

Column: College Community Connection

Embracing the Challenge

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By Dr. Al Roberts

American boxer Sugar Ray Leonard claimed, “Boxing is the ultimate challenge. There’s nothing that compares to testing yourself the way you do every time you step into the ring.”

Leonard certainly knew about testing and pushing himself to do his best. Among his many achievements, he won three National Golden Gloves titles, claimed two Amateur Athletic Union championships, and received an Olympic gold medal. His professional career spanned twenty years, and he won world titles in five different weight classes.

As Leonard’s words suggest, gifted athletes need rigorous challenges to achieve their full potential. Without testing limits and pushing beyond them, athletes may never have the opportunity to discover what they can accomplish.

This same principle holds true for talented students. Recognizing that some students thrive on strenuous challenges and have academic needs that differ from their age-level peers, Virginia instituted the Governor’s School program in 1973. Today, that program includes 19 academic-year schools throughout the Commonwealth.

Southside Virginia Community College is proud to host one of those schools, the Governor’s School of Southside Virginia, at its Christanna Campus in Alberta and John H. Daniel Campus in Keysville. GSSV’s student body includes nearly two hundred academically skilled juniors and seniors from eleven high schools in ten counties. These hard-working young adults thrive in a learning environment that is more independent than a traditional high school setting, and they tackle an interdisciplinary curriculum that includes conducting a two-year research project. During the course of their research, students work with scientists in the field, travel to facilities with specialized laboratory equipment, and develop mentoring relationships with working professionals. Along the way, they master college-level material in subject areas such as mathematics, science, and English. Finally, they hone their public speaking skills to present their findings at a senior symposium.

GSSV students spend part of the school day on the SVCC campus. They also participate as dually enrolled students in college-level courses offered at their home high schools. These courses help round out the curriculum in a way that enables students to earn both a high school diploma and Associates degree when they graduate.

The GSSV application process, which is highly competitive, begins during the fall of a student’s 10th grade year. In determining admission, participating school divisions follow a matrix that considers teacher recommendations and each applicant’s test results, grade point average, and writing ability. Prospective

students also participate in a shadowing event where they follow a GSSV student for a day, ride to SVCC on the bus, and visit classes.

Students who want to push themselves to see what they can accomplish can get more information about the Governor's School of Southside Virginia by contacting GSSV Director Laurie Michaelson at 434-736-2086.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.