Looking Back
To Define The Future

Students Help Local Teens GEAR UP To Graduate

Whether acting as after-school tutors explaining the angles of geometry at area high schools or as guides at SU during campus visit practices for at-risk students, Salisbury University students have made a major impact on the lives of a group of local high schoolers in the past seven years. Education students and students from a broad-range of disciplines served as tutors, role models and friends to students in Somerset County schools as part of the

Salisbury UNIVERSITY

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).

After receiving a federal grant matched by the state to fund the GEAR UP program some seven years ago, Somerset County has benefited from this initiative to increase the number of college-bound students in low-income communities. The program focused on the class of 2006, beginning in the sixth grade at two area high schools. Within the program, SU students provided in-class and after-school tutoring in the areas of math and science and later expanded the program to include other disciplines like Spanish.

Workshops such as "The Math and Science of Sound" were held for GEAR UP students on the Salisbury campus, along with the week-long Academic Summer Kamp (ASK). When students neared the end of their high school careers, SU students exposed them to college opportunities with campus visits at Salisbury and workshops on filling out college and scholarship applications.

Michael Bardzell, an associate professor in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, is the current director of the SU component of the GEAR UP program and past math coordinator. Bardzell noted that SU's students were "pleased with the progress made in one-on-one tutoring" and the education majors especially noted that the experience "really helped them to understand the educational process."

Hard Work For A Bright Future

The efforts of both groups of students paid off when beaming graduates received their diplomas amid thundering applause at the 2006 commencement exercises. The exhilarated graduates and their proud families had more to celebrate than just the completion of their secondary education, however. Approximately 80 percent of the graduates were headed to college

in the fall, a huge increase compared to the fewer than 50 percent of college-bound graduates in the late 1990s. Thanks to the program at the two schools, some 150 students out of the initial 198 participants graduated. To assist them in their post-secondary careers, over half a million dollars in scholarships were awaiting the approximately 120 graduates, many of who are future Sea Gulls.

With the GEAR UP program in place for the Class of 2011, Bardzell is eager to see how the program will grow through this second cohort and perhaps even improve upon the 30 percent jump in Somerset's college-bound graduates rate.

Colonial Chesapeake Mystery Solved

Michael Scott, an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Geosciences, participated in a project tracing Captain John Smith's 1608 voyage on the Nanticoke River. Using modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology, Scott used Smith's map of the Chesapeake Bay—the first of its kind—as well as present-day maps, to pinpoint the probable sites at which Smith landed. Explained Scott: "We found some interesting evidence when we used 'rubber sheeting,' where we mathematically transformed John Smith's representation of the Nanticoke River to today's representation … in essence you stretch and pull Smith's map to fit with points on maps showing today's geography." This evidence led the so-called "John Smith Project" team to announce three sites along the western shore of the Nanticoke where they believed Smith stopped and visited the resident Native Americans, most notably in the vicinity of the present-day town of Vienna, MD.

Shore Soil Stories

Hundreds of years have passed since the first settlers on the Eastern Shore were laid to rest in the tiny cemeteries that appear today in the middle of farmers' fields, deep in overgrown woods or on the sides of dual highways. Season upon season of plantings of such regional crops as tobacco and soybeans have led to soil erosion as evidenced by the lower elevation of the fields surrounding the graveyards.

SU professors took a look at these raised burial grounds and realized that due to the cultural taboo preventing their disturbance, the soil in the oldest cemeteries would date back to the first wave of settlement on the Shore. Samuel Geleta and Brent Zaprowski of the Biological Sciences Department collaborated with Michael Folkoff and Christopher Briand of the Geography and Geosciences Department in a multi-phase project headed up by Geleta to examine the time-capsule-like soil.

The most recent findings indicate that land clearance and farming practices have considerably altered soil chemistry and structure, giving soil a higher pH, higher levels of phosphorus and lower organic matter. According to Folkoff, the study will "determine the nature of the early soils on the Lower Eastern Shore and contribute to our understanding of how human activity is changing the environment of our region."