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Building a Foundation on Relationships!

Welcome to the First-Year Experiences (FYE) newsletter. It has been great to return to my alma mater and to work with such a dedicated and talented community of practice in the FYE!

I have enjoyed meeting many of you and attending a number of your classes. While I will continue to learn and better understand the good work in FYE at Virginia Tech, what has stood out to me as a strength of the program are the people. The community of practice is strong and has much potential. Here are some points I have gleaned through my time thus far:

- The FYE faculty challenge the first-year students with an engaged style of teaching.
- The faculty value the importance of building relationships in the FYE course as they introduce the students to the learning processes, skills, and competencies essential to be successful in the discipline.
- The FYE experience challenges and supports students in that learning is not always easy and immediate. Students need to persist and embrace the challenge. Additionally, the students learn that they have responsibility beyond memorizing facts and turning in assignments.
- FYE faculty embrace the five essential practices in FYE.
- FYE faculty value the direct, personal interaction with students.
- FYE faculty are restless and are always seeking to improve the educational experience for students.
- VT is a place where teaching excellence and great scholarship lead to a highly engaging and experiential college education.
- FYE is a foundational component of the VT-shaped experience!

The FYE office is busy planning for Camp FYE. You should have recently received information about the program. I look forward to seeing many of you on January 16th in the Merryman Center. Please register at www.tinyurl.com/campFYE2019.

We want to visit your classes this spring if you are teaching. We are collecting information to write short articles featuring FYE faculty, peer mentors, and FYE friends. Please contact us for more information.

I wish you all the best as the semester starts and greatly value and appreciate your good work. Each of our students matter, as so do each of you!

Rex Waters | Associate Director of Undergraduate Academic Programs

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BY THE NUMBERS

of freshmen enrolled 2018-2019 year

6827 students are flagged as freshmen in banner term 2018-2019 or Fall 2018, according to enrollment data

5317 out of the 6827 are participating in FYE courses (2018 fall)

145 FYE are offered

8 colleges with 113 majors are involved

A **VT-shaped First-Year Experience (FYE)** at Virginia Tech serves as an opportunity for transitioning students to learn skills necessary to be successful within **three core areas of focus**: foundational experiential learning, academic resiliency in transition, and InclusiveVT cultural competency. The initiative's core areas of focus support recruitment and retention efforts across the undergraduate degree-granting colleges. The five following **FYE essential practices** demonstrate meaningful integration of practice to support a VT-shaped learning experience that demonstrates these core areas of focus: effective teaching and learning; digital and information literacies; embodying VT Principles of Community; mentorship and engagement; and academic integrity.

> In the Spotlight

FYE Puts on First Academic Showcase

This past October, the Office of First-Year Experiences put on its first Academic Showcase during Family Weekend, inviting families and students to learn more about the academic experience at Virginia Tech. The showcase focused on three core academic units in which all undergraduate Virginia Tech students engage: Pathways, First-Year Experiences (FYE) courses, and Academic Advising, in addition to hosting an information fair with tables showcasing many of the academic support and program units available to students.

Thanks to the following units for participating in the information fair: Pathways, Academic Advising, Career and Professional Development, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), Communications Lab, the Global Education Office (Study Abroad), Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program (MAOP), Student Success Center, Undergraduate Research, Veteran's Services, VT Engage, and the Writing Center.

The event kicked off with a welcome from Rex Waters, followed by some key messages about the undergraduate experience at Virginia Tech by Dr. Jill Sible, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. The sessions began with an introduction to Pathways by Dr. Stephen Biscotte, Coordinator for General Education. Dr. Bob Oliver led an interactive

Summer Institute 2018 Review

Over 180 participants from multiple administrative units and all VT colleges came together for the 2018 Summer Institute, hosted by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost and an Inclusive Excellence Grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). This year, the program brought the First-Year Experiences program, Pathways to General Education, and the HHMI Inclusive Excellence Grant together under one roof to focus on professional development for undergraduate education. Stephen Biscotte, Director of General Education noted, "The Summer Institute enabled us to facilitate a variety of professional development needs in one place at one time to support anyone involved with foundational undergraduate education."

The program featured plenaries, workshops, and large poster sessions on issues such as ethics, inclusive pedagogy, best practices, outcomes assessment, service learning, and the future of the Virginia Tech Common Book Project. One faculty member who found the sessions helpful noted, "I learned about a few resources I wasn't aware of that will be good for the FYE class and even for others too."

Be sure to mark your calendar and save the date for the 2019 Summer Institute, June 5-6.

geography of ethics lesson like one students would encounter in his introductory general education course. Then Academic Advising's Assistant Provost for Advising Initiatives, Dr. Kimberly Smith, discussed ways in which academic advising facilitates student success.

To conclude the showcase, the First-Year Experiences session featured a panel discussion of FYE courses for transitioning students between faculty and peer mentors. Thanks to the panelists who participated, including faculty panelists Dr. Herbert Bruce, Dr. Renee Eaton, and Dr. Tiffany Shoop, as well as the student peer mentors: Kaitlyn Gallagher, Kelly Maguschak, Ryan Nasser, Madison Storm, and Emma Wilkinson.



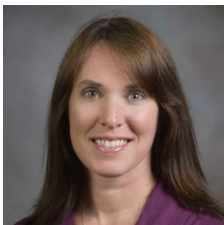
> Excellence

Faculty Development: FYE Award Nominations

FYE at Virginia Tech reflects the passion and dedication to undergraduate education and first-year students that our faculty and staff demonstrate through their time teaching first-year seminars, advising students, or coordinating programs that include peer mentoring or service learning. Their continued improvement and growth of these programs prepares students to begin their journeys as Hokies alongside others within the Virginia Tech community.

This semester, the Office of Undergraduate Education is pleased to feature two Virginia Tech instructors who have been

nominated for awards given by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Renee Eaton has received a nomination for the Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars Award, which recognizes an instructor who has achieved great success in inspiring student learning, development, and success in first-year seminars. In addition, Linda Granata has been nominated for the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award, given to educators involved in high-impact practices for first-year student learning and success.



RENEE EATON – Nominated for the Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars Award

Renee has been teaching first-year experience (FYE) courses since 2011, when she helped design the FYE course in its beginning phases for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). The enrollment for CALs FYE courses was at a mere 4.7% when Renee started, and it has now climbed to a total of 91% student participation. For multiple years, Renee has served as lead for both the CALs college-level FYE course and the HNFED department-level FYE course. Seeing the success and collaborative growth of the college-level course, Renee transitioned her focus to the HNFED course and has successfully established multiple high-impact practices within the course curriculum and through co-curricular opportunities such as study abroad.

Renee's teaching philosophy is centered around supporting students in discovering their interests, abilities, and goals, which are major aspects of her FYE classes. "Everything I do is to help students develop – academically and personally, so they grow into conscious citizens who are thoughtful, collaborative, and full of purpose and intention." She describes her role as a teacher to "ensure that students feel empowered to make decisions about their learning; understand how and why the content is useful; believe they can succeed if they put forth the time, effort, and strategies required; are interested in the content; and believe I care about their learning and about them as a person." Renee lives out this role by integrating mentorship into her courses and also acting as an advisor where she helps students create a four-year planning project, while working with other faculty within the department to expand her students' social and professional networks.



LINDA GRANATA – Nominated for the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award

Currently, Linda Granata works as the Undergraduate Program Director and Academic Advisor for the Food Science and Technology department. She has served as the instructor of record and leader for the peer mentor seminar and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) first-year seminar for the past three years. She also serves as an advisor to 130 undergraduate students in the Department of Food Science and Technology. In these leadership-intensive roles, she initiates and leads the First-Year Experiences mentorship program for CALs. She serves the students in leading them to successful paths on their collegiate journeys by utilizing prudent assistance techniques. Her passion for mentoring and teaching is expressed in her ability to connect with the students in integrating individualized recommendations for each person.

Linda's skill-set lies in effectively preparing teaching guidelines for faculty to cultivate college experiences for first-year students that fit each individual student's career interests. In addition, she guides the student peer mentors in seminars to bring enlightenment on the best way to bring her vision of supporting the first-year students into fruition. Her service to Virginia Tech through her diligent efforts in her advising practices is extraordinary and continues to positively impact the students within the department of Food Science and Technology.

> In the Spotlight

Student Highlights

This semester, the Office of First-Year Experiences would like to highlight three students who have been hired to support the Undergraduate Education units of FYE, Pathways, and Undergraduate Research: Abigail

Mercatoris-Morrison and Alexa Keeler, the student program assistants for communication, and Ryan Nasser, who has been hired as the student program assistant for peer mentoring.

Abigail Mercatoris-Morrison



A sophomore majoring in Business Marketing, Abigail is also pursuing minors in both Art History and Visual Arts and Society. In addition to the history of art, she loves how artistic evolution has shaped the modern world in perpetual creative innovations. In particular, she is passionate about the visual aesthetic of brands and how the image of a product drives consumer behavior in purchases. Abigail is putting these passions to work as this year's Vice President of Marketing for Collegiate Women in Business, where she ensures quality visuals to represent the club and its interests on social media and beyond. She is looking forward to projecting and promoting graphics and events as an Undergraduate Student Program Assistant this year at Virginia Tech.

Alexa Keeler



Alexa is a senior finishing up dual degrees in International Relations and Public Relations, in addition to a minor in Spanish. With a love for the environment, traveling, and community service, she hopes to use her experiences from both going abroad and working in her local community to educate others about important issues. Alexa also works for Intramural Sports at Virginia Tech as a supervisor and enjoys spending time outside and being active. She is excited to be working with Undergraduate Education as a Student Program Assistant to expand her communication skills and work alongside professionals in the Virginia Tech community.

Ryan Nasser



Ryan is a junior 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. Outside of the classroom, Ryan is interested in comedy, meditation, diet & exercise, fiction-writing, and nature documentaries. He is eager to be a part of the continued development of programs such as FYE, Undergraduate Research, and Pathways – programs that serve to connect undergraduate students to the multitude of high-impact experiences that Virginia Tech has to offer. Appreciative of the people he has met and the opportunities afforded to him, Ryan 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.

Upcoming Dates

- **Winter Camp FYE: January 16**
- **FYE Conference: Feb 16-19**
<http://sc.edu/fye/annual/>
- **Summer Institute 2019: June 5-6**

CETL/FYE partnered workshops (more information coming soon):

- **Getting Student Feedback Throughout the Semester: Feb 6 (1 - 3 pm)** - Tiffany Shoop, Rex Waters, Danielle Lusk
- **Group Work: Incorporating Learning Teams into Your Course: Feb 25 (1 - 4 pm)** - Tiffany Shoop, Rex Waters, Liesl Baum
- **Creating and Sustaining an Active and Engaged Class: Mar 6 (1 - 3 pm)** - Tiffany Shoop, Rex Waters