

# outbursts

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Virginia Tech's international campuses

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## Exotic animals in Chile

By Valerie Ragan

Sea lions, wild South American foxes, dogs with distemper, and pudús – such is veterinary medicine in Chile. Across the world, the principles of medicine are the same. The animals, the context, and the approaches are often quite different.



The port in Valdivia

In Chile, our veterinary students can work in many areas such as wildlife conservation and medicine, equine reproduction, and disease surveillance. Students are expected to understand their projects' big

picture including international importance and impacts.

I recently traveled to Chile to expand a partnership between the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine and the Universidad Austral de Chile in Valdivia. The partnership brings students from both countries to each other's campuses.

What is a pudú? It is a tiny South American deer, the smallest deer in the world, and my first fleeting view of them was at an impressive wildlife rescue and rehabilitation center at the veterinary college in Valdivia, where work on conservation of this threatened species occurs. They are shy and swift, and I had to look closely to catch a glimpse of them in their pen. While there, I also received a lesson on the art of handling birds of prey, including how to effectively hold the jesses (thin straps of leather looped around the bird's

legs) using a glove to keep both bird and human safe and secure! It's not as easy as it looks, and it's amazing how heavy the birds are when sitting on your extended arm.



The author gets up close and personal with a hawk.



Sea lions are not something vet students in Blacksburg and Maryland normally get to closely examine.

In Chile, some of our students work on wildlife, while others focus on domestic animals. One student recently examined the role of domestic canines as vectors of disease for wild South American foxes and to learn methods of safe trapping, sedation, anesthesia, and release of the animals. She was foiled in her attempt to get great photographs as the animals' sedation wore off: "Often we had to forgo what would have been the coolest pics for the sake of time," she said.

An additional benefit of this otherwise clinical rotation is the chance for students to be immersed in Chilean culture. Thanks to Universidad Austral de Chile faculty, our students have been invited into their homes for traditional meals and an introduction to life in Chile.

Valerie Ragan is director of the Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine.



*The seaside Bibliotheca Alexandrina sports a slanting roof to illuminate the interior with optimal levels of natural sunlight.*

## Hokies in Alexandria

*By Sedki Riad*

Stretching along the Mediterranean seashore, the Egyptian city of Alexandria is home to the Virginia Tech-Middle East and North Africa, called VT-MENA, program. Unlike the bustling and noisy streets of Cairo, Alexandria is a quieter city with a long history of culture and learning. The Bibliotheca Alexandria stands where the ancient library once stood and is a renewed symbol of scholarship. Some of the top schools in Egypt are found in Alexandria, including Alexandria University, with which the VT-MENA cooperative partnership is held.

The program offers students in the region the opportunity to earn advanced degrees from Virginia Tech in electrical and computer engineering and computer science. Most of the coursework and research is conducted in Egypt, but students pursuing a Ph.D. degree spend a year or more in residency at Virginia Tech.



*Street scene in Alexandria*

In the early stages of developing the program, I saw the need for Egypt and the Middle East to consider the higher education models used in developed countries, particularly the U.S. model. Similarly, I recognized the importance for American academia to take a closer look at the Islamic model and Middle Eastern culture.

At heart, the purpose of VT-MENA is to bring people together. Both Western and Eastern societies tend to possess a limited view of the other. Through partnerships like VT-MENA, the two sides can develop mutual understanding.

The impact of our work is seen in the growth of promising students and the strengthened international presence of Virginia Tech.

Over the past eight years, I have seen the program grow from nine students and five faculty participants in its first semester to more than 70 students and a similar faculty



count; each one has one or more stories to tell, and each one has had his or her own unique experience. It is satisfying to see how the family of this program has grown, and it is fulfilling to be part of the effort.

*Sedki Riad is a professor of electrical and computer engineering and VT-MENA director.*

## Biodiversity in the Dominican Republic

*By Jerry Via*

On the eastern side of the small Caribbean nation of the Dominican Republic, nestled between lush tropics and the crystal clear Caribbean Sea, is a region called Punta Cana. I consider it to be one of the most beautiful locations in the world.

I am lucky enough to be involved with Virginia Tech's biodiversity program in Punta Cana, which is housed at the Caribbean Center for Education and Research. We conduct research there as well as instruct students on biodiversity, environmental and social sustainability, global issues in natural resources, and hotel and tourism management. I help keep students connected with their surroundings by offering a class on birds of the tropics.

Faculty members from Virginia Tech travel there to teach, and our students can earn up to 18 credit hours through the program.

I believe what really sets our program apart is the requirement that students take part in a service-learning project while they are there. One of the more notable projects involves coral gardening and reef restoration. A coral reef serves as a protective area for the local beach as well as a haven for fish and marine animals. Those at the center are working to sustain the reef by "gardening" coral to expand it.



*Broad-billed Tody*

The center works closely with the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation to protect and preserve the region's natural resources while contributing to the country's sustainable development.

Our goal with the Punta Cana program is to immerse our students in the Dominican culture, to see life in a developing country, and to take a look at the world through different eyes. They then become more informed citizens of the world representing Virginia Tech.

*Jerry Via is assistant dean in the College of Science and director of the program in Punta Cana.*

# Switzerland and beyond

By Terry Papillon

Imagine being at the Aeropagus, the marble hill beside the Acropolis in Athens. Here, Virginia Tech students read from the book of Acts, which the Apostle Paul addressed to Athenians. At the Parthenon, students discuss the building as if it were a rhetorical argument. At Delphi, students read the Phaedrus aloud. At this site, they can almost touch low-hanging dark clouds on that sacred site close to the gods.



*Terry Papillon lecturing onsite in Delphi, Greece*

Such experiences remind us of what "awful" means: full of awe!

Each spring, 32 Virginia Tech honors students participate in a semester-long learning adventure based in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland. They travel throughout Europe and to more far-flung places such as Ghana.

Students take a semester of Italian first, and they keep studying in Switzerland. They start in the Italian-speaking part of the country, where Virginia Tech's campus is situated, later visiting the German-speaking and French-speaking parts. They get a sense of what it means to belong to a multilingual and multicultural nation.

The more than half-dozen faculty members who participate each year are some of Virginia Tech's top scholars, and they design their classes around a central

theme for the semester. My own training is in Greek and Latin. I've led the students on excursions throughout Greece.

The semester is a time for students to engage in contemplation. We ask: How will they take their studies to a higher level? They return home full of

purpose, ready to apply to the best graduate schools, top national scholarships, and fascinating jobs.



*Students learn drumming at the Art Centre in Accra, Ghana.*

I would take these honors students over any students in the country or the world. They're adventurous, creative, and curious. They see connections across disciplines. Those interdisciplinary ties probably could not be made any other way. (It's called the Presidential Global Scholars program, and it launched in 2012. The program is a joint effort by the Office of the University President and University Honors.)

The theme for 2014 is Transitions and Transformations. We hope to take the program into Turkey, where we'll explore the transitional space between East and West.

I often tell these students they have the capability to do extraordinary things, and I believe it.

*Terry Papillon is director of the University Honors Program and a professor of classics in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.*

*Photos by Kim Carlson*



*Montebello castle in Bellinzona, Switzerland*

# Innovation in India

By Guru Ghosh

Virginia Tech's piece of the industrial park in the southern Indian city of Chennai sits on 30 acres, just one-20th of the development. But our presence will hardly be insignificant. Our campus – called VT, India – will be situated in an idyllic location off the eastern coast of India.

Our Indian private-sector partner, MARG Swarnabhoomi, is building a city where executives will be helicoptered in and out. Grand-scale high-rises are home to thousands who will enjoy schools, doctors, and fresh-food markets within walking distance. Also on a grand scale, the world's multi-nationals are planting their research-and-development centers, creating jobs and training a new generation to compete in the global workforce.



Rendering of MARG complex, future home of VT, India

Befitting such a high-tech environment, the complex relies on rainwater harvesting and solar lighting. Amenities abound, including sports complexes and the opportunity to frolic in the Bay of Bengal surf.

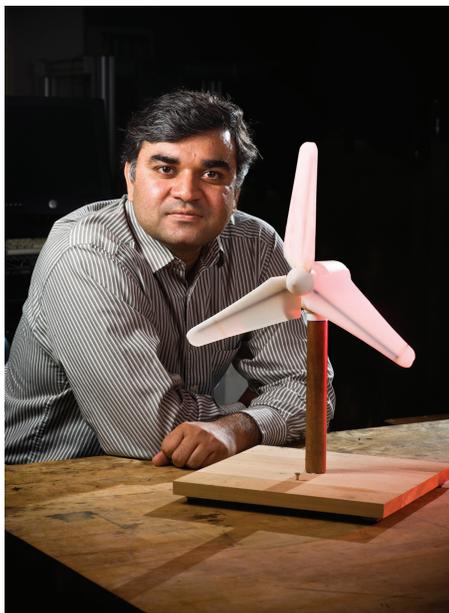
What is Virginia Tech's role? We are starting with a research center devoted to refining and adapting windmills and solar panels for use in households in rural India. The center is called the VT, India Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science Innovation Center. As my colleague Roop Mahajan said last year when the research center was announced, "Our push for sustainable energy technology reflects our understanding of the interconnectedness of developed and developing countries."

Our presence currently amounts to 6,000 square feet of office and lab space, with the possibility of expanding to 45,000 square feet. But our contribution is central to MARG Swarnabhoomi's vision bridging industry and academia. A planned port nearby is expected to spur industrial activity, and breezes blowing in from the sea are a boon to our windmill development.

Not far from this futuristic landscape, one will always be able to find the congested and noisy streets India is known for.

Exploring the nearby cities and towns is an adventure. But it's also an intellectual adventure to be part of something reminiscent of Detroit in its manufacturing heyday with the added sparkle of Silicon Valley.

*Guru Ghosh is vice president for Outreach and International Affairs.*



Shashank Priya's windmill technology research is among the projects planned for further exploration at the VT, India campus.

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