College of Natural Resources and Environment

Leadership Institute
2014-15 Student Cohort

Helping to Develop Tomorrow’s Leaders in Natural Resources and the Environment
Welcome to the Leadership Institute in the College of Natural Resources and Environment. Now in its fifth year, we are well on our way to the goal of establishing the Leadership Institute as a signature experience for students in our college. With 60 students participating to date, we are establishing this unique co-curricular experience as a national model for undergraduate engagement in a leadership experience. Students who participate in the Leadership Institute are gaining valuable skills and knowledge that will help them make a beneficial contribution to any organization. Student testimonials regarding their experience in the Leadership Institute are very compelling and continue to reinforce the value of this unique experience.

The current and future challenges and opportunities across the landscape of natural resources and the environment require a unique blend of scientific know-how and leadership. We want to equip our students with the skills and tools they need to solve critical problems facing society in the management and utilization of our natural resources and in stewardship of the environment. Leadership means working with people to solve problems, create opportunities, and move programs, organizations, and people forward. Leadership is necessary and can happen at every level of every organization.

With the generous support of our donors, we welcome the fifth cohort of students to our Leadership Institute for the 2014-15 academic year. Institute directors Steve McMullin and Brian Bond will be mentoring these students throughout the year. The fall semester will be spent studying leadership styles, leadership profiles, and assessing each student’s own personality type. Between semesters we will travel to Charlottesville and Richmond, Virginia, to meet with state government, state agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Our travel will continue to Washington, D.C., to meet with federal agencies, NGOs, and elected members of the Virginia delegation. In a very busy week of travel, our students will get to experience organizational, political, and agency processes, and leadership at all levels. During spring semester our students will be working on group projects that will require leadership to accomplish their goals.

This unique experience for our students is made possible through the generous contributions of our donors. We could not offer this high impact co-curricular activity without donor support. Thank you to our donors and know that you are making an impact that will last a lifetime for our students.

I hope you enjoy reading the profiles of students participating in our fifth cohort of the Leadership Institute in the College of Natural Resources and Environment — it won’t be long before this generation takes on major responsibilities in managing, protecting, and utilizing our natural resources and stewarding the environment. Leadership will be needed in the natural world, in the political arena, and in the public and private sectors. Our students are preparing to lead.

Warm regards,

Paul M. Winistorfer
Dean
I grew up in Davis, California, a community in the Sacramento Valley that is a lot like Blacksburg — a small town with a major university as its focal point. Fishing became my favorite recreational pursuit in my teen years, and when I discovered that I could make a career in fisheries management, I was ecstatic. I began my undergraduate studies at the University of California at Davis, then transferred to the University of Idaho where I completed B.S. and M.S. degrees in fisheries science. I spent 10 years with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as a fisheries biologist, regional fisheries manager, and, finally, as chief of the Fisheries Management Bureau.

I left Montana in 1989 to get my Ph.D. and teach fisheries techniques at Virginia Tech and have been here ever since. I currently teach a senior-level course, Human Dimensions of Fisheries and Wildlife, and a graduate course, Leadership and Communications for Natural Resource Professionals. I also travel around the country teaching leadership and team-building continuing education workshops for natural resource professionals (mostly with the U.S. Forest Service). My research focuses primarily on workforce planning for natural resource agencies and public involvement and planning for natural resources conservation. I believe that leadership is about service and having influence, regardless of your position, and I love helping people realize their leadership potential.

My wife, Leslie, and I enjoy traveling and spending time in the Maine woods, where Leslie grew up. I love to fly fish for just about anything, including trout, smallmouth bass, and saltwater fish. We have two children and three grandchildren. Our daughter, Emily, is an attorney living in Charlottesville. Our son, Kyle, is associate director of athletics at Christopher Newport University in Newport News.
I grew up in Roanoke, Virginia, where I was an avid hiker and backpacker, greatly enjoying the mountains around town. I have always enjoyed the outdoors and became an avid rock/ice climber and mountain biker while in college. Coming from a family with a long history of engineers, I searched for a way to combine my interest in engineering and manufacturing with my love for nature and the outdoors, finding wood science the perfect fit. I completed my undergraduate degree in forest products at Clemson University and enrolled in an M.S. program at Virginia Tech. I remained at Virginia Tech to complete my Ph.D. in 1998.

I started my academic career at the University of Tennessee, where I was an extension specialist in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries. In 2002, I joined Virginia Tech’s Department of Sustainable Biomaterials (formerly the Department of Wood Science and Forest Products), where I have continued as an Extension specialist but also teach, mentor graduate students, and conduct research. I have spent my entire academic career teaching, researching, and expanding others’ understanding of the properties, manufacture, and use of the most significantly used renewable material — wood.

My scholarly work includes teaching a junior-level course, Wood House, focused on the manufacture of biomaterials used in both structural and non-structural applications. I advise graduate students working in the areas of wood processing, drying, and use. I spend a lot of my time traveling in Virginia and the region working with the wood products industry on solving processing issues and on ways to increase competitiveness. I write articles for several trade journals that focus on wood processing and have become a leading expert on hardwood lumber drying. Over the last few years, I have become more interested in the use of wood as a sustainable and renewable material for meeting society’s material and energy needs. I also have an interest in developing tomorrow’s leaders, who will drive the use and management of our natural resources.

I enjoy spending time with my son, hiking, biking, and living in Blacksburg. I also travel and spend time in snow country with our seven Siberian huskies.
Coming to Virginia Tech, I had no idea that you could major in the field of geography. I always knew I wanted to do something in the environmental field, and when I realized that many applications of geographic information systems (GIS) relate to the environment, I signed up. I have always been in love with the world around me. From a young age, I was afforded the luxury of a unique worldview; my parents work for Initiatives of Change, an international nonprofit promoting peace in the world. As a child, I traveled to Switzerland every summer for a peacebuilding conference. I met people from around the world who shared their experiences with me. I realized that a lot of the conflict in the world is over natural resources. This is why I want to become a leader in natural resources management — to build a lasting, sustainable, peaceful future.

My affinity for the environment around me has led me to double major in geography and environmental science. I am trying to couple environmental analysis from computers with physical science environmental analysis. Arguably, the most important issue facing the world is water quality and scarcity for people and environments. I am in classes such as Environmental Engineering and Physics of Pollution to learn how to quantify pollution in water and soil, and how to remediate such problems. I want to work as an environmental consultant, finding and remediating problems in the environment. I also want to improve human interactions with the environment, minimizing the amount of resources we misuse and throw away. I hope to live in a world where everything can be recycled or composted to make other things, much like natural systems do. I think this has to be done to ensure the future success of humanity in this world.

The best way to achieve these goals is to be a leader in the natural resources field. I believe that the Leadership Institute will empower and guide me to make the important decisions. I believe that with the right direction, I can make a difference. I will learn a lot, from how to communicate orally and in writing to managing people of various psychological types. I am fortunate to be a member of the Leadership Institute and cannot wait for all the opportunities and insights that will come about this year.

Outside the classroom, I am a leader for the alto saxophone section of the Marching Virginians. I also have been a clarinet player for the symphony band at Virginia Tech. I am a brother of Kappa Kappa Psi, the honorary and service band fraternity. I am a big believer in the pillars of Virginia Tech, such as Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). I spend my time serving the university bands and the community in various service projects. I captain my intermural soccer and ultimate Frisbee teams. I love playing, but a bigger passion of mine is to develop tactics and team chemistry in these sports. I dream of becoming a coach, as I love the technical aspects even more than actually playing.
Page Clayton
Packaging Systems and Design

My hometown of Exmore, Virginia, is on the coast and is surrounded by the beautiful Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. I love the sights and sounds of the small woods, farms, and beaches. This is one of the main reasons that I knew I wanted to have a career that could make an impact directly or indirectly to preserve places just like it.

I have always had a hands-on approach to learning new things. However, I’ve never been afraid to compile mountains of data and reference materials in order to make sure that something can be carried out in the best manner possible. I have learned to balance information gathering with the ability to make quick decisions.

When I applied to Virginia Tech, I had no idea of what major I would end up choosing. I tried engineering for a year but quickly found out that it wasn’t for me. I eventually found myself applying to the Department of Sustainable Biomaterials in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, which is where I found the packaging systems and design major. There I learned about how I could reduce natural resource consumption by improving upon everyday product packaging. I started to realize how much of an impact I could have if I continued on this path, so I latched on and ran with it.

Since then, I have become vice president of Virginia Tech’s Institute of Packaging Professionals Student Chapter and participated in an internship with the Packaging Corporation of America. My career goal is to analyze and create product supply chains to make them more optimal and sustainable through extensive performance testing. I look forward to going out into my prospective career after I graduate in the spring, but I’m hoping to expand my communication and leadership skills this year with the Leadership Institute. I want to be able to share my vision of more sustainable supply chains and back it up with self-confidence, which I hope I can build up in the program.
Matthew Cunningham
Geography

The outdoors has always been a passion of mine, and my father always tried to get my family outside to learn skills such as fishing and canoeing. We would go on camping trips and enjoy time exploring the world. It took a while, but there came a point when I began to love being out in the wild. Although geography was hardly a concept I cared about in my youth, I developed an affinity for it. I would spend hours poring over the pages of my family’s National Geographic world atlas. I memorized mountain ranges, borders, cities, and oceans. I reveled in the beautiful cartographic wonders those pages held but never imagined that one day I would major in geography.

Like many Virginia Tech freshmen, I thought I wanted to be an engineer when I first arrived on campus. However, it became clear that it was not really my passion. When I talked with the advisors in the Department of Geography, everything made sense. The descriptions of the courses and the potential jobs after graduation sounded like everything I had dreamed about as a kid as I stared at the pages of that atlas. I immediately signed up. Now here I am, in my senior year, and I am enjoying every class and every opportunity I have been given. I feel like I am at home in geography.

I am a member of the Virginia Tech Corp of Cadets and the Highty-Tighties, and I have absolutely loved my time here. The beautiful campus, the football season, and my outstanding professors in geography have made this experience wonderful. However, the greatest part of it is my fellow Hokies who make every day exciting and fun.

Unlike many of the students in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, I will be commissioning into the U.S. Air Force upon graduation. My hope is to be a pilot, and while I may not be involved directly in a natural resources field, my long-term career aspirations are very much rooted in natural resources. I would love the opportunity to use aviation to get involved in remote sensing, which has become a staple of modern geography. It would also be very appropriate to become involved in geographic or sustainability initiatives during my time in the service. However, I am currently just excited to get the chance to serve in our great armed forces as I await graduation.

Wherever my career takes me, Virginia Tech has had a significant effect on my life and has inspired my love of geography. I hope to have the same effect on others. Maybe my work will inspire the next generation of young geographers who are currently transfixed by the beautiful maps in an atlas.
At a very young age, I had a great affinity for the outdoors. I spent most of my waking hours exploring the woods surrounding my house. As a teenager, I was involved with a Venture Crew, an outdoor club for high-school-aged youth. I went on many incredible trips with the crew, including a week-long backpacking trip in the Wyoming backcountry, a nine-day canyoneering trip in Utah, and many local backpacking, canoeing, and climbing trips. These excursions made me an outdoor recreation enthusiast and gave me a passion for the stewardship of the natural resources I love and enjoy so much.

I chose Virginia Tech because I grew up in Blacksburg; therefore, I grew up a Hokie. I also chose Virginia Tech because the natural resources conservation and recreation management program perfectly matched my interests. The college incorporated my passion for recreation with environmental science. Finally, having been homeschooled, combining school with fun and play was natural and important to me. With my major, I can still have fun with school and blend play with learning.

The past few years, I worked summers at a Boy Scout camp, teaching outdoor skills to youth. I participate in several outdoor and conservation-related groups and organizations. I plan to continue to stay connected to the outdoor community and follow a career path that keeps me outside and allows me to instill a passion for the outdoors in others.

I enjoy leadership and have held leadership roles on the job, in school, and among friends. I hope the Leadership Institute will advance my abilities in dealing with others and in acting as a good leader. I hope to develop as a leader, a team member, and a person. In just the first three weeks of class, I gained many helpful insights and knowledge through the Leadership Institute. I cannot wait to see what else I will learn over the next year!
Ilia Donner  
Forestry

My siblings and I grew up in an orphanage in Vorkuta, Russia. Vorkuta’s northern latitude made the winters dark and the summers short and cold. Although Vorkuta may not have been the best place to grow up, we had nothing to compare it to, thus we thought it was normal. The winters of the Arctic Circle taught us to admire the raw power of the natural world, especially the concept of wearing layers! We looked up at the Aurora Borealis during the longest nights of winter and admired the bright stars speckled between. My three siblings and I were adopted and moved to a small 35-acre farm located in the Upper Shenandoah Valley. The comfort of temperate weather allowed us to enjoy spending the afternoons exploring. It took several summers to acclimate to humid, hot summers of Virginia, but it did not take long for me to love and cherish the natural world around me. I chose to go to Virginia Tech and study in the College of Natural Resources and Environment because of my interest in natural resources. Stargazing as a child and my childhood on our small Virginia farm contributed greatly to my passion for this field.

Virginia Tech’s forestry program has influenced and inspired me to become a natural resources professional who reveres the natural world and kindles other peoples’ interest in natural resources. I hope to make a difference in the conservation of natural resources by teaching others the importance of the natural world to their livelihoods. The only reason I am here today is because of someone else, someone who has taught me, someone who has been kind, someone who cares about others. I would like to pass on what I know, and I hope that I can inspire people the way others have inspired me.

I applied to the Leadership Institute because I would like to work with like-minded individuals, people who share a passion for natural resources. As part of my college experience, the Leadership Institute will also help me to advance my leadership skills. I look forward to working with my peers on a philanthropic project and learning more about working on a productive and successful team. I am honored to be part of a small, distinguished, like-minded group of young people, and I know I will gain much from the experience.
Kaylyn Duda  
Meteorology and Geography

Hiking, running, camping, climbing, and embarking on outdoor adventures excite me. These experiences give me the ability to appreciate the environment recreationally. Volunteering domestically and abroad enables me to appreciate the environment agriculturally. Reading books and learning more about the diverse facets of sustainability allows me to realize how education is incredibly important and necessary.

When I volunteered in both Kentucky and Mexico this past summer, I recognized how immensely the environment affects lives. As a young adult double majoring in meteorology and geography, I possessed knowledge on the background and demographics of the two areas. This knowledge greatly expanded as I engaged the community. In Kentucky, the family I helped resided in a former coal-mining town. In Ensenada, Mexico, I worked with subsistence farmers. How these communities allocated and used natural resources was a reflection of their values.

I value the interconnectedness of sustainability in terms of its environmental, economic, and social components. We are significantly affected not only by the environment but also by the impact others have on the environment. This impact inspires me to learn more about sustainability and environmental ethics.

The Leadership Institute will facilitate and add depth to this learning process. With new knowledge and innovative ideas, I will pursue giving and serving. My majors are supplemented by a pursuit of three minors: Leadership, Spanish, and Diversity and Community Engagement. Graduate school, the Peace Corps, Teach For America, and USAID would all be incredible opportunities for growth, training, and development. I am confident that the Leadership Institute will further prepare me to think critically and communicate effectively. I embrace and look forward to expanding my global view of leadership in order to gain insight into the diversity of sustainable approaches.
Chandler Eaglestone
Wildlife Conservation

I grew up in a small New Hampshire village where I developed an appreciation for the environment, the Boston Red Sox, and Robert Frost. I spent summers on my family's boat "Africa" and over the years have logged many nautical miles sailing from Nova Scotia down to the Virgin Islands, exploring habitats and learning about native species along the way. These experiences have contributed to my strong interest in conservation.

After moving just outside Washington, D.C., in the late '90s, I had the opportunity to spend a great deal of time at the National Zoo, the National Museum of Natural History, and nature parks along the Potomac River. I volunteered at Riverbend Park for four years, taking care of the resident reptiles and amphibians, and participating in herpetology education events.

When I discovered the wildlife conservation major at Virginia Tech, I knew I had found the right program for me. I have had a wealth of experiences in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, including a variety of research opportunities. I have also been able to share my enthusiasm for wildlife with others as an undergraduate teaching assistant for the Principles of Fisheries and Wildlife Management course and as a peer mentor for the Introduction to Renewable Natural Resources course.

I am the camera trapping chair for the Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society at Virginia Tech and the student representative for the Virginia Chapter of the Wildlife Society. I traveled to Belize in the summer of 2013 to determine the effect of human disturbance on jaguars. Last summer I conducted dolphin research in Mississippi, photographing dolphins in the wild to identify them by the unique notch patterns on their dorsal fins, conducting fisherman surveys, and helping provide education opportunities to the public. I am now planning a project that I will begin this winter in Costa Rica. I look forward to my participation in the Leadership Institute, which will enable me to become the best that I can be in preparation for working with others to solve current and future conservation issues.

After completing my bachelor’s degree, I hope to attend graduate school. My areas of interest include herpetology, invasive species, threatened and endangered species, and human/wildlife interactions.
As a kid, I always loved being outside and seeing animals. I immediately loved every animal I saw; I almost seemed to attract them. When I found out I would be moving from a crowded city to a house surrounded by trees when I was eight, I was ecstatic. My brother and I, along with some of the neighborhood kids, would spend our evenings after school and our summer days exploring the woods behind my house and “falling” into the creek after our parents told us not to get wet. We explored every corner of our set boundaries. We even went fishing for the tiny fish in the creek. All of these experiences were just a normal part of life for me. When I was younger, I thought I would be doing stuff like that my whole life. As I got older, I thought I would like to go into an engineering field and started out in that program at Virginia Tech. I didn’t even make it half a semester before I realized I would hate not being outside almost every day! This led me to wildlife conservation and a field in natural resources.

Since deciding to change from an engineering course to a natural resources one, I have come to love my time at Virginia Tech. I have since added a minor in forestry and keep finding more topics in natural resources that interest me. Every semester filled with natural resource classes is the best semester. Working on the Belize Jaguar Project, being involved in the Wildlife Society, and volunteering at the Black Bear Research Center have made it so I have little free time, which is just how I like it!

One of my main goals for the future is to work with sea turtle conservation. Since people are one of the biggest issues when it comes to sea turtle conservation, being part of the Leadership Institute cohort will hopefully allow me to better handle these issues. What I learn in the Leadership Institute about working with others will also hopefully give me the competitive edge I need to get into the field in the first place.
I was born and raised in Crofton, Maryland, near Annapolis. Crofton has been steadily growing as I have also been growing and learning, and it is there where I first found my passion for both the environment and leadership. In elementary and middle school, I do not remember receiving much education about the environment outside of typical science-based classes. It was at home where I was first influenced by my family to learn about the environment and how my actions affected the environment around me. I was always encouraged by my parents to push myself and apply for many different leadership positions in the groups that I was interested in.

Music has always been a significant part of my life as I have played the trumpet in many of the bands at the schools I have attended. Being a part of a large student group was where I got my first hands-on experience with really working as a team and leading in some situations. In high school, I joined the environmental club and took an AP environmental science course. These two experiences were led by a teacher well known throughout my school who had a major influence on my decision to pursue environmental studies. I helped to lead many of the activities in the environmental club and found a passion in doing so.

I applied to many different colleges and I found that it was very difficult to decide on a single major that truly interested me. Looking into Virginia Tech, however, I found the College of Natural Resources and Environment and the natural resources conservation major. After I visited Virginia Tech, I knew it was the right fit for me. I have always enjoyed working outdoors as a lifeguard through high school, and outdoor recreation was a significant part of my life and something my family enjoyed doing. Through my working experience in high school, I found that I also enjoyed working with people in a more social setting, and my major fit many of these interests very well.

Aside from classwork, I have kept up with music in college by participating in the Marching Virginians as well as the honorary music service fraternity Kappa Kappa Psi. Each of these groups has given me many opportunities to lead my colleagues, as I have been the vice president of Kappa Kappa Psi as well as the operations officer for the Marching Virginians. Within the college, I am a student ambassador and president of the Xi Sigma Pi Forestry Honor Society. This past summer I worked with the Maryland Environmental Service and had a fantastic experience helping the many environmental specialists with a variety of different jobs.
My fascination with animals began at a young age. As a kid growing up in Fairfax, Virginia, I had a great balance of urbanization and nature at my fingertips, and I often explored creeks and walked through the woods discovering various insects. I loved adding to my parents’ collection of pets with animals I found outside. Though my parents were not thrilled by it, they supported my interests and always promoted the educational value of wildlife. As a result, I learned how to care for and respect many different animals over time. When I wasn’t starting a zoo in the backyard, I spent my time learning about animals from all over the world. The endless exploration excited me and now I am privileged to study my passion.

I made the decision to come to Virginia Tech after my very first visit. I knew I wanted to spend my next four years here after seeing the kind, smiling people and the beautiful campus. I first arrived as an animal and poultry sciences major hoping to study veterinary dentistry but quickly realized that wildlife science was truly my passion because it focused more on conservation in the field. I have always admired elephants for their beauty, intelligence, and social interactions, and I wanted to put my passion to use. After attending a Wildlife Society meeting, I decided to change my major and have not looked back since.

While at Virginia Tech, I have served as a peer mentor to incoming freshmen, a student ambassador for the College of Natural Resources and Environment, and a resident advisor for Cochrane Hall — all positions that have shown me the value of others in society.

After college, I want to pursue a career in elephant conservation and education, blending my love for animals and people. I dream of traveling to both Africa and Southeast Asia to resolve cohabitation conflicts and expand conservation efforts for elephants and other wildlife in need. This past year I worked for Walt Disney World at Kilimanjaro Safari where I gained experience talking to both children and adults about conservation efforts in Africa. I saw a glimpse of how people respond to conservation in the real world through this incredible experience.

I applied to the Leadership Institute because it has a great reputation and seemed like a great way to become more involved with the college. The annual trip to Washington, D.C., and Richmond comes highly praised and recommended, especially because of the networking opportunities. Through the Leadership Institute, I hope to broaden my leadership skills by working with people on a professional level, and I look forward to having great conversations with professionals in my field.
Benjamin T. Poling
Forestry

I arrived at Virginia Tech in fall 2013 after attending New River Community College for two semesters to take classes that transferred into the forestry degree that I seek. I did not choose forestry at first; it took me years to discover my true passion, and I tried many other fields of interest first. I started my path in the Navy for 8 years working as an electrician and firefighter, where I also learned how to be a machinist. I left the Navy in 2012 to try my hand at timber framing and carpentry while also operating heavy equipment. I have tried and done many things before I ended up pursuing a degree in forestry and I cannot imagine taking any other path!

I chose Virginia Tech because it has a great forestry program, offering vast resources and opportunities. I have always loved trees, timber, and timber products, and the idea that I will get to learn all about these things I am so passionate about thrills me to no end! I have an ultimate goal to buy, sell, and trade timber and timber products internationally, which requires good communication, a good knowledge base, and good leadership abilities. The Leadership Institute captured my attention with the opportunity to better myself and improve my communication and leadership abilities. I look forward to experiencing the opportunities provided by this program to learn more about myself and others. I believe we all should strive to learn something new each and every day, and that will be my intention with my time at Virginia Tech and in the Leadership Institute.

Benjamin T. Poling
btp5187@vt.edu

Hometown: Salamanca, New York

Expected Graduation Date: December 2015

Major: Forestry

Area of Specialty: Forest Resources Management

Honors and Awards:
Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest REU Internship, summer 2014
Xi Sigma Pi (Forestry Honor Society)
Dean’s List, four semesters
I grew up in Southern Maryland, where I spent most of my time outside exploring the woods, playing sports, or riding horses. Living on the Patuxent River and learning about it significantly influenced my development. Upon graduating high school, I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew I liked biology. I enrolled at Virginia Tech as a biology major thinking that a career as a pharmacist after graduation sounded like a good path for me. Within my first semester at Virginia Tech I learned about the fisheries science major. Who knew they had such a thing? My love for the water and the outdoors kicked into gear and I knew what I wanted to do with my college career. Choosing fisheries science as my primary major and biology as my second major ranks among the best decisions I’ve ever made.

The summer after my freshman year, I interned for the Student Conservation Association, surveying freshwater ponds at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station. Every day brought a new adventure and I virtually soaked up all I could about natural resources. My responsibilities included boat electrofishing, seining, and gill netting ponds, along with teaching field trip groups about local wildlife. This job affirmed my decision to pursue natural resources. Last summer, I worked for Professor Brian Murphy as an undergraduate researcher and laboratory technician. For my undergraduate research project, I am studying how black bass fishing tournaments affect smallmouth bass in the New River. Doing my own project provides me the opportunity to gain experience in project development, execution, and writing. I am actively involved in the Virginia Tech Chapter of the American Fisheries Society as a member and an officer since my freshman year, allowing me to network with fisheries professionals, explore career options, and participate in various community service activities.

Broadening my learning through classes in fisheries science and biology allows me to bring a unique perspective to natural resource issues. Many courses at Virginia Tech taught me the latest facts and techniques in my field, but not how to guide, direct, and serve others. I believe being a part of the Leadership Institute will develop these skills and enhance my ability to enter the workplace and create innovative ideas through productive leadership practices. I enjoy studying freshwater fisheries in my undergraduate program, but after graduating I hope to pursue a master’s degree in marine fisheries science and return to my marine roots where my interest began. I would then like to get a job working to conserve and sustainably manage our marine resources so that many more generations can experience a childhood like mine.
2014-15 Student Cohort – Front row (left to right): Brian Bond, Associate Director; Ashley Weston, Fisheries Science and Biology; Kaylyn Duda, Meteorology and Geography; Chandler Eaglestone, Wildlife Conservation; Eliza Demere, Natural Resources Conservation; Samantha Hannabass, Wildlife Conservation; Ilia Donner, Forestry; Charles Aquilina, Geography and Environmental Science

Back row (left to right): Steve McMullin, Director; Benjamin T. Poling, Forestry; Brendan Little, Natural Resources Conservation; Page Clayton, Packaging Systems and Design; Sterling Pino-DeGale, Wildlife Conservation; Matthew Cunningham, Geography; Paul Winstorfer, Dean
2013-14 Student Cohort – Front row (left to right): Mohamed Mwinyi, Geography; Sierra Steffen, Geography; Emily Ronis, Wildlife Science; Zachary Shiner, Wood Science and Forest Products; Kelly Summers, Forestry and Natural Resources Conservation; Brian Bond, Associate Director

Back row (left to right): Steve McMullin, Director; Kelley Anderson, Forest Resources Management; Alex Garrestson, Wildlife Science and Theatre Arts; Juan Botero, Wildlife Science; Britney Kreiner, Fisheries Science; Katy Battle, Wildlife Science; Paul Decker, Natural Resources Conservation and Environmental Resources Management; Jeremy Withers, Wood Science and Forest Products; Paul M. Winistorfer, Dean

2012-13 Student Cohort – Front row (left to right): Brian Bond, Associate Director; Stephen Perkins, Wildlife Science; Ally Rodgers, Natural Resources Conservation; Claire Helmke, Wildlife Science; Lisa Trapp, Wildlife Science; Carol Anne Nichols, Wildlife Science; Keegan Mobley, Wildlife Science; Katie Abelt, Geography and Spanish

Back row (left to right): Steve McMullin, Director; Matt Layman, Geography; Morgan Brizendine, Fisheries Science; J. Turner Crawford IV, Forestry; Josh Hertzler, Wood Science and Forest Products; Ryne Noska, Meteorology and Geography; Paul M. Winistorfer, Dean
2011-12 Student Cohort – Front row (left to right): Helen Tripp, Wildlife Science; Scott Riley, Fisheries Science; Lorelai Mackenzie, Environmental Resources Management; Kara Dodson, Environmental Resources Management; Lauren Cabral, Environmental Resources Management; Megan Cochran, Geography; Addie Jones, Geography; Steve McMullin, Director
Back row (left to right): Brian Bond, Associate Director; Jandir Santin Jr., Wood Science and Forest Products; Kalena Comer, Wildlife Science; Paul Ngo, Wildlife Science and Biological Sciences; Roxzanna Dalton, Wildlife Science; Kyle Dingus, Forestry; Paul M. Winistorfer, Dean

2010-11 Student Cohort – Front row (left to right): Kathy Hixon, Wildlife Science; Lydia Eggleston, Geography; Brittany Schultz, Natural Resources Conservation; Kelly Merkl, Natural Resources Conservation; Hannah Lee, Environmental Resource Management; Kenneth Erwin, Wildlife Science
Back row (left to right): Steve McMullin, Director; Cari Lynn Squibb, Wildlife Science; Walker Baldwin, Geography; Patrick Trail, Geography and International Studies; Charles Turner, Wildlife Science; Mitchell Kern, Wildlife Science; Adam Christie, Forestry; Paul M. Winistorfer, Dean
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