A native of southwestern Virginia, Leanna Blevins (PhD 2004) felt compelled, as a doctoral student, to try to figure out why some people in communities like her hometown attended college while others did not. For her dissertation research, Blevins focused on rural students in Virginia and their access to and persistence in public colleges and universities. As she approached graduation, she started looking for jobs that would enable her to make a difference in the lives of the students she studied. When she first heard about a new college that was being developed in Martinsville, she was skeptical at first, but she quickly decided it was an exciting opportunity. “What better place,” she decided, “to put my money where my mouth is?”

The idea for a new college came about in 1999, when state senator Charles Hawkins proposed a university and led a legislative study commission on the feasibility of bringing a four-year, public university to Virginia’s Southside region. In 2004, the same year Blevins was hired, development of the college gained significant momentum when the Harvest Foundation of the Piedmont offered a $50 million contribution towards the establishment of a state-supported, baccalaureate-level college in Martinsville and Henry County. Following a study by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and a lot of work from local community leaders and residents, former Governor Mark Warner included $1.5 million in his 2005-2006 budget for the development of higher education in Southside. A planning commission was formed and in late 2005, the commission announced the name for the new institution, as well as their selection for executive director. The New College Institute (NCI), led by Barry M. Dorsey (PhD 1980), was on track to begin offering classes in fall 2006.

As associate director of NCI, Blevins is primarily focused on educational outreach, although she admits that she “wears a lot of hats.” Now several months into its first year of operation, NCI offers the third and fourth years of baccalaureate degree programs through partnerships with several state colleges and universities, as well as selected master’s degrees that meet regional needs. To recruit new students, Blevins overseas a team of “knowledge managers,” NCI staff members who work with local residents to help them understand the value of a college education and to assist them in reaching their educational goals. By sending staff members directly into the community, Blevins said, NCI is hoping to change the educational culture. “We want to take out that intimidation factor and just have one person who you can feel comfortable with and get to know.”

The response from the community, Blevins
**Center Students**

**Alexis Andres** and **Marc Shook** presented at the Southern Association for College Student Affairs conference in November. Their presentation was entitled “In the Huddle: Insight on Student Staff Supervision for Rookies and Veterans.”

**Troy Buer** attended the 31st Annual Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference in Anaheim, California, in November. He chaired the “College Effectiveness and Student Satisfaction” session and was selected to participate in the pre-conference graduate student policy seminar. He and his wife Courtney welcomed a son, Samuel Scott Buer, on December 27.

**Brian Cullaty** was selected to join Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership honor society for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni that recognizes and encourages superior scholarship, leadership, and exemplary character.

**Carolyn Livingston** was named assistant to the senior vice president and dean for campus life at Emory University.

**Matt Newman** was named assistant dean in the College of Arts and Sciences at Seattle University.

**Center Alumni**

**Roy W. Baker** (EdD 1991), director of fraternity and sorority affairs in the Office of Student Life in the Division of Student Affairs at Syracuse University, was honored by Delta Chi Fraternity’s international headquarters as the outstanding Greek advisor in the United States for 2006. The award honors Greek life professionals at the university level who support, encourage, motivate, and inspire members of the Greek community.

**Gene Crume** (PhD 2000) has been named president of the Indiana State University Foundation.

**Jeff Doyle** (PhD 2001) was awarded the Al Calarco Commitment to Excellence Award by the North Carolina Housing Officers in November. This award is for housing and residence life professionals who have been in the field for 10 years and made significant contributions to the student affairs profession. In December, Dr. Doyle was honored by the freshman seminar office at Appalachian State University for outstanding service to first-year students.

**Chris Foley** (PhD 2003) co-presented a one-day workshop for curatorial staff members entitled “Fundraising for Libraries, Archives and Museums” at the Association for College and Research Libraries’ annual rare book and manuscript pre-conference in Austin, Texas, in June 2006.

**Dennis Gregory** (EdD 1987) was selected for a three-year term as editor of the *College Student Affairs Journal*. In November, he made two co-presentations at the 2006 Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) conference in Jacksonville, Florida: “Legal Issues Update: What Are the Hot Legal Issues Facing Higher Education?” and “CAS and SACSA: Going the Distance to Provide Self-Evaluation.” In addition, he co-presented “Going the Distance: Providing Opportunities for Low-Income and Minority Students” at the 2006 Virginia Student Services conference in Wintergreen.

**Patti Helton** (PhD 2000) was appointed to the *NASPA Journal* editorial board for a three-year term.
Tom Jennings (PhD 1993) has been named senior development officer for special projects in the UVA development and public affairs division. He is responsible for pan-university initiatives in the sciences, the arts, and historic preservation. Dr. Jennings presented a program at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District III conference in February titled “Take the High Road,” a session for newcomers to the advancement field on the topics of ethics, professionalism, and best practices. At the same conference, he also served on a panel called “Ask the Professional,” designed for new advancement officers.

Tim Millard (EdD 1995) recently completed a trip to Klaipeda, Lithuania, during which he served as a consultant to senior management at Lithuania Christian College. Dr. Millard, who is currently director of institutional research and planning at Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York, assisted the Lithuanian college with their strategic planning process and also helped them establish an office of institutional research.

John B. Noftsinger, Jr. (EdD 1997) was recently selected to present at a global migration round table to be held at Oxford University in July 2007. Round-table membership is limited to an interdisciplinary group of approximately 40 scholars who have a particular interest and expertise in global migration. In addition, Dr. Noftsinger was the lead author of a book entitled Understanding Homeland Security: Policy, Perspectives, and Paradoxes, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Dennis Parks (EdD 1982) was elected president of the Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) at their annual international meeting in October. Previously, he had served as the organization’s regional chair, director-at-large, and vice president.

Larry Rowley (PhD 1999) is undertaking a two-year research study of African-American male achievement and college aspirations, funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education. In addition, he was recently elected to the inaugural edition of Marquis Who’s Who of Emerging Leaders. He also published the lead editorial in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day edition of the Ann Arbor News, in which he discussed the importance of the National Martin Luther King Memorial currently being built in Washington, D.C.

Leslie Sadler (PhD 1999) started a new position at Cornell University in July 2006 as associate director for academic initiatives for campus life. She is responsible for three major areas: directing the faculty-fellows and faculty-in-residence programs, directing assessment initiatives for campus life, and creating and directing additional academic initiatives to bridge in- and out-of-class learning for students.

Andrea Spreter (PhD 2006) accepted a new position as director of new-program development at the UVA School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Center Faculty

Dr. John Bunch has been appointed by Governor Tim Kaine to the Frontier Culture Museum’s board of trustees. Dr. Bunch, who has degrees in history, folklife, and education, teaches the Museums and Education courses at the Curry School and at the UVA School of Continuing Professional Studies.

Dr. Jennifer de Forest presented a paper at the October History of Education Society meeting in Ottawa as part of a panel on philanthropic foundations and college students. Her paper was entitled “Conservative Philanthropy on Campus: Educating Policymakers and Pundits.” She also contributed a chapter in a collected edition published to mark the 100th anniversary of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Education, edited by Ray Bachetti and Tom Ehrlich. The chapter was coauthored with Ellen Condliffe Lagemann and is entitled “What Andrew Carnegie Might Want to Tell Bill Gates.”
**Dr. Margaret Miller** attended both a special meeting on retirement and the annual meeting of the TIAA/CREF Institute as a TIAA/CREF fellow. The TIAA/CREF Institute also published a paper she wrote called “The Value of Learning.” Dr. Miller has served on a variety of panels and given a number of speeches on the National Forum on College-Level Learning since the project was mentioned by the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education. She gave a presentation at a meeting of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), served on a panel of experts that opened the Secretary’s invitational meeting on accreditation and accountability, and spoke at the Council on Higher Education Accreditation’s (CHEA) annual meeting and Emerging Issues Forum. In addition, Dr. Miller chaired the judging panel of the 2007 Hesburgh Awards and served on the panel of judges for the Virginia B. Smith Award, consulted with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) on assessment, attended the release of *Measuring Up 2006*, and participated in a series of discussions on the future of *Measuring Up* with the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. She did presentations on writing for *Change* magazine, which she continues to edit, at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) national conference. She also joined the advisory board of Inside Track, a for-profit counseling program for at-risk college students.

**Dr. Brian Pusser**, along with John Downey (2004) and J. Kirsten Turner (2003), co-authored an article for the Winter 2006 issue of *New Directions for Community Colleges*. The issue was devoted to the mission of community colleges in the 21st century, and the article was entitled “Competing Missions: Balancing Entrepreneurialism with Community Responsiveness in Community College Continuing Education Divisions.”

*Blevins, continued from p. 1*

said, has been overwhelmingly positive. In fact, NCI has already exceeded its target enrollment of 50 students, and with two new programs starting in the fall, enrollment will be up to 100 students. One of the new programs, an M.Ed. in K-12 administration and supervision, is being offered in partnership with the Curry School. “We were thrilled when the faculty at the Curry School approved the program to become a full-time program,” said Blevins. “The UVA name resonates well here, as it does everywhere.”

Blevins is particularly excited about the collaboration with the Curry School because she has found her own experience at UVA so invaluable. Dr. Annette Gibbs, she said, was helpful in thinking through the decision to take the position at NCI. “I think about her all the time in making professional decisions. I also talked with Peg Miller a lot about the politics of Virginia higher education, and I’m grateful to her for helping me work through some issues.” She said that her classes in management and planning, organization and governance, and finance have been particularly applicable to her work at NCI. “I didn’t realize how helpful they were going to be until I was actually in the situation. So much of getting NCI started had to do with politics and finance.” She also said that her internships were one of the best parts of her education because “they were truly hands-on and prepared me for all of the hats that I’m wearing now, and I feel like that jump-started my ability to take on this challenge.”

Looking ahead, NCI is in the process of negotiating additional degree programs through partner institutions, as well as developing summer camps for area youths. One of the things Blevins is most proud of is a project called “Family University,” an outreach initiative that will work through community churches. “It’s a great way to reach a segment of the community, in a setting where they already feel comfortable, so we can spread the word about what it means to get a college degree and pursue an education. Too often, we become comfortable with the ways we’ve always done things, and we need to start taking different avenues to talk to folks.”

“We have a lot of good things going on,” Blevins said. “It’s wonderful, but it’s surreal. For it all of this to come to pass, it’s so gratifying to know that I’ve been a part of such a fantastic mission for Southside Virginia.”
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Amy Swan, Editor
Dr. Margaret Miller, Advisor

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