



Making An Impact

The Commonwealth Alliance for Rural Colleges:

Making a difference for every student

The path to a college degree is shaped by each student's hopes, dreams and talents. Every individual experiences unique opportunities and achievements along that journey. However students at our institutions reach that milestone, one can be assured that they will give back to their communities in ways great and small.

The students featured in this newsletter reflect that commitment to service. Member institutions with the Commonwealth Alliance for Rural Colleges (CARC) give students extraordinary opportunities to customize programs to meet their interests and needs. Rather than simply open their doors for all who want to come, CARC institutions meet students where they are and create a learning environment designed for student success, community service and lasting relationships.

These are but a few examples of the students who benefit from your financial contributions to CARC. We hope you will enjoy reading their stories.

Peter Blake
Interim President



Bluefield University's Cameron Justis and a Guatemalan martial arts student celebrate after an international competition.

BLUEFIELD UNIVERSITY

Bluefield University's Cameron Justis takes martial arts and ministry to Guatemala

Cameron Justis is a rising junior, business major and discipleship group leader at Bluefield University. He is also a fourth-degree black belt, a certified master in Tang Soo Do and owner of Justis Martial Arts.

For the past two summers, he has joined his martial arts instructor, Grand Master David Sgro, on mission trips to Guatemala. On these trips, Sgro, Justis and their teammates offer Tang Soo Do demonstrations and martial

arts training, distribute food, support the local churches, and share their faith in Jesus.

Martial arts training has drawn much interest and creates opportunities for Justis and others to teach biblical concepts along with self-defense. The martial arts school has become the pride of the community, being the village's first team of any kind to compete at an international competition and winning 22 medals for Team Guatemala. Justis accompanied the team, winning two medals for Team USA.

"I never thought I would have a direct impact on sharing the Gospel with people from a different country and language," Justis said. "This experience showed me that if you submit to the will of God, He will use you in ways you could never imagine."

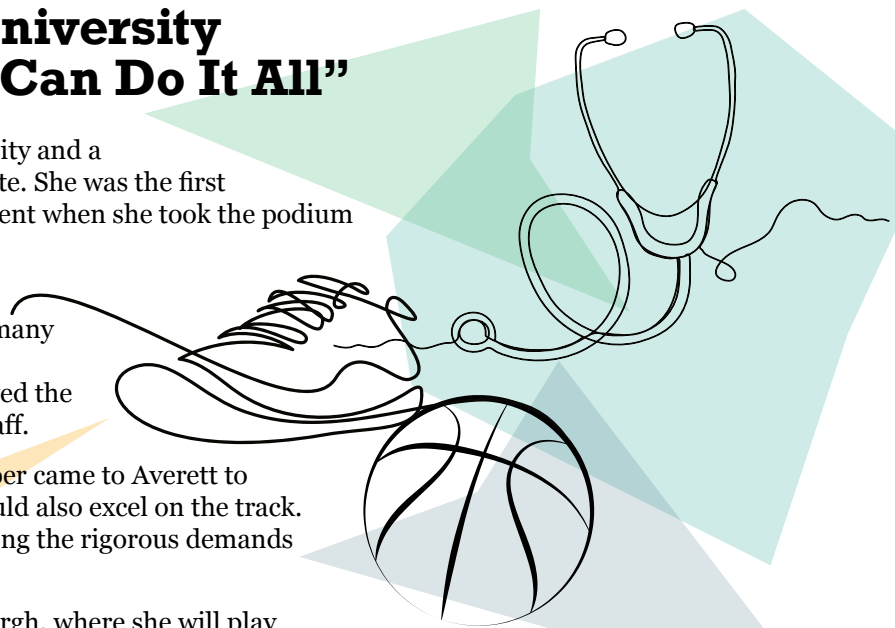
For Talia Prosper, Averett University is truly a place where “You Can Do It All”

Talia Prosper, a 2024 nursing graduate of Averett University and a native of Manassas, is a standout student leader and athlete. She was the first student to have a speaking role at an Averett commencement when she took the podium in the spring ceremony.

As class president, a position she held from her freshman through her senior years, Prosper took great pride in the many innovations and changes she helped bring to the student government. She truly enjoyed her time at Averett and loved the closeness of the people, including students, faculty and staff.

A competitor both in the classroom and athletically, Prosper came to Averett to play basketball, but realized once she got here that she could also excel on the track. She was a valued team member in both sports while juggling the rigorous demands of a nursing major.

Prosper is entering a graduate nursing program in Pittsburgh, where she will play on the basketball team.



Mike Smith '24, a Ferrum College degree 35 years in the making

Mike Smith of Burke was among the graduates who walked across the commencement stage at Ferrum College in May 2024, but his journey was different than most: He began it 35 years ago in 1988, and then life took him on a different path.

“I went on to become an industrial security contractor for the next 30 years and worked with the Departments of Defense, Justice and State; multiple military and law enforcement entities; Virginia State Police Executive Protection Unit; and numerous VIPs. I eventually took over, sold a private security business and changed careers,” Smith said.

He spent the last two and a half years with Fairfax County Public Schools in special education as a paraprofessional, specifically with students with emotional and learning challenges, and he became motivated to earn his teaching license. “Because I began at Ferrum – and I knew my advisor was still there and willing to help – it made perfect sense to complete the work as a Panther,” said Smith.

Professor of English Lana Whited continued her support when Smith returned. “Lana has always been a guiding light and a generous friend to me, and I cannot overstate how much I appreciate the support, encouragement and, most of all, the extraordinary patience,” said Smith.

Smith, who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies, is working toward his Master’s in Special



Mike Smith received his degree from Ferrum College after a 30-year career in the security sector.

Education and accepted a Special Education teacher trainee position at Lake Braddock Secondary School, where he also looks forward to coaching soccer.

Maggie Garber McClary, EMU’s First Music and Peacebuilding Graduate

After her first two semesters at Eastern Mennonite University, EMU, Maggie Garber McClary '24, of Broadway, had an idea for a major that would combine the two areas she loved studying most: music and peacebuilding. “I approached [EMU Music Professor] Benjamin Bergey and asked him, ‘What would it look like to pair them?’ He told me, ‘This is crazy, but there’s this major I’ve been working on.’ It was this moment of total serendipity.”

In 2019, Bergey began developing an undergraduate music and peacebuilding major following his dissertation work on the topic. He had been seeking approval to add the major when McClary approached him with her idea. The first-of-its-kind major, available only at EMU, trains students to creatively transform conflict by using music to build common ground, facilitate healing and create a space of storytelling. It was formally added to EMU’s list of majors in 2021.

McClary became the first graduate, of the major in May. Bergey said McClary is “a wonderful first graduate as she exemplifies the ethos of the major. Maggie is deeply



Maggie Garber McClary was the first graduate in a new music and peacebuilding major at Eastern Mennonite University.

empathetic, seeking to listen and care well for others. She cares about justice at any level of life and infuses music into all she does.”

CARC welcomes Interim President Peter Blake and Bluefield University President Dr. Steven Peterson

The former longtime director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) has been selected to serve as Interim President of the Commonwealth Alliance for Rural Colleges (CARC). Peter Blake began his new leadership position in May.

“I am excited to join a team whose mission is to expand access to affordable and high-quality education,” said Blake, who recently retired after serving 12 years as SCHEV director. “The institutions and the students they serve improve lives and communities across Virginia.”

Blake succeeds CARC President Carthan Currin who left in March after multiple years of dedicated service on the CARC board and as the organization’s president since 2020.

You can reach Blake at pablake88@gmail.com.

CARC also welcomes Dr. Steven Peterson as the 10th president of Bluefield University. Dr. Peterson comes from Houston Christian University, in Houston, Texas, where he served as Vice President for Online/Digital Learning.

“I am honored to be joining Bluefield University at such a pivotal time in its history,” said Dr. Peterson. “I look forward to working with the entire Bluefield community to build on the strong foundation already in place and to explore new opportunities for growth and innovation.”

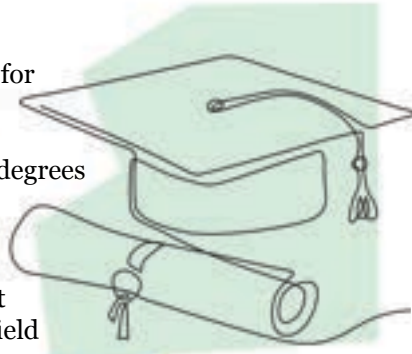
Dr. Peterson succeeds Dr. David Olive, who served as Bluefield’s president for 17 years.

CARC institutions award over 1,000 degrees in spring commencement ceremonies

Commonwealth Alliance for Rural Colleges member institutions collectively awarded just over 1,000 degrees to students in spring commencement ceremonies. After beginning their studies at

Averett University, Bluefield University, Eastern Mennonite University and

Ferrum College in the bleak, COVID-19-ravaged days of 2020, members of the class of 2024 celebrated their achievements in what is for many of them their first traditional graduation ceremony.

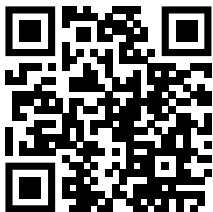


Graduates received messages from leaders across the business and political spectrum. Dr. Gregory L. Robinson, retired NASA pioneer whose leadership salvaged the James Webb Space Telescope program, spoke at Averett University. At Bluefield University, speakers were Dr. Wayne Faison, the first minority Executive Director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, and Dr. Allen Jessee, Pastor of Regional & Global Networks, Highlands Fellowship Church. Jose Koshy, business leader, philanthropist and advocate for international students and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion causes, was speaker at Eastern Mennonite University. And the Hon. Winsome Earle-Sears, Lt. Governor of Virginia, was speaker at Ferrum College.

The successful conclusion of students' studies, however, was not the only cause for celebration. In addition to graduation, Ferrum College inaugurated its 13th President, Dr. Mirta Martin, on Saturday, May 4th.

"It is with profound gratitude, humility and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today as the newly invested 13th president of Ferrum College. I am honored to have the extraordinary privilege to lead this institution into the next chapter of its distinguished history," Dr. Martin said.

Make an Impact



Donate online by scanning the QR Code or by visiting CommonwealthAlliance.org

Mail a check to Commonwealth Alliance at PO Box Richmond, VA 23230

Endowment opportunities

In addition to annual giving and sponsorships, CARC gives donors the opportunity to contribute to three recently established endowment funds. The Blocker Foundation Fund supports students from Hampton Roads attending one of the CARC institutions. The Betty Jolly Endowed Scholarship Fund supports Virginia students with financial need who have a commitment to service and leadership. The American Electric Power Fund supports students from regions of the state served by Appalachian Power. Anyone interested in learning more about these funds should contact Interim President Peter Blake at pablake88@gmail.com.

P.O. Box 6893, Richmond, VA 23230 (804) 918-9351
www.commonwealthalliance.org

CARC

INTERIM PRESIDENT

Peter A. Blake

BOARD OFFICERS

Brad N. Hall, Chair

Karen R. Jackson, Vice-chair

Elizabeth G. Povar, Immediate Past Chair

INSTITUTIONAL PRESIDENTS

Dr. Tiffany M. Franks

Averett University

Dr. Steven Peterson

Bluefield University

Dr. Susan Schultz Huxman

Eastern Mennonite University

Dr. Mirta Martin

Ferrum College

BOARD MEMBERS

Jeannie P. Baliles

Roy E. Bucher, Jr.

Benjamin Dessart, Esq.

Harold E. Johnson, Esq.

Viren R. Kapadia

Charles M. Kelley

Richard W. Loving

Frederick V. Martin

J. Lee E. Osborne, Esq.

Adam T. Peachee

Brooks Powell

John G. Rocovich, Jr., Esq.

Judith R. Trumbo