VCU Educates Dean to Return to Roots

National Search for New Dean Begins

by Pamela Lippincott
University News Services

A fter more than 14 years leading Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education, John S. Oehler, Ed.D., will go back to doing what he loves: preparing future educators to make an impact through teaching. On June 30, Oehler will return as a full-time faculty member to guide doctoral students and work with the school's centers that support their research.

As shown in the photograph, Oehler is a former NFL player and current professor at VCU. His recent career has been focused on educational leadership and is now set to return to teaching and research.

Psychiatry Professor Meets with U.S. Surgeon General

by Donna C. Gregory
University News Services

I ncreased interest in the effects of human-animal interaction recently led U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher to meet with a Virginia Commonwealth University researcher for an update on the health benefits of companion animals. Satcher's meeting with Sandra Barker, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry, may lead to a national scientific conference on the subject.

Barker was one of three researchers from across the country that met with Satcher last October in Washington, D.C., to discuss the latest research on human-animal interaction. As a result of the meeting, plans are underway to host a national conference on health benefits of companion animals.

"Over half of households in the United States have a pet, but we've only begun to look at that interaction in a scientific way," Barker said.

VCU Chemist Pioneers New Anti-Cancer Drug

by Mary Beth Alford
University News Services

A Virginia Commonwealth University chemist has helped develop a new platinum-based drug that attacks cancer cells by interrupting the replication of the cell's DNA. The drug, called BBR3464, may be available to patients by 2004. It is likely to benefit individuals with ovarian cancer, the disease that develops in nearly 25,000 women in the United States each year.

Nicholas Farrell, Ph.D., a VCU chemistry professor, presented his findings at the 2000 International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies last month in Honolulu. The scientific meeting, held every five years, is hosted by the American Chemical Society.

Platinum-based drugs have been successfully used to treat cancer since 1978. Cisplatin and carboplatin, both platinum-based, are front-line treatments for many cancers, particularly ovarian and testicular tumors. Their use dramatically changed the prognosis for testicular cancer, but ovarian cancer cells frequently become resistant to cisplatin.

The first new platinum-based cancer drug in nearly three decades, BBR3464 is expected to treat lung, pancreatic and skin cancers, which are rarely treatable by current chemotherapy. After cisplatin became the first platinum anti-cancer drug in 1978, drug-development efforts concentrated on adapting its structure, leading to the clinical use of carboplatin, a decade later. No structurally new platinum drugs had emerged from the laboratory until BBR3464, which entered clinical trials in 1999.

The agent also represents a breakthrough in platinum chemistry. "This drug breaks the pattern of what we considered necessary for a platinum compound to have anti-tumor activity," said Farrell, who also holds an appointment at VCU's Massey Cancer Center. "This is a genuinely new structure class that opens up the possibilities of finding other classes that also have different activities."

In BBR3464, a new form of platinum has been modified to contain three platinum atoms, which bind differently and more effectively to DNA. The new drug is significantly more potent than cisplatin and can be given in much lower doses, helping to minimize side effects. BBR3464 emerged from joint research by Farrell and Novuspharma SpA, a pharmaceutical firm based in Italy, and is licensed to Roche, a research-oriented health-care group. The clinical trials are being conducted by Novuspharma.

Phase I clinical trials, used to determine

More than 70 Virginia Commonwealth University researchers recently took part in a daylong clinical research conference, the latest of many university efforts aimed at stimulating research and training faculty and staff in the protection of human subjects. Debbie Rosenbaum, a national trainer with more than 20 years of research experience, led sessions that covered a range of issues, including federal regulations, the informed consent process and inspections by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Developed by VCU's Institutional Review Board, Clinical Trials Institute and Massey Cancer Center, conference registration filed within one week. Conference organizers expect to offer other opportunities for VCU researchers on an ongoing basis, with the next day conference planned for this spring. For details, call Lisa Balantine at 225-4811 ext. 103.

Former NFL player Dan Marino to Compete in VCU Children's Classic

Richmond Golf Tournament to Benefit VCU's Children's Medical Center

by Michael Ford
University News Services

A future National Football League Hall of Fame quarterback will play in a local golf tournament that benefits Virginia Commonwealth University's Children's Medical Center. Former Miami Dolphins star Dan Marino will compete in the annual VCU Children's Classic, an official stop on the Celebrity Players Tour, the nation's premier celebrity golf tour. Proceeds from the April 19-22 tournament, to be held at the Dominion Club, 6900 Dominion Club Dr. in Glen Allen, will benefit the Children's Medical Center at VCU's Medical College of Virginia Hospitals.
The establishment of the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System will necessitate changes in our identification program, which will shortly be introduced to university and health-system employees. The goals of these changes are to ensure that the ties between the health system and the university are preserved, while still maintaining the mission of teaching, research, patient care, and patient care remain not only interrelated but also key to our national stature in the future. At the same time, we want to preserve the traditions of our shared past, encompassed within the name "Medical College of Virginia." The changes in our identification program will include updates to nomenclature as well as a new stationery and marks (logo). The nomenclature will add the reference, the "VCU Health System," consisting of MCV Hospitals and MCV Physicians. General references might include, for example, "Health System employees" or physicians and providers of the "VCU Health System." Greater specificity will be allowed in the nomenclature as well. "MCV Physicians at VCU" or the "nurses working at MCV Hospitals and those who are teaching in the VCU School of Nursing," as examples.

Academic programs may also continue to be identified as on the "MCV Campus" or on the "Academic Campus" of Virginia Commonwealth University when this distinction is necessary. We are a multifaceted organization, and I am looking forward to our new look representing that diversity. As we begin to implement the new identification program, I hope you will stay in touch with your comments and questions.

EUGENE P. TRANI
President

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**PLATINUM continued from page 1**

safe doses and possible side effects with patients suffering from schizophrenia. Specifically, Barker, along with Dr. Anand Pandurangi, M.D., chair of inpatient psychiatry, will look at changes in patients' requests for medication, the occurrence of negative symptoms and the appearance of attachment behaviors.

Scientists only began giving serious consideration to the effects of companion animals with in the last 20 years. A 1980s study documenting an increased survival rate among heart-attack victims who were pet owners appears to be the impetus for future studies in the evolving field.

"We are seeing a growing body of literature that documents the health benefits of companion animals," Barker said.

Additionally, research has shown that pet owners experience reduced blood pressure and heart rate and cholesterol levels when compared to non-pet owners. Pet ownership also has been associated with other reduced cardiovascular risk factors and fewer physician visits during the childhood of sexual-abuse survivors.

Her latest research proposal involves studying the effects of companion animals on patients with schizophrenia. Specifically, Barker, along with Dr. Anand Pandurangi, M.D., chair of inpatient psychiatry, will look at changes in patients' requests for medication, the occurrence of negative symptoms and the appearance of attachment behaviors. Scientists only began giving serious consideration to the effects of companion animals with in the last 20 years. A 1980s study documenting an increased survival rate among heart-attack victims who were pet owners appears to be the impetus for future studies in the evolving field.

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in December, Charlie Johnson went on national television to meet the stranger who had saved his life. Johnson’s 1999 bone-marrow transplant at Virginia Commonwealth University’s Medical College of Virginia Hospitals was made possible by an anonymous donation by an Illinois man.

The two had been paired by the National Marrow Donor Program, an organization that matches patients with potential bone marrow donors. Their identities were kept confidential for one year, but when both patient and donor indicated their interest in meeting, the organization contacted the Sally Jesse Raphael talk show to set up an on-air meeting between the two. Johnson and his donor, Thomas Hall, met face-to-face at a Dec. 13 taping of the show. “Thank you for saving my life. I’m just so grateful. I knew you were sent from God,” an emotional Johnson told Hall during the show.

In 1998, the then-45-year-old Johnson was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia, a condition that occurs when too many white blood cells are produced in the bone marrow. Johnson was not a candidate for an autologous bone-marrow transplant, a procedure that uses the patient’s own bone-marrow to replace diseased marrow. The alternative was an allogenic bone-marrow transplant, which requires a bone-marrow donation from someone whose blood type closely matches the patient, usually a family member.

When Johnson was unable to find a match within his family, the MCV Hospitals Bone Marrow Transplant Unit began working with the NMDP to find an unrelated donor. The organization facilitates more than 1,000 bone-marrow transplants a year and within several months Johnson was matched with Hall.

“We were very pleased to find a match for Mr. Johnson so quickly, it can sometimes take up to six months to match African-Americans and other minorities with a donor.” With Caucasians comprising 70 percent of the NMDP registry and African-Americans only 8 percent, there is a large need for minority donors.

On Sept. 10, 1999, Johnson underwent a successful bone-marrow transplant. Four weeks later, the father of 9-year-old twins returned home. He continues weekly check-ups and at last year received the hopeful news that his disease is in remission.

“The MCV Hospitals BMT Unit is a leader in the state that performs unrelated allografts, opened in 1988 and is the busiest bone-marrow transplantation center in the state. In the past five years, the facility has performed more than 600 allogenic and autologous transplants for adult and pediatric patients.” The hospital uses bone-marrow transplants as a treatment option for a number of diseases, including Hodgkin’s lymphoma, chronic acute leukemia and breast cancer.

Virtue and the Virtues’ 1990 hit “Guitar Boogie Shuffle.” At age 19, Bruno toured with Buddy Rich and then worked in Las Vegas. He eventually made his way to Los Angeles, where he recorded with Teddyro. When his career didn’t move as he had expected, Bruno returned to Philadelphia to focus on his first love: straight-ahead jazz. Since then, Bruno has recorded critically acclaimed albums, including “Burnin’,” “Slight of Hand,” and “Like That.”

Bruno will offer a free master class at VCU at 10 a.m. on Feb. 7 in the Vachievic Concert Hall. The class is open to the public. Tickets for the concert are $10 for general admission and free for VCU faculty, staff and students with a valid ID. For tickets or details, call VCU’s Department of Music at 928-1106.

Leading Jazz Guitarist to Perform at VCU

Jimmy Bruno, probably one of the world’s leading jazz guitarists, will perform an evening of standards at Virginia Commonwealth University at 8 p.m. Feb. 7 in the Performing Arts Center Sonia Vachievic Concert Hall. VCU jazz faculty Victor Dvoskin, bass; Andrew Curtis, drums, will accompany Bruno in the performance.

Respected by the likes of George Benson, Bruno has worked with renowned musicians, including Tommy Tedesco, Bobby Watson, Art Blakey, George Coleman, Sam Rivers and others. Bruno is best known for his straight-ahead jazz, which attempts to take guitar to a new technical level.

A native of Philadelphia, Bruno inherited a love of the guitar from his father, who played in Frank so quickly,” said John McCarty, M.D., the MCV Hospital physician who performed Johnson’s transplant. “It can sometimes take up to six months to match African-Americans and other minorities with a donor.” With Caucasians comprising 70 percent of the NMDP registry and African-Americans only 8 percent, there is a large need for minority donors.

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In Brief

VCU Offers Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Sessions

VCU’s Office of Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Services will conduct 10 open-enrollment training sessions on preventing sexual harassment. Faculty and staff who have not already attended a sexual harassment workshop are encouraged to attend one of the following sessions:

- Jan. 20—10 a.m., Sanger Hall, Room 1-044
- Feb. 10—10 a.m., Student Commons, Forum Room
- Feb. 14—2 p.m., Sanger Hall, Room 1-044
- Feb. 26—2 p.m., Student Commons, Forum Room
- March 8—1 p.m., Sanger Hall, Room 1-044
- March 25—10 a.m., Student Commons, Forum Room
- March 27—3 p.m., Sanger Hall, Room 1-044
- April 6—9 a.m., Student Commons, Forum Room
- April 12—11 a.m., Sanger Hall, Room 1-044
- April 17—11 a.m., Student Commons, Forum Room

Musicians from Marlboro to Perform at VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University will continue its Mary Anne Benn-olds Chamber Concert series with a performance of Musicians from Marlboro at 8 p.m. on Feb. 3 in the VCU Performing Arts Center Concert Hall. Critically acclaimed by The Washington Post as a "virtual guarantee of musical excellence," Musicians of Marlboro will present a classical music program of Beethoven, Bartok and Dowland on the third, featuring violinists Nathan Cole and Joseph Lin, cellist David Soyer and violist Ryo Sasaki.

Now celebrating its 36th season, Musicians from Marlboro is known for producing up-and-coming artists as well as producing a unique all-string sound. Past performers in the group include such talents as Richard Goode, Benita Balente, Murray Perahia, Jaime Laredo and Paula Robison. These other artists now can be heard in the Emerson, Guarneri, Julliard and Tokyo Quartets, as well as the Beau Arts and Kallistein-Laredo-Robison Trios.

Sponsored by VCU’s Department of Music, the Mary Anne Bennolds Chamber Concert series presents six concerts each year featuring prominent chamber artists. Through the series, VCU’s music department offers chamber music to the university and the Richmond community. Tickets are $25 for adults, $20 for seniors and $10 for students. For tickets or for more information about the performance, call the VCU Department of Music at 828-1166.

Virginia State Quarter Designed by VCU Alumna

by Lissette Linares
University News Services

I did some research and learned all coins have standard characteristics — they’re simple and easily identifiable — and was sure to incorporate those elements into the design,” said Asthon-Bessler, now in creative director for the Virginia office. “I did some research and learned all coins have standard characteristics — they’re simple and easily identifiable — and was sure to incorporate those elements into the design.”

The new state quarters issued by the United States Mint quickly are becoming collectors’ items all over the United States. The Virginia quarter — the 10th coin released under the 50 State Quarters Program — is bringing Virginia Commonwealth University some fame.

Paris Ashton-Bessler, a graduate of VCU’s Department of Communication Arts and Design, designed the coin, which celebrates the quincentennial of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement.

Ashton-Bessler’s design features the three ships — the Susan Constant, the Godspeed and the Discovery — that brought the first English settlers to Jamestown, marking the beginning of U.S. colonial history. Writing on the coin says “Quincentennial 2007” marking the year Jamestown turns 400 years old.

Colleges, universities, museums and agencies from around the state contributed ideas for the new Virginia quarter. Gov. James G. Gilmore then selected five concepts to submit to the U.S. Mint, including Ashton-Bessler’s Jamestown design, Mount Vernon, Monticello, the colonial Williamsburg capitol and the Jefferson design of the state capitol in Richmond, with eight stars representing the Virginia-born presidents.

Now circulating throughout the United States, the new Virginia quarter was produced and released to the public in October in honor of Jamestown. Accompanying Ashton-Bessler to the site were her two children, 8 and 9 years old, who now can boast to their friends that their mom designed the Virginia quarter.

Oehler continued from page 1

concentrate on teacher education and quality issues.

“My administrative career began in 1975, and I have spent a lot of time there so I felt it was time for me to go back to my roots,” said Oehler, who has an appointment as professor of education in addition to serving as dean.

“VCU is at a point where faculty are here and new faculty who have come on board, like the university, will grow in creative ways. I am excited to go back to teaching as well as helping the school grow in any way I can.”

A national search began earlier this month for a new education dean. Roderick McDavis, Ph.D., presented vice president for academic affairs, and Michael Wise, Ph.D., professor of health, physical education and recreation, will co-chair the search committee.

“We will be searching far and wide for the best person to fill this critical leadership role. Dr. Oehler has provided exemplary leadership for the School of Education during his tenure as dean.”

“Dr. Oehler has provided exemplary leadership for the School of Education during his tenure as dean. We are extremely proud of all his accomplishments.”

Under Oehler’s leadership, VCU implemented and extended the Fifth Year Program in Teacher Education, a teacher preparation program. Developed in collaboration with the College of Humanities and Sciences, the program allows students to earn an undergraduate degree in an academic discipline and a master’s degree in teaching.

From 1990-95, Oehler directed the Richmond School Leadership Academy, a school-reform partnership with the Richmond Public Schools and the Southern Educational Foundation Inc. Funded with $760,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation, the program offers site-based management to strengthen academic achievement of at-risk children. The program, established its first Professional Development School (PDS) at Whitecomb Model Elementary School. The cost for each class is $835 per person and may be covered under individual insurance plans. To register, call 560-8509.

Burn Survivor Sunday Celebration Marks Commitment to Burn Care, Burn Awareness

The Evans-Hayes Burn Center at VCU’s Medical College of Virginia Hospitals, in cooperation with the Old Dominion Professional Firefighters Burn Foundation, will host "Burn Survivor Sunday," to kick off National Burn Awareness Week, Feb. 4-10. The celebration will be held at 1:30 p.m. Feb. 4 at the Larrick Student Center.

Former patients of the Evans-Hayes Burn Center and their families are invited to celebrate with physicians and nurses from VCU Hospitals as well as local firefighters. The celebration is free and parking is available at no charge in VCU’s Q Lot. For details, call 828-3240.

MCV Women’s HealthCare Offers New Diabetes Class

Virginia Commonwealth University’s MCV Women’s HealthCare will offer a new nutrition program called "Diabetic Dining Made Easy," that will focus on controlling blood sugar through diet. The class will examine consequences of food choices by exploring which foods will help to control a diabetic’s blood sugar and which ones will send it out of control. Operating under the philosophy that the best type of diet to control blood sugar is one that the diabetic can follow for life, the course focuses not on counting calories, exchanges, or carbohydrates but on balancing food groups and nutrition.

The class is offered on the first Wednesday of every month: Feb. 7, March 7, April 4, and May 2. Classes will be held in the first floor conference room of MCV Women’s HealthCare. The cost for each class is $335 per person and may be covered under individual insurance plans. To register, call 560-8509.

OEHLER

by Lamar Gary
University News Services

Virginia Commonwealth University will continue its Mary Anne Bennolds Chamber Concert series with a performance of Musicians of Marlboro at 8 p.m. on Feb. 3 in the VCU Performing Arts Center Concert Hall.

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Editor's Note: University News Services recently sat down with Marsha Terr, Ph.D., vice president for research, to talk about the status of VCU's research initiatives since joining the university in September.

What were your goals for the first months after your arrival? VCU's research has been fairly flat for the past 10 years after a strong first 20 years of its existence. Our overarching goal at the institution is to restore our position in the national rankings of research universities. VCU at one point was ranked 71 in the nation, which is a remarkable achievement for a university that really didn't exist 30 years ago. We came from essentially zero research funding 30 years ago to being ranked 71st among the world's premiere research institutions. And in the last 10 years we've slipped to just below 100. We need to get back into the top 75, and do so fairly quickly because we don't want our benchmark institutions accelerating away from us.

My task, in the first few months, was to talk with a broad spectrum of faculty and administrators, chair, deans and researchers and get a sense of where our capabilities are and where these line up with the big opportunities for funded research. We can't do much in leading, timely research without having the resources needed to make exciting things happen. If we're going to change the boundaries of knowledge, or if we're going to change the way people think, if we're going to reshape ideas and information, we've got to have the tools to do that. Those tools basically boil down to having great people, students and equipment. That means we've got to have the resources to support that. Twenty or 30 years ago this institution was funded primarily by the state. Now very little of what we do in the world of research comes from the state. The world of research is funded largely by the federal government through the medium of national competition. At VCU, one dollar out of every five that we spend comes in the form of a sponsored grant or contract, where we have competing with the rest of the United States. And so, finding out where our great researchers are within the institution and how this office can enhance what they do, is really what the charge was in the first few months.

How could we have lost ground in the last 10 years if our overall research dollars have continued to increase? Over 10 years, for example, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of Cincinnati, Wayne State University — all downtown urban universities with health centers — grew 100 percent or more in federal funding. The University of Virginia, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and many others, grew by about 60 percent. We grew by only about seven and five percent in federal funding. So something went flat in our competition for our major source of research resources, and that's what we have to fix.

Seventy percent of the average big research university funding comes from the federal government. About 60 percent of what we do at VCU currently comes from the federal government. We will grow in all areas but to build prominence and capabilities, we need success with federal agencies.

Our goal over the next five years is to essentially double our annual sponsored program base at about $40 or $50 million, largely through federal funding. And that is doable.

How constructive have the meetings with university faculty, deans and vice presidents been? In the first four months I probably have had fairly extended discussion with 200 or so people of whom making up the institution. I've probably met with over 400 VCU faculty, in various settings. I've had a chance to see a broad cross-section of individuals.

Many meetings have had a specific topic of conversation: where are we as a university, where should we be as a university and how do we get there? And that conversation will continue for the next several weeks, but we're now at a point where we're spending less time talking about how we came to where we are and moving into the implementation phase.

We've identified a number of areas where we have formed and are forming teams to go after bigger research initiatives. This university submits about 1,300 proposals a year. A large number of those are single investigator $100,000-200,000 awards. We are not competing for the National Institutes for Health. We have very few grants that are two, five, or 10 million dollars. Yet the nature of research nationally is shifting. We will all continue to have the broad base of single investigator research, which is the foundation of what we do. But the shift is towards complex issues that are addressed in teams bringing together economists and physicians, engineers and sociologists, who can look at an issue from all of its perspectives. This is what a university is so wonderfully equipped to do because of a strength of breadth of expertise in our community. Yet for decades we've operated in our individual, sharply focused areas and we haven't mined this horizontal potential of what we have.

That's really what I think the Office of Research brings to the table.

We're already good at doing the individual investigations. Where this office brings value to the institution is bringing all those people together who normally don't encounter each other and facilitating their plans. That's where we are at this point. We're starting to write those proposals. We'll continue to look for suitable areas during the course of this year. If we can find several great areas each year that can take us to two or four or 10 million dollar opportunities, that's exactly what we need to be doing.

These grants bring in the larger resources that are needed for a more substantive study of whatever the topic is. Small grants will probably pay the salary of a faculty member and graduate student during a research period, and buy some equipment. But we have to keep pace with a rapidly over turning technology frontier where things become obsolete in three to five years. Research is expensive and it cannot only be done by tenured or tenured-track faculty. It needs an army of computer specialists and information technologists as well as good students, technicians and support staff who enable us to do advanced research.

So interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research projects will become more commonplace nationally and here as well?

That's the big push and it's really important for us because we're a relatively small institution. We don't have many large departments with more than 70 faculty in one department. We may have an expert in chemistry, one in pharmacy and one in immunology who have a common interest. But together they create a critical mass that lets us compete with whoever is out there. We'll never pull away from needing that single disciplinary depth that goes to build the individual investigator grants but we've got to have both.

Are there some federal agencies we'll target for grant proposals? The five are NIH, NSF, NASA, and the departments of Energy and Defense. We need to have good funding from each of them. Right now we've got all of our eggs in the NIH basket and that will continue to be our dominant area. It is, for obvious reasons. But a growing portion of what NIH will be looking for in the future calls for expertise that is developed by more specialized funding from these other agencies. So broadening our funding base will feed our competitiveness.

Our IIB situation has been resolved. Did we lose a lot of ground while doing that? We almost certainly did. It's very difficult to quantify how much ground we've lost or how many opportunities we've lost.

Our awards appear to have held constant with the year before the IIB interruption, but not stronger because it's made us think through in great detail how we handle research at this institution. We can never allow ourselves to get into a situation where the research becomes more important than the subjects we use in our research, whether they are humans or animals. This made us completely revise all of our policies and procedures dealing with research matters generally.

I think we worked at it very hard. It could have taken much longer if we hadn't been as diligent in correcting it as we were, but we had a good team of people and they did a wonderful job. Research institutions like ours owe a lot to the faculty and staff who volunteer for terms on our research subjects protection committee.

What improvements should VCU make in infrastructure and other areas to better compete? We need capital, information system and educational improvements. We also need to provide educational forums for our investigators so they can have answers to questions such as: How do I write a grant, or fill out a protocol for human subjects? How do I deal with animals in my research? What does it mean to deal with conflict of interest? How do I file an invention disclosure? Ultimately, the responsibility for so many aspects of research lies with the investigator. We should have a constant stream of seminars that they can sign up for on one of these topics.

We haven't invested enough by comparison with our benchmark institutions in what it takes to do modern competitive significant research. We have to invest in the support capabilities for research.

What are your long-term goals for VCU? I think we want to be seen first and foremost as one of the nation's strong research universities. I'm passionate about the value of research in a university. Many fields are changing so very fast that if we're not there to educate the people that are going to be making judgments in the top 75 universities in the country, then we must be teaching at the cutting edge, and to do that we have to be researching at the cutting edge. The research invigorates and permeates everything we do. Our research defines us. If in five years from now we are doing more significant, more nationally recognized research, then it will be seen by potential faculty as a good reason to come here. It also will draw some of the best graduate students. Then we will have a place with a vitality that is the vitality you get at a strong research university.

To bring this about we depend on our good, self-motivated research faculty. These are my primary focus. I cannot fix every problem in a large institution such as this one, but if I can bring about an improvement in the environment for our productive researchers, I'll be pleased with that. Someone one told me once that if one tries to fix all the weak points, one can work very hard and ultimately achieve mediocrity. But if one identifies the strengths and works to make these stronger; then one can achieve something exceptional. That's the task for us.
Internal Medicine Finds Success in Attracting Federal Funding

by Laura Arborgast
University News Services

As part of Virginia Commonwealth University's Strategic Plan to promote research and scholarly activities, departments within the university have been involved in an ongoing effort to increase federal research grants. The Department of Internal Medicine has excelled in this effort by implementing a number of initiatives that have more than doubled the department's funding from the National Institutes of Health.

From 1995 to 2000, annual NIH awards to the department increased from $6.4 million to $16.4 million. The department also has won $9.6 million in state, foundation, and industry awards totaling in the past year. Much of the funding success can be attributed to the arrival of Richard Wenzel, M.D., who became the department's chairman in 1995. Wenzel has vigorously pursued initiatives to make research funding a top priority.

"We placed a considerable value on the expansion of research," Wenzel said. "We have alighted as many incentives as possible to achieve success."

The main focus of these new initiatives has been on recruiting talented new faculty as well as supporting current researchers working throughout the department's 12 divisions.

Arun Sanyal, M.D., the department's associate chair for research and chairman of the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, has been leading the effort to support young investigators just starting out.

"We are fostering career development and training for young researchers. By supporting these talented young people, we begin to change the research climate and everyone will benefit."

The Department of Internal Medicine also sponsors interdisciplinary research seminars that bring together division heads throughout the university to discuss current research needs and to share their work. Other efforts within the department have contributed to the boost in federal funding:

- Financial rewards are given to faculty who consistently win research awards.
- Councils within each division review and offer suggestions on grant applications before faculty members submit them to funding agencies.
- Division chairs have actively recruited faculty with proven investigation skills and a history of funding in research.
- The department has renewed efforts to acquire endowed professorships and chairs to increase talented faculty members' time for investigation and research work.
- The department hosts an annual dinner to celebrate faculty success and award its best researchers.

A newly formed committee has set up formal guidelines for the utilization of research space.

The department continues to implement new strategies that encourage and identify strong researchers. Currently, plans are being made for a research retreat for division heads to develop additional methods of advancing the department's research efforts.

"In the last five years, we have begun to move strongly," Wenzel said. "As research budgets at NIH and large pharmaceutical companies increase in the next few years, the talent of our faculty and commitment to the department all should offer us special advantages in the coming decades."

General Clinical Research Center Partners with Researchers

by Joe Kuttenkuler
University News Services

Expanding knowledge. It is the ultimate goal of any research. But often the task of initiating and managing a research study can be almost as challenging as discovering the cause and cure of a disease. Virginia Commonwealth University's General Clinical Research Center was created in 1992 to assist researchers with those challenges.

The GCRC opened a miniaturization research hospital within VCU's Medical College of Virginia Hospitals. The center provides on-site space, staff and resources for investigators to conduct translational, or bench-to-bedside, research in a highly controlled in-patient or outpatient setting. The GCRC's services range from study design and implementation to database management and biostatistical support — from specimen analysis in its laboratory to patient care — all at no cost to VCU researchers.

Located on the eighth floor of North Hospital on the MCV Campus, VCU's GCRC is one of 74 National Institutes of Health and National Center for Research Resources-funded programs like it in the country. The center's current five-year, $13 million grant makes it possible to offer its wide range of services to researchers.

"One of the goals of academic medicine is to contribute to science," said John Clore, M.D., professor of medicine and GCRC director. "Clinical research enables doctors to take their love of patient care to another level by attempting to understand the mechanisms of diseases that affect their patients. Our center serves as a partner in that process."

During its nearly 40-year history, the GCRC has helped improve transplant survival odds and led to a deeper understanding of a number of complex diseases, including sickle-cell anemia, HIV, depression, hepatitis C, polycystic kidney syndrome and epilepsy.

"The existence of a GCRC in an academic medical center sets it apart from other institutions," Clore said. "It has enormous impact when it comes to writing grants."

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Theatre VCU students recently traveled to New York City to get together with Virginia Commonwealth University alumni who now are working actors in the Big Apple. A group of about 20 students spoke with more than 30 working actors who got their start at VCU.

While in New York, the VCU students also talked with an agent about acquiring good representation, toured the Circle in the Square Theatre and managed to squeeze in time to attend five shows.
VCU to Host Former Deputy Counsel to President

Event to Celebrate Community Learning Week

In celebration of Community Learning Week and the life of Martin Luther King Jr., Virginia Commonwealth University will host Cheryl D. Mills, former deputy counsel to President Bill Clinton. Mills, an advocate for equality in education, will discuss King’s life and how his lessons still resonate today. Her talk will be offered at 5:30 p.m. Jan. 25 in the VCU Performing Arts Center.

Currently a senior vice president for corporate policy and public programming at Oxygen Media, Mills oversees Oxygen’s public policy, philanthropic and grassroots initiatives and co-directs the firm’s legal and political programming. Mills gained national prominence for her defense of President Clinton during the 1999 Senate impeachment trial, becoming only the third African-American to speak from the Senate floor. Her presentation was praised by senators from both political parties and described as “very powerful... everything was riveting.”

Mills is co-founder of DCWorks, a non-profit organization devoted to academic enrichment and the interpersonal development of underprivileged senior high school students of color. DCWorks’ mission is to help these students achieve their dream of a successful four-year college experience and provides financial scholarships to students who have completed the program.

In 1990, she was presented the Susan B. Anthony Achievement Award by President Clinton, who described her as an “eloquent and effective champion of equality in education” and who “has opened the doors of higher education for underprivileged youth.”

In 1999, she received her Juris law degree from Stanford University, where she was elected to the Law Review. While at Stanford, Mills co-chaired the third National Conference on Women of Color and the Law. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Virginia in 1987, where she received the Arthur “Pete” Gray Award for outstanding leadership, scholarship and contributions to the university community.

Mills currently serves on the boards of the National Partnership for Women and Families, the Stanford Law School, the Leadership Conference Education Fund, The Jackie Robinson Foundation, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation, and the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Foundation. She also serves on the advisory board of Grassroots.com, a non-partisan political information and action Internet site.

The VCU event is sponsored by the Office of Community Programs. For details of the week’s events, call 828-1831.

By Laura Arbogast

Researcher Helps Transplant Patients Maintain Their Health

Since 1967, when the first human heart transplant in modern times was performed, Virginia Commonwealth University has pioneered research to improve the survival rate among cardiac-transplant patients.

Today, VCU remains on the cutting-edge of transplant research by studying ways to help patients maintain healthy lifestyles after surgical transplants. Jeanne Salyer, Ph.D., assistant professor of nursing, is studying the effect of using community-based programs such as Weight Watchers to encourage healthy eating and exercise habits in post-transplant patients.

"Most of the people who work with transplant patients are very focused on acute care, and using a community-based care program is not something they would think of," Salyer said. "But when you see patients in their homes, you realize they need to be given everyday resources to maintain their health."

Cardiac-transplant patients commonly suffer from a number of post-transplant problems, ranging from hypertension and coronary heart disease to diabetes and weight gain from medications. "Despite all the glamour associated with being transplant patients, they are very much like other people with chronic illnesses," Salyer said. "The side effects of the transplant can be extremely difficult."

In 1987, Salyer began working with the cardiac transplant team at MCV Hospitals. By documenting the health and lifestyle habits of her patients, she discovered that many needed help with lifestyle modifications. Salyer found that more than 20 percent resumed unhealthy habits they had before transplants, including smoking, lack of exercise and poor diets.

This lowered sensitivity to maintaining their health can mean the difference between life and death for transplant patients who require lifelong post-transplant care, but whose hospital visits become less frequent. Using a technique that helps select the best method of behavioral intervention based on the patient’s lifestyle, Salyer discovered the need for an easy-to-follow community program that would encourage better diet and exercise after patients left the hospital. Familiar with a Weight Watchers program used to help breast-cancer patients maintain their weight, Salyer became convinced this kind of community program also could benefit transplant patients.

Salyer’s study focuses on patients who are at or above their ideal body weight. Study participants are randomly selected to receive either a 26-week membership to Weight Watchers, including meetings and diet advice, or six months of weekly consultations with an MCV Hospitals dietitian. All participants also are encouraged to participate in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each day.

After completing one of the six-month programs, participants complete questionnaires describing how competent they feel in managing their health and any barriers to weight loss that they have experienced while in the program. Data such as patients’ weight and blood pressure also is recorded. From this, Salyer can evaluate how effective the programs have been in motivating the patients.

Salyer will continue enrolling new participants in the study through June and is encouraged by the positive feedback she has received so far: “All 19 participants have been enthusiastic about the study,” Salyer said, “and all but one have lost weight and lowered their blood pressure and cholesterol.”

Graduate Sculpture Students Receive International Honors

Four Virginia Commonwealth University graduate students recently were named recipients of the International Sculpture Center’s 2000 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award. Founded in 1994, the award recognizes young sculptors and encourages their continued commitment to the discipline.

VCU students selected were Kimberely Baranowski, Peter Tascarella, Beth Solis and Jason Sheldon, all enrolled in VCU’s master of fine arts program in sculpture, rated in the top five programs in the nation by U.S. News & World Report.

Each of the student-artists offers a different approach to sculpture. For example, Baranowski creates room-sized installations that her work explore modes of display and attempt to connect viewers with a lost world beyond glossy and artificial packaging. Tascarella uses a Web camera to mix live and mediated experiences into amorphous creations. Solis builds installations that crush, extend and distort space and time. Sheldon uses everyday materials — such as masking tape, tinfoil, ballroom and dirty socks — to create works that decay over time.

"The people at the International Sculpture Center were amazed by our students’ work," said Joe Seipel, M.F.A., VCU chair of sculpture. "We had by far the most students from any college or arts school to receive the awards. That’s a reflection of the quality of the sculpture program here at VCU.”

The International Sculpture Center is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the creation and understanding of sculpture and its contributions to society. The organization publishes Sculpture, the leading publication in the field.

On Jan. 11, Julie Williams, Ph.D., director of the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, left, presented Virginia Commonwealth University President Eugene F. Trani, Ph.D., with a register containing the names of the inaugural class of the VCU Leadership Development Program. Looking on are Roderick J. McDavis, Ph.D., provost and vice president for academic affairs; Grace E. Harris, Ph.D., distinguished professor in the Center for Public Policy; and Hermes A. Kontos, M.D., Ph.D., chief executive officer for the VCU Health System and vice president for health sciences.

Inaugural Class recognized included, (from left) Trani, McDavis, Harris, Salyer, Sadowski, Solis, Trani, Sheldon and Kontos.

10-month VCU Leadership Development Program, made up of 30 participants, nominated from across the university, who demonstrate the talents and commitment to pursue greater leadership roles at VCU and the VCU Health System. The program is designed to train and develop current and emerging campus leaders to assume leadership positions within the university.
VCU Alumni Named to Dance Magazine's '25 to Watch' in 2001

Two Virginia Commonwealth University alumni were among the dancers, choreographers, troupes and trends named in Dance magazine's "25 to Watch" list published in the January issue. Paule Turner and Richard Move, 1983 and 1985 graduates respectively, received the honor by the top professional magazine in the field.

We are incredibly proud to have two of our alumni named to this distinguished list," said Martha Curtis, chair of dance and choreography. "This speaks volumes about the quality of the dance department, including both our faculty and our students.

Turner performs with his newly established troupe, Court. The outlandish performer draws on popular culture and human emotion to create profound dance theater works.

"In my work, I want to speak about human conditions — love, loss and release," he said. "The best way to capture this is using people as your subject. If the world is a stage, there are serious character studies on the subway."

While at VCU, Turner learned to express himself and to draw on human emotion for his works. "VCU was an incredibly creative place to be for a young aspiring dance artist," he said. "As a student, I was given the space to fully explore whatever came into my young mind. This has proven extremely valuable."

While each dancer exhibits his own unique style, Move is known for his imitations of Graham's signature choreography and monologues in typical Graham garb. He said all dancers owe Graham respect as she paved the way for us today.

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