

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

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YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Averett University, Danville, VA

Founded in 1859 as a school for young women, **Averett University** became a fully accredited, co-educational, four-year college in 1971. Today the University is a diverse and dynamic institution that serves students of all ages, offering more than 30 undergraduate majors, minors and special programs, along with 5 graduate programs. Dedicated to preparing students to serve and lead as catalysts for positive change, the University's historic main campus is embedded in the heart of southern Virginia with regional campuses throughout Virginia and online. Averett enrolls almost 1,500 students, including 965 traditional undergraduates from 24 states and 20 countries, and almost 600 adult learners in the non-traditional programs. The University offers 16 NCAA Division III teams for both men and women and competes in the USA South Conference. Averett became a member of YWMC in 2017.



With about half of its undergraduate students eligible for Pell grants, Averett is challenged with identifying programs and initiatives to help low-income students succeed academically and socially. The Office of Student Success oversees a number of these programs, including its new Summer Success Academy, designed to provide students with the opportunity to get on campus early to become familiar with the University's resources, meet people and develop the skills to make the most of their college education. The Cougar Success Program is a two-semester program that works to increase student retention and progression. By fostering academic success and personal development among students through success coaching and tutoring

assistance, the Program helps students successfully transition from high school to college. The Office of Student Success, in conjunction with Student Life and the Center for Community Engagement and Career Competitiveness (CCECC) at Averett, recently established the Cougar Cares Program, which provides students with access to necessities such as professional business clothing, emergency food items, hygiene products and textbook assistance.



Spearheaded by the efforts of the CCECC, community volunteerism is integrated into the student experience from the time students first enter the college. All first-years are provided with a variety of unique service events each academic year. A Summer Bridge Program provides a tour of Danville's service sites and engages first-year, at-risk students in a service project to help them envision how their education impacts the community. Also, a Conference on Freshman Engagement and Empowerment is offered each fall and provides students with several workshops ranging from diversity and inclusion, mental awareness, food security, youth and mentoring, poverty, personal branding, communication skills, democratic dialogue, etc.

The CCECC also functions as a regional hub, linking students and faculty with community partners to create distinct learning experiences, internships and career and service opportunities. The CCECC leads the region's Engaged Employers initiative, in which 42 local companies encourage and allow their employees to dedicate one full day a year to serving the community using service leave time. The CCECC identifies service projects for participating organizations, as well as the community at large, through its volunteer software, Serve365, enabling users to identify community needs and projects that match their interests and availability. In 2015 the CCECC also helped establish the Career Development Advisory Committee (CDAC), comprised of local business and industry representatives who work in tandem with the CCECC to coordinate the University's career development efforts and more effectively align career pathways with substantive learning experiences.

Institutional Resources/Practices

STEM Scholars Program

On April 4–5, 2019, **Coker College** (SC), **College of Saint Elizabeth** (NJ), **Ferrum College** (VA), **Mercy College** (NY), and the Yes We Must Coalition hosted the inaugural STEM Scholars in Biology (SSB) Institute in Research Triangle Park, NC. The Institute was part of a project funded by a grant to the four institutions over five years from the National Science Foundation and brought together over 100 first year low-income biology students, STEM faculty and professional staff for two days of planned activities. The goal of the grant, *Collaborative Research: Institutional Collaboration to Recruit, Retain and Graduate Low-Income Students in Biology*, is to provide low-income biology students at each institution with scholarship support over a period of four years, along with a series of interventions supported by best practices research.

As part of the experience, students and their science faculty took part in a tour of two industry sites operated by BASF Corporation, the largest chemical company in the world, during which they heard from a variety of scientists involved in research and development of innovative biotechnology and chemistry-related solutions for agricultural issues. In addition, Metacognition Workshops for students and faculty were led by cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Amy Overman of Elon University. Dr. Overman shared the importance of developing a positive growth mindset among students, which involves promoting their understanding that intelligence is modifiable and that they can enhance their learning through the application of a series of specific strategies. Students also participated in roundtable discussions with biology faculty from each of the four schools as well as invited guest scientists who described their journeys from college and graduate school to their present careers. Dr. Saara Mansouri of BioAgilytix noted after the session, "The students were so excited to hear my story of how I became a scientist; it was enjoyable for me to interact with such a diverse group of emerging adults and budding scientists." Professional development sessions for faculty were also conducted regarding challenges and successes, strategies to improve gateway courses and the role of e-portfolios in student development as well as in providing a valuable assessment tool

for the project as a whole. The SSB Institute culminated with a keynote address by Dr. Jessica Barron of Frontline Solutions. Dr. Barron spoke of the value and impact of meaningful and authentic efforts involving diversity, equity, and inclusion. She emphasized to the students the importance of having a “home team” consisting of friends and family members who can help navigate the strong headwinds facing students from non-privileged backgrounds.

A similar Institute will be held each spring over the next three years for this cohort of students. For further information contact: Joe Flaherty, Professor of Biology, Coker College. jflaherty@coker.edu.

YWMC Webinar Series

The next YWMC Webinar in our Spring Series will focus on Promoting Success among Transfer Students and is scheduled for Friday, May 17, at 12pm ET. To register for this event, go to:

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_xnc5qRRQT3Cp39lk39v9zA

Recordings and accompanying slides of past webinars are available on the YWMC Website (<https://yeswemustcoalition.org/publications-webinars/#webinars>).

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. Send brief descriptions to Nia Lane Chester, YWMC Program Manager. niachester@gmail.com.