South Lawn Design Nears Completion

The conceptual design phase of the College’s South Lawn Project is nearly complete. Following a spring and summer of changes filled with a series of new architectural proposals that expand the openness and scope of the University’s most ambitious construction project in a century.

According to the latest concepts, which emerged in late April following a presentation by Dean Ed Ayers on a new College curriculum based upon rankings as of the middle of the applicants’ senior year; the final rankings are likely to be higher, Blackburn said.

“We wanted to attract a significant number of Emeritus Society members and to present a program that connected them to the College and the University,” said Donald Laing III (Economics ’69), a member of the College Foundation board of trustees and Emeritus Society chairman. More than 75 individuals—former members of the Alumni Council and College Foundation and their guests—attended an insider’s view of the College today. Activities included cocktails and dinner with President and Mrs. John T. Casteen III at Carr’s Hill, a presentation by Dean Ed Ayers on a new College curriculum and the South Lawn project; an opportunity to meet with current undergraduates and to learn about their research projects; presentations by Leonard W. Sandridge, Jr., the University’s executive vice president and chief operating officer; and Professor Larry J. Sabato (Government ’74), director of U.Va.’s Center for Politics, and a tour of ongoing and proposed capital projects.

According to evaluations completed after the event (for a summary of results, see page three), attendees were enthusiastic about the program. “I have attended many weekend events in Charlottesville and I believe the College Foundation Emeritus Society weekend is the most interesting and informative of the lot,” wrote John P. “Jack” Ackerly (History ’57, Law ’60) former rector of the University. Some attendees expressed interest in renewing their involvement with the College. An alumnus wrote that she would “trade informational sessions for work sessions,” an alumnus asked if there were “any specific projects for Emeritus Society members” to tackle. Others stepped forward to offer assistance.

This type of enthusiasm has inspired Laing to begin planning the second Emeritus Society weekend, scheduled for April 8 and 9, 2005 in Charlottesville. “We believe we have created important momentum for the future,” he said.

Save the Date

Make plans now to attend the second Emeritus Society Weekend in Charlottesville on Friday and Saturday, April 8 and 9, 2005. Blocks of rooms have been reserved at Farmington, (434) 245-6090; Spencers Inn, (434) 245-5000; and Courtyard by Marriott, (434) 917-1700. Rooms also may be available at the Inn’s Executive Inn, (434) 245-2900. See more for details in February.
China Calling; Page Takes the Back Roads
To Study a Young Democracy

When Sara Page was in high school, she returned from a family trip to China fascinated with the language and the culture. But Chinese language classes weren’t available in her hometown of Roanoke, Va. She had to wait until enrolling at U.Va. to immerse herself in all things Chinese.

Page, a fourth-year Echols Scholar who has a double major in government and foreign affairs and Asian studies, recently returned from her second trip in three years to China, where she conducted research on liberal democracy for her Politics Honors thesis.

She became interested in Chinese politics while learning about the Revised Organic Law of Village Committees in Professor Brantly Womack’s Politics of China course. Originally passed in 1987 and reaffirmed a decade later by China’s National People’s Congress, the law permits residents of small villages to elect members to committees through which they voice their opinions and have basic needs met. The committees co-exist with local Communist Party leaders, who remain largely responsible for village government.

“Seventy percent of all Chinese live in villages,” said Page. “I wondered whether the Organic Law is empowering villagers to the extent that a liberal democracy is beginning to rise in the country.”

To answer her question, she traveled to Lijiang, which is located just east of Tibet in Yunnan Province and is Roanoke’s sister city. Supported by a Harrison Undergraduate Research Grant, she also took a job teaching English and lived with a local family. In her free time, she interviewed more than 30 Chinese citizens—from peasants to government officials—to solicit their thoughts on the political climate in their villages.

According to Womack, who helped Page organize her trip, such a journey is not for the faint-hearted. “Usually it would not be possible for an undergraduate to do research in China. One needs guanxi, or connections—people who know you and who know people in China. In Sara’s case, a woman named Pearl Fu living in Roanoke has long-standing connections and could vouch for her and help make arrangements.”

Page also had help from other sources, including Donald Laing III (Economics ’69), Chairman of the College Foundation Emeritus Society, who met her at a Foundation function in Charlottesville and recommended several contacts.

Despite the assistance she received, Page said she learned in China Calling, continued from page 2.

statewide, she had to build many of her own relationships, particularly in remote areas. She often did so by hiring taxi drivers to take her to their home villages and introduce her to local residents. “These men had moved to the city to make a better living, and they were thrilled to have an excuse to be paid for a trip back home,” Page said. “They introduced me to almost everyone in their villages.”

At first, she admitted, she felt nervous asking political questions in a Communist country. But she had little difficulty with the language, thanks to three years of instruction at U.Va. as well as courses she took in Shanghai during the summer of 2002. And now she found the citizens she encountered remarkably willing to talk about government’s role in their lives.

“Sometimes,” she said, “I would grab a bicycle and pedal into the countryside, talking to everyone I met along the way.”

Page’s data, which she has already presented before a conference of the Harvard Project on Asian and International Relations in Shanghai, do not suggest that a Western-style liberal democracy is developing in China. “Village elections are supported by the Communist Party because residents reject corrupt bureaucrats who upset them and incite rebellion,” she said. “By electing leaders they respect, villagers gain more control over their lives, which makes them happier and less likely to rebel against the Party.”

She believes some form of democracy is beginning to take shape in China. “It may not be the type we know in this country,” she said, “but it is satisfying many of the country’s rural residents.”

Emeritus Weekend Gets High Marks

Participants in the inaugural College Foundation Emeritus Society weekend enjoyed the mix of activities and would like to stay involved with the College, according to evaluations returned after the April event.

Over half of the program participants returned surveys, which awarded scores of three (indicating they found that particular session “outstanding/very informative”) to the vast majority of the sessions and scores of two (rating that particular session “average/needs improvement”) to a few. The most popular sessions were the presentations by Dean Ed Ayers and Leonard W. Sandridge, Jr., the University’s executive vice-president and chief operating officer. None of the informational sessions received an average score below 2.7 out of 3, and some even averaged over 3, but several attendees indicated that visualizing the South Lawn project without a model was difficult. A model is expected to be available for the spring meeting.

Attendees also had ideas for future programs. One suggested including a “faculty-student interchange;” another recommended “more contact with College faculty and graduate students” and a session emphasizing the need “for graduate fellowship support.”

Participants believe the Emeritus Society weekend is a good idea. As one wrote, “the idea of emeritus gatherings and keeping the group together is brilliant. Every part of the weekend I attended was well done.”

China Calling, page 2

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