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## Actively Engaging with Virginia Center on Aging's Retired Community

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# From the Director, Virginia Center on Aging

By Bert Waters, Ph.D., Associate Director

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## ***Actively Engaging with Virginia Center on Aging's Retired Community***

For over a decade, as Assistant, Associate, and now Director of the Virginia Geriatric Education Center (VGEC), one of my core responsibilities has been to recruit and maintain a dynamic interprofessional team. Over the years, I have actively maintained relationships with recently retired VCU faculty, and provided them with opportunities to rejoin our university in new academic roles that are in line with their scholarly passions. VCU received an Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network designation in June of 2021, following the submission of a 16-page application and report earlier this year describing how the university upholds the [10 Age Friendly University \(AFU\) Principles](#). One of the Virginia Center on Aging's (VCoA) contributions to the report addressed Principle 9, to engage actively with the university's own retired community. These recruitment efforts also pertain to recently retired faculty from other institutions, who have had long-term collaborative relationships with the VCoA, most notably through the VCoA and its VGEC Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) grants.

The VCoA has had this model of including recently retired faculty on grants since 2009, when Dr. Joan Wood was instrumental in writing the VCoA's first VGEC grant proposal. They serve as core faculty for the interprofessional GWEP team, which we named the Plenary. Often, their intentions are not to retire from academia, but to leave the administrative responsibilities of a professor so that they will have more time to contribute to their own scholarship and to give back to our community. Dr. Wood, who I met when she was Director of the VGEC in the late 1990s, had recently retired as Director of the Geriatric Education Center at University of San Francisco (USF). Dr. Wood was instrumental in conceptualizing our first successful VGEC proposal, and we modeled our Faculty Development Program after her program at USF. Our interprofessional team, which became the Plenary, met twice monthly for a year to prepare for the proposal submission, and Dr. Wood was there volunteering her time. She then rejoined VCU as an

adjunct faculty after we were funded.

Myra Owens, PhD, a graduate of the Department of Gerontology, was also involved in the initial conceptualization of our VGEC. She then served as a Research Associate at the VGEC until 2019. She retired from a state position during the first five-year cycle of the VGEC grant. Dr. Owens, an applied research and program evaluation expert, led analysis of the data collected and reported results to the grant sponsor, and led efforts to disseminate results in refereed journals. She designed and developed both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools for the VGEC. Dr. Owens, who graduated from the College of Health Professions PhD Program in Health Related Sciences (HRS), served on the HRS Comprehensive Exam Development and Review Committee, and serves on the HRS Steering Committee.

Patricia Slattum, PharmD, PhD, retired as Professor Emerita from the VCU School of Pharmacy in April 2019, where she was director of the Geriatric Pharmacotherapy Program. Dr. Slattum's interests have always included aging issues. She received a Certificate in Aging Studies from the Department of Gerontology in 1992, and was core faculty with the VGEC when its home was in the Department of Gerontology. As another founding member of the Plenary, she also helped conceptualize our current VGEC. After six months of mandatory retirement, Dr. Slattum returned as part-time faculty at the VCoA. She is currently a Co-Investigator for the GWEP grant and a vital member of the VCoA's staff.

Most recently, Jodi Teitleman, PhD, and Ken Faulkner, MA, MDiv, two faculty retirees from the College of Health Professions, joined our Plenary. Dr. Teitleman retired from her full-time position as Associate Professor in the VCU Department of Occupational Therapy in September, 2019. Six months later, she joined the GWEP's Plenary where she assists with developing training content and conference presentations on family caregiving. Her educational

background includes a PhD in Experimental Psychology and Certificate in Aging Studies, and she maintains post-retirement interests in dementia caregiving and political advocacy. Dr. Teitleman always used to explain that she was not an Occupational Therapist, but a Gerontologist in the Occupational Therapy Department. Now she can focus on her passion, gerontology.

Rev. Faulkner served as Assistant Professor in the Department of Patient Counseling from 1997 until his retirement in 2018. I met Rev. Faulkner as a graduate student in the early 2000s. He taught and continues to teach the Ethics and Health Care course in the HRS PhD program. He also had several different clinical roles since joining the VCU Health System in 1991, including Director of Pastoral Care and Advance Care Planning Coordinator for VCU Health until retirement. He joined the Plenary six months after retirement, and continues to contribute with our Advance Care Planning and ethics initiatives. Rev. Faulkner was drawn to join the GWEP because of its strong interprofessional collaboration and the importance of preparing others for service to older adults. He especially appreciates learning from his colleagues in the Plenary.

Regarding the return of faculty from other institutions who partnered with VCU and the VCoA, two come to mind. First is Kathy Fletcher RN, DNP, who was the University of Virginia Lead under our first GWEP grant (2015-18) as well as a prior HRSA Geriatric Education Center grant (2010-15). Dr. Fletcher remained closely affiliated with the VCoA after her retirement from UVA, as community faculty at Riverside Health Systems. Dr. Fletcher led our 40-hour interprofessional Train the Trainer program in geriatrics, which had two clinical themes: care transitions and medication management. She was instrumental in the development of our Evidence Based Practice Falls Prevention curriculum and was a founding member of our Faculty Development Program. Dr. Fletcher passed away in 2019, but her legacy lives on through her mentorship of current VGEC faculty and staff.

Dan Bluestein, a Geriatrician and Family Physician who spent his clinical career at Eastern Virginia Medical School, has joined us. Dr. Bluestein had a

mid-career transition when the opportunity to “grandfather” for Geriatric board certification presented itself. From 1992-2019, Dr. Bluestein taught Geriatrics to Family Medicine residents and other interprofessional learners in a seniors’ clinic with a focus on dementia and as a certified medical director in a large continuing care retirement community. Dr. Bluestein was an active contributor to the VCoA GWEP programs, presentations, and publications, and was a co-author of all GWEP grant competing continuations, including our currently-funded project. Dr. Bluestein retired as Professor Emeritus from EVMS in 2019, and joined VCU and the VCoA as adjunct professor in 2020. He now lends his past experience in Geriatrics, Primary Care, and Long-term Care as a subject matter expert for our VCU nursing home ECHO, a new ECHO concerning dementia in primary care, and an emerging ECHO program on advance care planning. He is also a coauthor of current and pending presentations and publications.

As I come to the close of this piece, I recall my friendship with a fellow graduate student in the Department of Gerontology, in the late 1990s. This was Sung Hong, who was a Certificate in Aging student in Gerontology and a PhD student in the School of Education. Sung would have been labeled a “non-traditional” student in most of VCU’s academic programs, as he was nearing retirement from a successful career as an architect in South Korea, while living in Virginia. I was one of several mid-career Gerontology students returning to graduate school to enhance our careers. The “non-traditional” moniker isn’t applicable for our field, as our students cover the lifespan. Once Dr. Hong completed his dissertation on aging in place of low-income homeowners in 2003, Dr. Connie Coogle recruited him to become a Research Associate at the VCoA, where he continues to contribute to our research projects 18 years later.

Dr. Hong wrote in the final paragraph of his dissertation acknowledgements, “Finally, I would like to thank the late J. Seo, a mentor and friend, who urged me to go back to campus with pen when other of my colleagues headed for the green with club after taking early retirement.” We are so grateful that we can provide an opportunity for Sung, and our other “retired” Plenary members, the paper on which to use their pens.