



March 11, 2009

The Honorable John C. Watkins  
Virginia Senator, 10<sup>th</sup> District  
P. O. Box 159  
Midlothian, VA 23113

Dear Senator Watkins:

RE: Importance of Teaching Geospatial Technologies

Thank you for your letter dated February 26, 2009 regarding your interest in encouraging the continued involvement of Virginia's Community Colleges in the development of a trained geospatial technologies workforce. You will be pleased to note that the VCCS, in partnership with the Virginia Space Grant Consortium (VSGC) and the Virginia Geospatial Extension Program at Virginia Tech, recently submitted an NSF proposal titled "Geospatial Technician Education through Virginia Community Colleges" (GTEVCC). Some highlights from this grant proposal are as follows:

- The vision of the GTEVCC project is to establish and grow three unique academic pathways in GIS (geospatial technology or geospatial) that can serve as models for the other 20 community colleges in Virginia. Of the 23 community colleges, very few offer GIS courses and only one (Virginia Western Community College) currently offers academic pathways in GIS. Virginia's community colleges are at the ground floor in geospatial pathway development and faculty capability to meet projected geospatial workforce demand, and this project aims to spread the use of GIS across the state by building on the successful model of VWCC to create locally driven pathways at three community colleges: John Tyler, Tidewater and Virginia Western. The mission of Virginia's Community Colleges is to develop pathways to meet local employer demand and each region has different needs.
- The GTEVCC team, through a comprehensive online survey, employer interviews and job analysis, thoroughly assessed the current demand for GIS technicians and geospatial-related workforce in Virginia. The results of this survey indicate the nature and role of the GIS technician jobs in Virginia is not limited to strictly GIS-related work but encompasses a wide variety of tasks and responsibilities which include geospatial skills and knowledge applied within a discipline. Employers overwhelmingly stated that a successful GIS technician should be trained in a field such as engineering technology

(architectural, civil, or other), information technology, or other technical field and possess GIS skills and experience to perform the tasks outlined in the Virginia DACUM in support of their field. While employer demand in Virginia for skilled geospatial technicians is high and continues to grow, student knowledge and interest in the field of geospatial technology is lagging behind. A significant and important goal of this project is to increase geospatial career awareness programs and materials to increase student interest needed to support academic programs and meet employer need.

- An additional and very significant barrier to creating additional pathways in GIS is the lack of trained faculty to teach GIS courses. This project proposes to increase the development of GIS pathways at other colleges by training 15 faculty members from community colleges across Virginia. Fifteen faculty members will attend a summer workshop led by the Virginia Geospatial Extension Program at Virginia Tech in summer of year 2 and then return for another summer workshop in year 3. Following the initial workshop and throughout the life of the project, the faculty will be supported and mentored by the faculty and staff at the Virginia Geospatial Extension Program and the partnering faculty, and will have access to the VCCS web resource portal for resources and materials to support their development and their ability to begin teaching GIS courses.
- The GTEVCC project team will disseminate the work of the project through several venues including the VCCS geospatial web resource portal, regional and state conferences and meetings, national conferences, and the National Geospatial Technology Center of Excellence. Disseminating the work of the project will be critical to the mission of developing geospatial workforce development programs in community colleges across the state to meet employer demand. A primary goal of the dissemination plan will be to inform all of Virginia's Community Colleges about the project team, the web resource portal, and to disseminate the model curricula and academic pathways in GIS that are being developed. Other goals include informing business/industry that community colleges are developing geospatial pathways, and disseminating project results and components to a national audience.
- The VCCS geospatial web resource portal will become the central hub for disseminating project information, faculty professional development opportunities, geospatial curricula, resources, presentations, and data across the state. The project team will partner

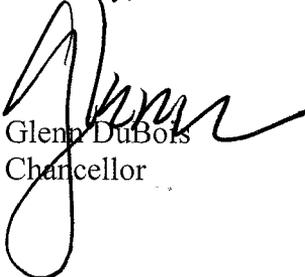
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with the Virginia Association of Mapping and Land Information Systems (VAMLIS) education committee to disseminate results and project information to a statewide audience of geospatial professionals and employers. VAMLIS organizes and sponsors the Annual Virginia GIS Conference where the project team will attend and present. This conference is attended by geospatial employers, educators, and the current and future geospatial workforce and is a good venue for informing business/industry that Virginia's Community Colleges are developing academic pathways to prepare the workforce.

- The NSF-funded National GeoTech Center at Del Mar College will provide GETVCC with national dissemination through their Resource Clearinghouse and will provide a link on their website to the VCCS geospatial web resource portal. In addition, the GeoTech Center can provide broad dissemination of the project at national conferences, such as the ESRI International User's Conference and the HI-TECH Joint ATE Centers and Projects Conference. The project team will also collaborate with Northern Virginia Community College to leverage its Geospatial Career Pipeline Initiative (GCPI) funded by the US Department of Labor.

As you can see, Virginia's Community Colleges are very aware of the need for providing trained geospatial technicians for the emerging workforce. Several of our colleges are working collaboratively with external agencies to lead the way in this effort. We are pleased that our college and system office leaders are supporting this effort through both academic and workforce development staff involvement.

Sincerely,



Glenn DuBois  
Chancellor

GD/ph

- c: Mr. Peter Blake, Vice Chancellor of Workforce Development Services  
Mr. Chris Carter, Assistant Director, Virginia Space Grant Consortium  
Dr. Deborah M. DiCroce, President, Tidewater Community College  
Dr. Robert H. Sandel, President, Virginia Western Community College  
Dr. Marshall W. Smith, President, John Tyler Community College  
Dr. Monty Sullivan, Vice Chancellor of Academic Services and Research