F E A T U R E

The Class of 2014

The Class of 2014 has already set records at SU. According to the Admissions Office, it is the most diverse AND academically competitive class in University history. For the first time, more than 20 percent come from diverse families. In addition, it is the first incoming class with an average GPA of 3.65 and an average SAT of 1700. That is up nine points from last year!

The 1,250 students also comprise the second largest class in SU history. (Last year’s group was 1,276.) They hail from 20 states and 16 countries.

Some 77 members of the class call recently renovated Manokin Hall “home.” It re-opened last fall after a $6 million update that included the installation of SU’s first geothermal heating and cooling system. Eleven of the students reside on that facility’s “Green Floor,” which is one of eight Living Learning Communities now offered for freshmen. Altogether, 161 students participate in the communities, taking a common course and engaging in social activities outside of class.

Last summer, New Student Experience outdoor programs gave 118 students the chance to build friendships and learn about college, while trying everything from canoeing in Canada to surfing at Assateague.

Incoming students tackled the New Student Reader, A Hope in the Unseen, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ron Suskind. At Convocation, the book’s inspirational main character, Cedric Jennings, shared his own path from D.C. streets to Brown University.

Overall, the Class of 2014 had a successful first semester at SU—some 285 of them made the Dean’s List!

SU education professor Doug DeWitt believes teachers today have to grasp how federal policies and legislation impact their daily classroom routines.

To expose first-year students in his education major Living Learning Community (LLC) to current trends and issues in their field, he, for the past two years, has arranged face-to-face meetings with people in the trenches.

Last fall, his 16 students traveled to the Capitol to talk candidly with Mario Cardona and Amanda Mendoza, legislative staffers who help U.S. Senators Barbara Mikulski and Benjamin Cardin with education-related affairs. They met in a hearing room inside the Russell Office Building and, afterward, toured the White House. Later, the students used Skype video conferencing to ask questions of longtime Washington Post education columnist Jay Mathews.

“Dr. DeWitt gave us once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to meet with important leaders and experts to discuss issues in education today,” said freshman Frank Willingham. “Thanks to him, I now have a deep understanding of the field I am entering.”

Before meeting Mathews, the class read some of his recent columns and screened Waiting for “Superman,” a 2010 documentary that featured him. After seeing the film, which analyzed failures of American public education, one student remarked to DeWitt, “It made me want to be a teacher even more.”

The class also discussed the No Child Left Behind act and the powerful role of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and his Race to the Top grant funding. They dissected “How to Fix our Schools,” a manifesto recently issued by superintendents of major districts nationwide.

“We analyzed key issues and my hope was that, in the process, they also saw another way of actually teaching,” DeWitt said. “It’s not all worksheets and overhead projectors, lectures and quizzes. They watched me model some alternative teaching methods, even before they knew the concepts. I want that to stick with them for their upper-level classes.”

For students, enrolling in the LLC had many perks, including being able to use a brand-new classroom inside their recently renovated residence hall, Pocomoke. Some days, they even met in the building’s lounge. In addition to DeWitt’s course, mandatory for their major, the students also completed a General Education requirement: Professor Melany Trenary’s course on classroom communications.

So engaged in the LLC, the students even opted to start a book club this spring. Their first selection is, of course, a book by Mathews on the two young teachers who started KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools for disadvantaged children.

DeWitt knows there is a need for new teachers who drive the future agenda for education—and he is empowering SU graduates to do just that.