



Hollins Receives Ford Foundation Grant to Promote Academic Freedom, Constructive Dialogue

Roanoke, Va. – Hollins University has received a \$10,000 stipend from the Ford Foundation to participate in the organization’s *Difficult Dialogues* initiative. The program promotes campus environments where sensitive subjects can be discussed in a spirit of open scholarly inquiry, academic freedom and with respect for different viewpoints.

Difficult Dialogues was created in response to reports of growing intolerance and efforts to curb academic freedom at colleges and universities. The goal is to help institutions address this challenge through academic and campus programs that enrich learning, encourage new scholarship and engage students and faculty in constructive dialogue about contentious political, religious, racial and cultural issues.

Hollins will use its stipend to support an initiative called “A Civil Voice: Difficult Dialogues on Sexuality, Gender Expression, and Homophobia on Virginia’s College Campuses.” Hollins professors Jennifer Boyle and LeeRay Costa collaborated with the American Association of University Professors to apply for the stipend, and will develop this program in partnership with a consortium that includes Virginia Commonwealth University and Norfolk State University. A conference/workshop is planned for spring 2007.

The Ford Foundation awarded grants and stipends to 43 higher education institutions for this two-year initiative. During its course, the institutions will be invited to share their experiences and ideas at regional conferences coordinated by the Thomas

Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Center will also host a Web-based forum for project directors to share ideas online.

Difficult Dialogues is part of a broader, \$12 million effort by the Ford Foundation to understand and combat anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of bigotry in the United States and Europe. It builds on the foundation's history of supporting efforts by colleges and universities to foster more inclusive campus environments and to engage effectively with the growing racial, religious and ethnic diversity of their student bodies.

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January 25, 2006