomplishment has been to provide leadership to create some of the infrastructure needed to support the university's efforts to build a diverse and inclusive higher education community. The development

"None of us can afford to sit in the stands waiting to see how things turn out"

and establishment of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, the Multicultural Fellows, three publications on diversity activities and the people involved, a diversity research initiative, an emerging education and training program, the Diversity Strategic Plan, the SafeWatch program, and the Principles of Community are examples of the institutionalized activities and programs created, facilitated, or managed by the office.

What is one thing that you would have liked to have accomplished before your retirement?

The one thing I wish I could have done a better job on is laying the foundation for the university to move to its next level of maturity as a committed, competent, and cutting-edge higher education institution in matters of diversity. I know that we have the talent to be more than competitive in the area of diversity education, training, and research. It's clear to me that we have the capabilities to be a leader, both domestically and globally. However, it appears that VT's highly touted entrepreneurial spirit is less evident when it comes to investing resources and energy to achieve that end.

What will be your fondest memory of your time here at Virginia Tech?

This is an easy one to answer. The people. It's the personal and professional relationships I cherish the most. I have been privileged to informally mentor undergraduates as they grappled with their understanding of diversity and multiculturalism, and I have encouraged graduate students as they struggled through the sometimes frustrating process to obtain their degrees. As a result, I have developed several meaningful relationships with students that have survived graduation or the student's departure from the university.

I also have a number of professional relationships that I know will continue into my retirement. Virginia Tech has an amazing number of talented and enterprising individuals with whom I feel proud to have worked. It's not surprising that the ones I feel closest to are those who share my passion for social justice, equity, and equal opportunity.

As you prepare for your retirement, what are you most looking forward to?

Strapping on my tool belt and getting to my wife Carolyn's "Honey-Do" list of chores. (Not really!) More sleep, traveling, reading, etc., and other things retirees say they do. Actually, I'm looking forward to doing some writing, both musical compositions and diversity-related articles. I will probably continue some of my speaking and training activities. Also, I would like to spend some time consulting with individuals and organizations that might benefit from my experience in education and organizational and community development, especially as it relates to diversity and inclusion.

SECOND ANNUAL MLK CELEBRATION

ABOUT 'THE CONDUCTOR'

The Conductor is produced three times per year 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. Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor

Editorial Board

Reza Barkhi, 231-5869, reza@vt.edu
 Benjamin Dixon, 231-1820, bdixon@vt.edu
 Jean Elliott, 231-5915, elliottj@vt.edu
 Ray Plaza, 231-7289, rp25@vt.edu
 Judith Snoke, 231-6963, eslsnake@vt.edu
 Ray Williams, 231-8584, cwilliam@vt.edu

Production

Roxanna Link, Coordinator of Communications, Office of Multicultural Affairs, 231-2610, roxanna@vt.edu

The second annual Virginia Tech MLK Celebration will take place from January 14 - 19, 2007. It will consist of a week-long series of events designed to honor the legacy of Dr. King. Since 2006, no classes are held on the MLK Holiday, and the first day of classes begins on Tuesday, January 16th.

We invite and encourage you to participate in any or all of the activities that are a part of the celebration. While classes don't begin until Tuesday, we ask that you talk to your students and colleagues about coming back in time to participate in the Monday activities.

While details for the celebration are still being finalized, we can share the following snapshot of events:

- The annual NAACP Kickoff Event for MLK will happen on Sunday, January 14th. In addition, we are also working together on the 2nd annual Poster and Essay contest for the local public schools.
- The Community Breakfast will be held on Monday, January 15th from 8-10am in the Commonwealth Ballroom. It will feature a speech by Mr. John Stokes, one of the organizers of the 1951 high-school student walk-out in Prince Edward County, Va.
- A variety of community service opportunities will be organized by the Service Learning Center. Information about these projects will be available

before the end of the semester so that groups can sign-up to participate.

- MLK Kickoff Event will take place on Monday, January 15th at the Burruss Hall Auditorium at 7pm. This event is a joint effort with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. The highlight of the event will be the keynote speaker. Details surrounding the speaker are still being finalized, and will be revealed before the end of the semester.
- MLK Cultural Literary Event will take place on Wednesday, January 17th at 7pm in Burruss Hall Auditorium. The highlight of the event will feature our own Nikki Giovanni and Dr. Lerone Bennett.
- January 19, 2007 marks the ten year anniversary of the Diversity Summit. Specific times and registration information will be available within the next few weeks.

This is a valuable opportunity for the university and local community to engage in the conversation surrounding diversity, inclusion and community. Our hope is that this 10th annual summit is the largest ever. The Diversity Summit is coordinated by the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Ray Plaza, Project Specialist for Diversity Initiatives at 231-7289 or rp25@vt.edu.

ABOUT MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMS

by Ray Williams

The mission of Multicultural Programs and Services is to promote the academic, personal, and social success of all students, particularly those from under-represented and historically marginalized populations. Creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange as a path to cultural competency leads to a valued-added education. Cultural competency is no longer a “nice to have” among today’s leadership. As a land grant institution with a leadership commitment, Virginia Tech has articulated the need to better educate those who cross its threshold on the way to assuming leadership positions.

MPS seeks to accomplish its mission through a combination of programs and services that promote:

Cultural Awareness

Coordinating annual cultural celebrations as a means of community celebration and exposure to a variety of ethnic communities.

Multicultural Education

Partnering with campus and community groups to create co-curricular opportunities that help expand cultural knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Retention

Supporting the retention of students through advocacy, mentoring programs, and support groups.

Leadership Development

Promoting student leadership development through organization advising and training.

Community Building

Maintaining the Cultural Centers as safe and welcoming spaces for its constituent groups and all members of the Virginia Tech community.

A unit in the Division of Student Affairs, Multicultural Programs and Services began in 2005 – 2006. The purpose was to centralize many of the services and activities in support of diversity and under-represented students at Virginia Tech. MPS organized the university’s

heritage month celebrations and several student support services. In the spring of 2006, renovations began in Squires Student Center to give MPS a home and to raise the level of awareness of the value that the University places on diversity-related education.



MPS fall leadership training

The fall of 2006-2007 introduces the newly constructed office of Multicultural Programs and Services and the renovated Multicultural Center. The office suite includes conference space, a light duty kitchen, workroom, and office space for five. Adjoining the office is the Multicultural Center with flexible meeting and lounge space and a computer workroom open to students. Select publications and recorded media on cultural issues are available in both the Multicultural and the Black Cultural Centers. Demand for these venues remains high with an average of thirty-four hours of meeting time scheduled per week (where possible meetings are limited to the afternoon and evening hours to preserve the spaces as student lounges).

From these locations, many of the student-led efforts to generate attention to issues of building community, inclusive decision-making, and equity are borne. As the advising base for the Latino Association of Student Organizations, the Black Student Alliance, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Alliance, the Black Organizations Council, and the Asian American Student Union, MPS and the Cultural Centers create fertile ground for cross-cultural

exchange. Also housed in the Multicultural Center workspaces are Caribso (the Caribbean student organization), Hillel (the Jewish student organization), and ASA (African Student Association). Through the advising of assistant directors, Mary Grace Campos and Rosa Jones, much of the student programming through MPS represents co-sponsorships between these groups and other campus organizations like the Virginia Tech Union. Hillel and ASA are currently working together in support of the Darfur crisis, AASU and the BSA co-sponsored a musical concert last spring, and BSA and LGBTQA co-sponsor Aids Awareness Week activities. Individual students are also proposing projects to be developed through MPS such as a Latino studies institute and a Middle East issues forum. Central to the goals of MPS is seeking opportunities to promote collaboration across historical divides.

Building alliances across differences has taken on new forms during this second year of MPS’s existence. From the Each One Reach One Program – a volunteer peer mentoring program supported by African American upperclassmen for incoming African American students to the faculty-student interaction series – Finding My Path and the Brown Bag Seminars, open and lively discussions about college life, careers, and intellectual passions help to explain how individual perspectives are generated and sustained. Dialogue Across Differences will be a new series of moderated, small group discussions around differences and how to harness the power of diversity. The participants will be selected to represent a cross-section of the broader University community.

MPS is but one strategy among many to keep Virginia Tech relevant in the face of changing clientele and increasingly complex human interactions. However, it is a key strategy and tool that is open to involvement from all levels of the institution. Providing systems like MPS are crucial to our institutional goal of service and the holistically educated mind.