

VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION ADVOCACY DAY (VHEAD)
JANUARY 15, 2009
RICHMOND

VHEAD is organized by the American Association of University Professors, Virginia Conference, and the Faculty Senate of Virginia. This is a day when faculty from around Virginia converge on the General Assembly in order to advocate regarding higher education issues. We technically cannot be lobbyists since that requires a registration procedure.

About 35-40 faculty and six students gathered early at VCU where their Provost provided space and refreshments. We started off with a presentation by the Director of the State Council of Higher Education, Dan LaVista, who talked about higher education issues in general as well as specific house and senate bills impacting higher education. Next we discussed the position papers generated by our faculty organizers. We were given assignments (which senators, assemblyman we were to visit) and gathered materials.

The materials included a tote bag (“Higher Education—Invest and Grow”) which we were to give to each representative. The bag contained a copy of our position papers and an apple (apple from the “teachers”).

In a typical year, we talk to our representatives (or their legislative aides) about particular bills. This time, our main position paper addressed the funding shortfall and how it has and would in the future impact higher education. The title of that position paper was “Higher Education: Protect the Investment.” In essence, we told them that we realized funds were tight, but that the General Assembly should try to protect higher education and not further damage what is an essential industry. We said that tuition is too high now and it is likely to increase causing additional stress on Virginia families who are already hurting. We reminded them that Virginia needs to increase degree production by 34% by 2025 to meet needs and remain competitive in the world and that demographically, the number of high school graduates will continue to increase for another 10 years and that they will need even more higher education resources. We emphasized the role of the community colleges and asked them to remember that curriculum planning and adjustment are viewed nationally as the primary responsibility of the faculty. We reminded them that base adequacy (money needed to keep us running at an acceptable level) was now at 90%. Lastly, we talked about the value of the Virginia Retirement System to state employees and that it also needed to be funded properly.

We also presented the Mike Harris Award to Senator John Edwards (from Virginia, not North Carolina). The Senator chairs the Higher Education sub-committee, and last year introduced on the behalf of Virginia faculty a bill which would provide the option to switch to VRS after ten-years of service. He also submitted the ORP annual contribution bill, and the dependent children tuition benefit bill. He also has been a strong advocate of community college assistance, and is helpful when there is legislation we oppose. His district includes Virginia Tech, Virginia Western Community College, and Hollins University.

Submitted by Ron Mollick