



fye.vt.edu

So what makes a first-year program successful?

"Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."
- Mark Twain

Greetings FYE@VT Community of Practice!

In the guide *Challenging & Supporting The First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving The First-year of College* by Upcraft, Gardner and Barefoot, the authors suggest that first-year success can be measured by a student's progress towards academic and intellectual competence, establishing interpersonal relationships, exploring identity, deciding on a career path, maintaining personal wellness, contributing to the community, and dealing with diversity. Because this definition of success touches on so many different aspects of a student's life, first-year experience programs are designed to not only introduce students to the academic world of higher education, but also the community and environment where they will spend their next four (or more) years.

FYE@VT serves as the launch pad for student success in their chosen field of study. Students are challenged to expand their boundaries and engage all that Virginia Tech has to offer.

In addition to taking a strong FYE@VT course, my hope for our students during the first-year is that they:

- stay curious and try new things,
- engage with faculty outside of the classroom and seek mentoring relationships,
- engage their residential community as they get to know Blacksburg and beyond,
- learn to have difficult conversations with others who have different viewpoints,
- explore civic/political engagement and be a part of social change, and
- better understand themselves and others.

Again, thank you all for the work you do in support of our students!

Rex Waters | Associate Director of Undergraduate Academic Programs

In this edition:

- **What's New with FYE?** | p. 2
- **CAMP FYE 2020** | p. 2
- **FYE Council 2019-2020** | p. 2
- **UAA Student Profiles** | p. 3
- **Award Nominations** | p. 4
- **Course Spotlight** | p. 5
- **Peer Mentor Training** | p. 6
- **Save the Dates** | p. 6

Join us!

CAMP FYE

January 15, 2020
Torgersen Hall

More information soon!

> Overview

What's new with FYE@VT?

This semester, the Office of First-Year Experiences has been hard at work updating the main FYE website with information about FYE@VT. Learn more at <https://fye.vt.edu/>.

Read about transfer students in VT News!

In "Transfer students find support and build community" transfers talk about their transition to Virginia Tech. The article is currently linked on the FYE@VT home page.



Students taking the new transfer-dedicated course UNIV 2984: Unleash Your Hokie Potential pose together for a picture during their class retreat early in the fall semester

Share your scholarly work with the FYE Community.

Calling all FYE@VT faculty members! Are you interested in sharing your work with the larger FYE community? Send conference presentations, articles, photos, and/or samples of student work our way! Submit work to Rexford Waters (watersr@vt.edu) and Rachel Corell (rcorell@vt.edu).

> FYE Council

FYE@VT Council Members 2019 - 2020

Formed in 2019, the FYE@VT Council is dedicated to supporting the FYE faculty community of practice and helping the Office of First-Year Experiences provide professional development opportunities.

Herbert Bruce, Associate Director, University Studies

Taran Cardone, Director, Learning Partnerships

Catherine Cotrupi, Assistant Director for Campus & Community Engagement, VT Engage

Kirsten Dean, High-Impact Practices Librarian, University Libraries

Renee Eaton, Undergraduate Program Director, Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

Joan Hawsey, Administrative Assistant to Associate Vice Provost Jill Sible, Undergraduate Education

Buddy Howell, Advanced Instructor, Communication

Ryan Nasser, Student Program Assistant for Peer Mentoring, Undergraduate Education

Rob Jacks, Director of Academic Advising, College of Architecture and Urban Studies

Mara Knott, Academic Programs Manager, Engineering Education

Alma Robinson, Instructor/Teacher-in-Residence, Physics

Stephen Skripak, Professor of Practice, Pamplin College of Business Department of Management

Tiffany Shoop, Associate Director for Special Programs, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Dean Stauffer, Professor & Associate Department Head for Undergraduate Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Donna Cassell Ratcliffe, Director, Career and Professional Development

Rex Waters, Associate Director, Undergraduate Academic Programs

CAMP FYE 2020 IS JANUARY 15

- **Celebrate 10 years of FYE@VT**

Join us for a day of FYE professional development.

- **Learn more about the essential practices**

Hear how colleagues implement these best practices in class.

- **Understand the role of identity**

Discover ways to improve accessibility, gender inclusion, etc.

- **Explore the importance of peer mentors**

Engage methods and strategies for using peer mentoring.

Schedule a class visit for next spring.

FYE@VT is still developing the course showcase to feature every FYE class offered at Virginia Tech. This means visiting classes to take pictures of work in action, collecting student perspectives to share, and including whatever resources you think might be useful on your course page.

Contact Abby Mercatoris-Morrison (alouise1@vt.edu) to set up class visits for the spring semester. Please include the course name, meeting days/times, location, ideal visit dates, and a brief lesson overview in your request.

Help us tell the 10-year story of FYE @ VT.

With FYE@VT now in its tenth year, the Office of First-Year Experiences is working to tell the story of a decade of FYE courses. We welcome your insights and stories about your time teaching these courses. We're looking for reflections on teaching, experiences with peer mentoring and its place in your FYE, and stories about your role within the larger FYE@VT community. More information will be sent out soon!

> Student Highlights

UAA Student Support Profiles

The Office of First-Year Experiences is committed to reaching out to first-year students as they transition to life at Virginia Tech. In addition to supporting the different FYE courses across majors and disciplines, this includes targeted communication efforts and training for peer mentoring programs.

These projects could not be completed without the help of FYE's student program assistants.

This fall, FYE@VT is pleased to welcome back both Abby Mercatoris-Morrison and Ryan Nasser as student program assistants for communications and peer mentoring, respectively.

Abby is a senior majoring in business marketing with minors in both art history and visual arts and society. She is also an accelerated graduate student pursuing a masters in material culture and public humanities.

Ryan is a senior double-majoring in clinical neuroscience and creative writing. He has previously been a peer mentor for the Orion Living-Learning Community.

In addition, the Office of FYE would like to highlight several students who are new to supporting some of the



Ryan Nasser (panelist seated far right) participates on a panel about peer mentoring during the peer mentor training in August

departments under the Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA) unit, which includes the First-Year Experiences, Pathways General Education, and Undergraduate Research.

Those students are graduate student Mengyun Li, as well as undergraduate students Alyssa Duong, Caitlin Lambert, and Nala Miller.

Alyssa is doing videography for the broader UAA unit. Caitlin is assisting with administrative and program support needs for FYE@VT, and Nala is assisting with data collection in support of FYE@VT.



Mengyun Li is a PhD student studying educational evaluation. In addition to working as a graduate assistant for the Office of Undergraduate Education, she is also conducting research within her Ph.D. program. She specializes in data and program evaluation in support for the FYE@VT program as well as Pathways General Education.



Alyssa Duong is a junior majoring in marketing management with a minor in political science. She plans to pursue a career in the creative ad agency business. Through various mediums such as photography, videography, dance, and music, Alyssa is passionate about connecting the world using visual storytelling and she looks forward to serving as a student program assistant and videographer for Undergraduate Academic Affairs where she can share her passion for videography with other students.



Caitlin Lambert is a senior pursuing a bachelor's degree in international public policy as well as minors in philosophy, politics, and economics and French for business. She is excited to build on this passion for enabling others for success using her background in knowledge management, project management, and content creation. Caitlin looks forward to supporting the rest of the FYE@VT team in Undergraduate Academic Affairs.



Nala Miller is a sophomore majoring in computational modeling and data analytics (CMDA). She is also a peer mentor for first-year students majoring in CMDA and loves to help them learn ways that they can be successful in college. She is excited to work as a student program assistant and collect data about First-Year Experiences at Virginia Tech to ensure that FYE courses are fully preparing first-year students for the rest of their college careers.

> Excellence

Award Nominations

FYE@VT is pleased to feature two Virginia Tech instructors and one student who have been nominated for awards given by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Catherine Cotrupi, instructor of SPIA 1024: Community Service Learning, has been nominated for the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award. This award is given to educators involved in high-impact practices for first-year student learning and success.

Stephen Skripak, instructor of MGT 1104: Foundations of Business, has been nominated for the Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars Award. This award recognizes an instructor who has achieved great success in inspiring learning, development, and success in first-year seminars.

In addition, Ryan Nasser, the student program assistant for peer mentoring in the Office of First-Year Experiences, has been nominated for the Jordan Smith Undergraduate Student Fellowship, which provides a student with a chance to attend the annual NRC FYE conference.



CATHERINE COTRUPI
*Outstanding
First-Year Advocate*

Catherine has worked for Virginia Tech for six years, first as LGBTQ Coordinator from 2011-2013 and now as an Assistant Director for Campus & Community Engagement with VT Engage. As a part-time PhD student in the Higher Education program, her academic interests are coupled with her professional role and include the tensions between focusing on student learning and development and community-identified need.

She has taught this course for 5 semesters, 3 those with the course being a FYE, and has engaged over 100 students in the course topics by challenging their ideologies around volunteerism and instead encouraging them towards the goals of community-identified need, root causes and social change, and collective impact. She leads communication across boundaries and roles with internal and external stakeholders to identify opportunities for engagement with a variety of partners in the New River Valley in support of the advancement of community initiatives, student learning, and faculty/staff engagement.



STEPHEN SKRIPAK
*Excellence in Teaching
First-Year Seminars*

Stephen Skripak is currently Professor of Practice in the Department of Management. He is in his 15th year at the university and was previously Associate Dean for Graduate Programs and MBA Director. While at Virginia Tech, he has taught a range of courses including Global Business Strategy and Ethical Leadership at the MBA level, and undergraduate courses including Foundations of Business, Management Consulting, Business Strategy, and Management Theory and Leadership Practice.

He is the designer of the first-year experience course for the Pamplin College of Business, which has now become a requirement for all business majors. He has been involved with FYE since 2015. The FYE course is demanding for students and has a blend of concepts, skills, case study/analysis, and a real business project, providing an experiential learning experience to over 1,000 students a year.



RYAN NASSER
*Jordan Smith
Undergraduate Student
Fellowship*

Ryan is a senior double-majoring in Clinical Neuroscience and Creative Writing. As he works toward his degree and moves forward in life, he aspires to become both a writer and a practicing physician.

He is eager to be a part of the continued development of programs such as FYE@VT, Undergraduate Research, and Pathways – programs that serve to connect undergraduate students to the multitude of high-impact experiences that Virginia Tech has to offer. Ryan also hopes to promote student engagement so that other undergraduate students will also leave Virginia Tech with fond memories and pride in all that they have accomplished.

> Course Spotlight

Service learning FYE class engages in community environmental efforts



SPIA 1024 students assist with riverside cleanup effort at Peak Creek in Pulaski

As Zaineb Almarzooq, a first-year student in General Engineering, explains it, the service learning component of SPIA 1024: Community Service Learning is more than a required project; it is an opportunity for hands-on engaged learning outside the classroom that is essential for helping students make connections to what they're learning in class.

"Since we have been talking about the creek and the issues that the Pulaski community is facing, getting more educated about the matter was our first step in this journey," said Almarzooq. **"And seeing everything in real life, experiencing the town, its people, and the river was the best way to get everything in perspective and further understand the seriousness of the situation."**



SPIA 1024 students assist with riverside cleanup effort at Peak Creek in Pulaski

Austin Little, a first-year student in University Studies, shared a similar sentiment. **"Not only did we get the satisfaction of helping a local community with their pollution problem, but we also got to learn a lot about the history of their town,"** said Little.

The service learning projects for the course included two

visits to Pulaski. Here, students assisted the Friends of Peak Creek (FOPC) with two different cleanup efforts, including trash pickup and tree planting. FOPC, a community-based, all volunteer organization, works to protect and preserve the Peak Creek area, a vital historical part of the town of Pulaski.

The class introduces community engagement focused on the development of civic identity. "We consider the communities that the students are a part of (such as geographic or cultural), their community engagement and volunteerism efforts, the downsides of only volunteering, and how to direct time and attention towards greater efforts for social change," said instructor Catherine Cotrupi, Assistant Director for Campus & Community Engagement for VT Engage.



Instructor Catherine Cotrupi helps clean up during class service learning experience

Lindsey Nolen, a first-year student in University Studies, appreciated the opportunity to participate in a project that had a tangible impact. **"We were able to make a small but effective change in this issue,"** said Nolen.

Open to students from all majors, the course is geared toward students minoring in Community Systems & Engagement or in the SERVE Living-Learning Community through VT Engage.



SPIA 1024 students with the Friends of Peak Creek volunteers

> Peer Mentoring

Peer mentor training seminars a success



Students attending the first peer mentor training in April

In a survey sent out by the FYE@VT to peer mentors in Fall of 2018, peer mentors expressed interest in a training workshop to provide them with actionable information, practical skills, and strategies to better prepare them for their mentorship role.



Students at the August peer mentor training discuss diversity and inclusion in small groups during a conversation led by Michelle Deramo

The following spring, the FYE@VT piloted a peer mentor training seminar to help facilitate peer mentor development. The first two trainings were in April 2019, and the third was in August 2019. Over the course of four sessions, 241 peer mentors attended the training.

“When I served as a Peer Mentor, there was no university-wide initiative to prepare students like me to serve in a mentorship capacity. I wish this opportunity had been available when I was a peer mentor because I think it really would have eased my learning curve,” said Ryan Nassar, now a student program assistant for peer mentoring for the Office of First-Year Experiences who helps lead the training.

“The peer mentor training seminar gives mentors the opportunity to coalesce with a community of like-minded students and faculty to engage best practices for mentorship through a hands-on approach,” Nasser said.

Several guest speakers presented at these trainings. Byron Huges, Dean of Students, presented on topics that included social excellence and helping students in distress. Emily Stallings, a Senior Instructor in the Department of Communication, highlighted within her presentation the importance of facilitating dialogue, as well as empowering First-Year Students. Assistant Provost for Diversity Education, Michele Deramo, gave a presentation on diversity, inclusive peer mentoring, and fostering intercultural competence.

To conclude the training, Rex Waters spoke about defining what peer mentoring is, provided insight on skills necessary to be a peer mentor, and discussed the life cycle of a mentor-mentee relationship. In addition to these speakers, a peer mentor panel was held as a Q&A session for these students to answer their questions.

> Save the Date

2020 Important Dates & Upcoming Events

- **Camp FYE 2020: Wednesday, January 15**
Torgersen Hall at Virginia Tech
More information to come!
- **Symposium on Teaching Large Classes: February 2**
The Inn at Virginia Tech & Skelton Conference Center
More information: <https://largeclass.teaching.vt.edu/>
- **Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy: February 5 -7**
The Inn at Virginia Tech & Skelton Conference Center
More information: <https://chep.teaching.vt.edu/>
- **Annual FYE conference: February 21 - 24**
Washington, D.C.
More information: <https://nrc.uts.sc.edu/fye/annual2020/>
- **Summer Institute 2020: TBD**

