

RADFORD UNIVERSITY EXPLORES NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE



Helping students succeed is the core of a new, million-dollar initiative at Radford University. REALISE: Realising Inclusive Science Excellence is a new program designed to develop learning environments that are student-ready, welcoming and inclusive. To achieve this, REALISE will provide training and support for faculty and students to engage in more project-based classroom activities. Students will be supported through a peer role modeling program as they transition into a more project-based classroom environment. Faculty will be offered professional development to support efforts to embed inclusive pedagogy into courses, and expand project-based learning, including Radford University's Maker opportunities, into their courses. REALISE will also hire three recent Ph.D. recipients who wish to become undergraduate science educators as Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows. The fellows will participate in the professional development opportunities offered to Radford's permanent faculty and receive mentoring as they gain hands-on teaching experience. As the postdoctoral fellows are teaching some of Radford's natural science courses, Radford's permanent faculty will have the opportunity to receive a temporary reduction in teaching responsibilities providing them time to participate in professional development and revise the courses they routinely teach.

The REALISE program held a Kick-off event and Expo on August 25 at the SELU Conservancy Barn where goals, concepts, and inspiration were shared with faculty and administrators. The five-year program is enabled by a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) - the largest private, nonprofit supporter of science education in the United States.

Radford University President Brian O. Hemphill recognized the significance of this grant in his opening remarks by stating "I would like to acknowledge the Howard Hughes Medical Institute for the deep gratitude that we have for allowing us to be a part of this effort." He added "This shows a great deal of faith that they have in this University."

Dr. Hemphill also addressed the potential impact on the Radford University Community. "This collaborative program will ensure that more students have success. You will help Radford fulfill our

vision,” President Hemphill said. “Your efforts show the university community uniting. I commend the bold thinking and innovative teaching that will come.”

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Graham Glynn expanded the impact of the REALISE program stating “It is in Universities like Radford where we are comprehensive and where we are teacher-scholars, that we are going to transform education.” He added “Too often, students get the impression that it has all been discovered. We need to share with them the excitement about the lack of boundaries for the future. Project and research-based teaching does that.”

“REALISE takes a large, holistic approach to inclusive excellence by which we hope to affect our students, faculty, curriculum and the institution,” said Associate Professor of Biology and REALISE Program Manager Tara Phelps-Durr.

Dr. Phelps-Durr and the REALISE leadership team of ACSAT Dean Orion Rogers, Assistant Provost for Academic Programs Jeanne Mekolichick and Professor of Biology Jeremy Wojdak, will focus Radford’s efforts on enhancing introductory-level courses that introduce students early on to STEM fields, piquing interest and directing students toward related career options.

Embedding more project-based activities into the classroom is a key component to the success of the REALISE effort. During the kick-off and Expo, faculty shared items and materials they have used to engage students in current programming as well as the challenges and opportunities that exist in bringing these elements to fruition. REALISE will help provide assistance in the form of training and reassigned time for faculty to become more proficient in maker and other project-based learning projects that promote learning and inclusivity in the classroom.

Radford University is just one of two higher education institutions in Virginia to be selected to the prestigious HHMI Inclusive Excellence program to increase the capacity of colleges and universities to engage all students in successful science practices. The initiative targets undergraduates who enter four-year institutions via non-traditional pathways.

The HHMI considered pre-proposals from 511 schools from across the United States. Over multiple stages of peer-review by scientists and science educators, HHMI identified Radford as one of 24 schools nationwide for an Inclusive Excellence 2017 award.