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10 Professors Win Mead Grants to Foster Faculty-Student Interaction

October 14, 2008 – Dreams are coming true for 10 University of Virginia faculty members, recipients of this year's **Mead Endowment** grants.

Each year, the Mead Endowment funds faculty members' "Dream Ideas" for continuing the U.Va. tradition of fostering close student-faculty relationships, a tradition exemplified by music professor emeritus Ernest "Boots" Mead, for whom the endowment is named.

A teacher, mentor and friend to hundreds of students during his more than 35 years at U.Va., Mead was honored upon his retirement in 1996 by former students, who created The Mead Endowment to fund programs proposed by faculty that perpetuate Mead's legacy.

"We wanted to create a living legacy instead of a memorial," said Tom Darbyshire, Mead endowment chairman and 1982 University alumnus.

The endowment not only honors Mead but also expands Thomas Jefferson's vision of putting students and faculty together," Darbyshire said.

"He was making an architectural statement about an educational vision of students and faculty having a life of living and learning together," he said. "Those of us touched by that special relationship with faculty wanted to be sure that this unique tradition not only continues but thrives."

Mead, who just turned 90, still participates in various student organizations and teaches each spring, at students' requests, what has become known as "Mr. Mead's Seminar," a student-run class that explores numerous topics during the semester. Many former students still keep in touch with Mead.

Since the inception of the Mead Endowment, faculty and students have spent time together in casual get-togethers and in-depth explorations of academic ideas. By funding the "dreams" the Mead Endowment insures the continuation and enhancement of the U.Va. experience.

One student wrote on the Mead Endowment Web site that a history professor took students out for a James Bond movie and pizza.

"I have never heard of my friends at other schools having such interesting interactions with faculty, and I really think that it makes U.Va. unique," the student wrote.

This summer, Heather Warren, associate professor of religious studies, was able to realize her dream. She took a group of students on a 57-mile hike along the Appalachian Trail and climbed Mount Katahdin in Maine as part of a class on "The History and Meaning of Religious Pilgrimage."

It was a learning experience for students and teacher alike.

"Living out my 'dream idea' enabled me to appreciate far more fully that education is an adventure with other learners, which, when undertaken in the heart, mind, body and soul, leads to deeper understanding as well as appreciation for the mystery of God, creation and each other," Warren said. *(For more from Heather Warren, see the bottom of this article)*

The Mead Endowment honored 10 faculty members at the seventh annual Mead Endowment dinner in the Rotunda on Sept. 20 by funding their dream proposals.

- **Alev Erisir, associate professor of psychology, and Ignacio Provencio, associate professor of biology,** will take students to the prestigious annual meeting of the Society of Neuroscience, where they will have the opportunity to experience a professional organization in action and mingle with some of the 35,000 scientists who attend.

- **Assistant professor of chemistry Linda Columbus'** interest in promoting students sharing ideas led her to propose the creation of a weekly lunch seminar for 12 students involved in research. Her plan is to provide space for the students to not only share their work but also hone critical thinking and communication skills.

- Joan of Arc is the focus of a class that **assistant professor Deborah McGrady** teaches in the Department of French Languages and Literature. She will use her Mead fund to take students on three excursions. They will travel to Baltimore's Walters Art Gallery to study the rich collection of medieval manuscripts and armor similar to that worn by Joan of Arc. A visit to The Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Va., will provide Shakespeare's depiction of Joan of Arc in his "Henry IV," part one. A visit to Washington, D.C., to tour medieval art at the National Gallery and the gardens at the National Cathedral will round out the expanded view of Joan of Arc and the times in which she lived.

- "Know Thyself" is a popular course taught by **Mitchell Green, Cavaliers' Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor of Philosophy.** The class brings together teachings from philosophy, neuroscience, psychology and Buddhism. Thanks to the Mead Endowment, Green will be able to recruit students from the class to join him in an outreach venture he is calling "Know Thyself on Two Wheels," that will require training physically, mentally and spiritually for participation in a 150-mile bike ride, the MS 150, to raise funds for multiple sclerosis research.

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Additional Resources:

- [The Mead Endowment](#)
- [U.Va. Professor, Students to Hike AT As Part of Course on Religious Pilgrimage](#)

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- **Assistant professor of Slavic languages and literature Margarita Nafpaktitus** will take five students in her Russian and Soviet film course to the Russian Film Symposium in Pittsburgh to join film scholars in screenings and discussions.
- At the request of students interested in exploring sustainable living, **Deborah Lawrence, associate professor of environmental sciences** and an expert on rain forest ecosystems, will meet with students over a series of meals to develop a course on the topic that will include the exploration of issues of ecology, politics, equity economics and religion.
- **Sound designer Michael Rasbury, assistant professor of drama**, will explore Goethe's quote that "architecture is frozen music" with an interdisciplinary group of students. Together they will explore the creative process and various ways to express what the eye sees and the ear hears.
- Berlin will be the classroom for an expanded group of students in a J-Term study abroad program led by **Chad Wellmon, assistant professor of German**.
- **The John Colley Fund**, under the auspices of the Mead Endowment, was created in 2007 to honor the former Darden faculty member, who, like Mead, left a legacy as a teacher and friend.
- Thanks to the fund, **Darden assistant professor of business administration Mary Margaret Frank** will explore HIV/AIDS in the United States and abroad with graduate students across business, public health, nursing and medicine. Her goal is to bring awareness of the impact of HIV/AIDS on minority communities and nurture the students' talents as future leaders to improve the welfare of humanity.

For more information about the Mead Endowment and the experiences of past recipients visit its [Web page](#).

2007 Mead Endowment recipient **Heather Warren** took a group of students on a 57-mile hike along the Appalachian Trail and climbed Mount Katahdin in Maine as part of a class on "The History and Meaning of Religious Pilgrimage." Warren put together a slideshow of her journey, [which you can access here](#). (power point file / 9 mb)



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