



VIRGINIA TECH.

“LESSONS LEARNED FROM A 34 YEAR CAREER”

PROFESSOR MARY MARCHANT

Agricultural and Applied Economics Department
August 30, 2023



MARCHANT BIO

- Grew up on a farm in the central valley of California
- Ph.D. from U.C. Davis
- Career spans 34 years—17 years at the University of Kentucky and 17 years at VT; served as CALS Associate Dean & Director of Academic Programs
- Research focuses on U.S.-China agricultural trade
- Courses taught
 - AAEC 3504 “Marketing Ag. Products”
 - AAEC 3024 “Monetary & Global Issues”
 - AAEC 5004 “Professional Ethics & Expectations”
 - AAEC 6004 “Professional Communications & Engagement”
- Taught 16 unique courses to nearly 3,000 students
- Career highlights:
 - 2019 AAEA Quality of Communication Award
 - Fulbright Distinguished Chair (Italy)
 - SAEA Lifetime Achievement Award
 - Co-Editor (with Darrell Bosch), *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*
 - AAEA Teaching Award
 - USDA “Markets & Trade” Panel Manager, National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program



Drs. Wang & Marchant awarded AAEA “Quality of Communication” Award as co-editors of “U.S.-China Trade Dispute” *Choices* theme issue; 2019 AAEA meetings in Atlanta, GA.

MOTIVATION FOR SEMINAR

- I'm retiring in two days-September 1, 2023!
- Lots of talented new AAEC faculty going up for promotion and tenure and graduate students at the beginning of their career
- One of my main goals is **mentorship** and assist students in their **professional development**--- publish research, present research at academic conferences
- Want to share with you tips I have acquired over 34 years that may help you with your career



At the 2023 AAEA Meetings in Washington DC; Drs. Chen & Marchant hosted AAEC students at the CWAE/COSBAE Luncheon

A wide-angle, high-angle shot of a football stadium at night. The stands are filled with a large crowd of spectators, many wearing orange. The field is green with white yard lines and the words "VIRGINIA TECH" and "ACC" visible. In the background, several large fireworks are exploding in the dark sky, creating bright red and white streaks. The stadium lights are on, illuminating the field and the crowd.

RESEARCH TIPS



GENERAL RESEARCH TIPS

- Block out time for writing; put on your calendar and protect this time
- “The only good dissertation is a DONE dissertation!”
- Beware of perfectionism! **Strive for Progress, not Perfection**
- Collaborate with others (students & other faculty)—can expand publication numbers
- Handout: See “Heilmeier’s Catechism” for basic questions on research development

Heilmeier's Catechism

George H. Heilmeier was an engineer and Director at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). He required answers to the questions below for any research project or product development effort. You can use the Heilmeier Catechism to sketch out a persuasive argument why your project should be selected for funding.

- What are you trying to do? Articulate your objectives using absolutely no jargon.
- How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?
- What's new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?
- Who cares?
- If you're successful, what difference will it make?
- What are the risks and the payoffs?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take?
- What are the midterm and final "exams" to check for success?

GRANTS

- Most importantly, be sure to answer 2 key questions:
 - (1) **Why should we fund this proposal?**
 - (2) **Why are you the right person to do this research?**
- Preliminary data helps, as does building on prior research—establishing a track record
- COLLABORATING with more senior faculty who have a track record also helps
- **The 1-page “Project Summary” is CRITICAL**—most grant panel reviewers only see this; usually written last & cut & pasted from the proposal—do leave time to do a good job
- Make your grant proposal easy to read—most reviewers are reading 20 proposals; use sub-headings
- Link your project to the goals of the Request For Proposal—use their language
- Answer the basics—Who/What/Why/How/Where?
- Patricia Duffy 2-page rule: Be sure your main objective is in the first two pages of the proposal.
- For new faculty, be sure to check the “New Investigator” box, which gives your proposal a “second look”
- **Follow the instructions**
- When writing the proposal, consider starting with the forms—2-page CV/Conflict of Interest/Current & Pending Support—Gets these out of the way & helps me with “getting started”
- Choose your co-Principal Investigators wisely; want responsible teammates who will meet deadlines

Website: <http://purl.umn.edu/15455>

The Keys to Preparing Successful Research Grant Proposals

Mary A. Marchant

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to demystify the competitive grant recommendation process of scientific peer review panels. The National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRICGP) administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Cooperative State Research, Extension, and Education Service (USDA-CSREES) serves as the focus of this article. This article provides a brief background on the NRICGP and discusses the application process, the scientific peer review process, guidelines for grant writing, and ways to interpret reviewer comments if a proposal is not funded. The essentials of good grant writing discussed in this article are transferable to other USDA competitive grant programs.

Key Words: *competitive grants, national research initiative competitive grants program, NRI, USDA-CSREES.*

Over the last decade, as Federal and state formula funds have declined, universities have placed a greater value on attracting external funding success. My comments focus on the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRICGP) administered by the U.S.



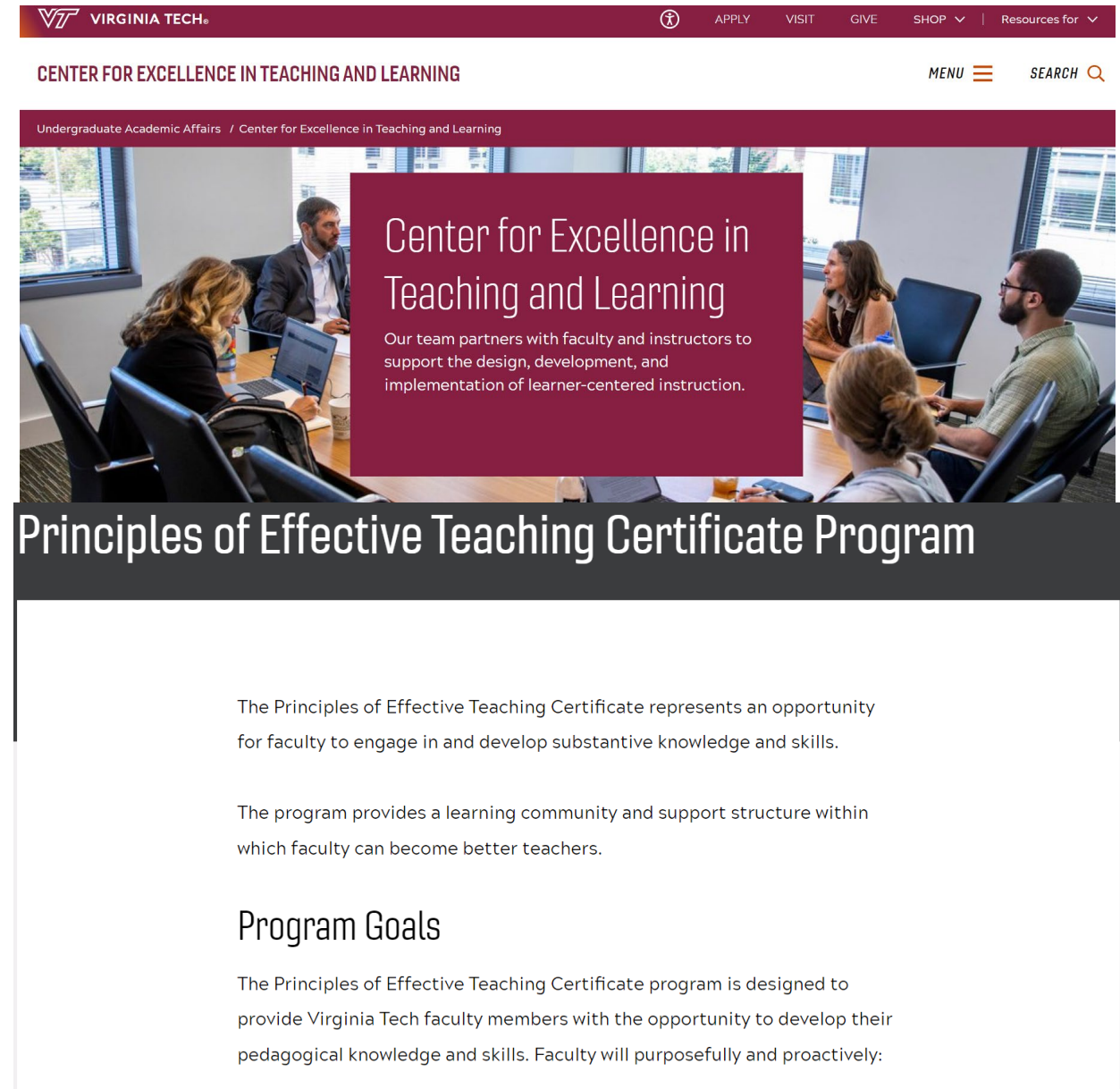
TEACHING TIPS



TEACHING TIPS – Beginning Steps

How I Prepare for the beginning of the academic year/teaching semester:

- Start with attending “Course Design Clinic” by VT **Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETL)** <https://teaching.vt.edu/>
- CETL has GREAT classes/programs—I attended their year-long “Teaching Large Classes” certificate program
- Consider current “Principles of Effective Teaching” Certificate Program;” starts September 15, 2023; must apply for program <https://teaching.vt.edu/programs/principles-of-effective-teaching.html>



The screenshot shows the website for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Virginia Tech. The header includes the Virginia Tech logo and navigation links: APPLY, VISIT, GIVE, SHOP, and Resources for. Below the header, the text "CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING" is displayed. A secondary navigation bar shows "Undergraduate Academic Affairs / Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning". The main content area features a large image of four people in a meeting, with a maroon overlay box containing the text: "Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Our team partners with faculty and instructors to support the design, development, and implementation of learner-centered instruction." Below this, a dark grey banner reads "Principles of Effective Teaching Certificate Program". The main body of the page has a white background with the following text: "The Principles of Effective Teaching Certificate represents an opportunity for faculty to engage in and develop substantive knowledge and skills." followed by "The program provides a learning community and support structure within which faculty can become better teachers." and a section titled "Program Goals" which states: "The Principles of Effective Teaching Certificate program is designed to provide Virginia Tech faculty members with the opportunity to develop their pedagogical knowledge and skills. Faculty will purposefully and proactively:"

TEACHING TIPS – Importance of TAs

- Hire & use undergraduate teaching assistance (TAs)—top performers from prior year's class; TA tasks include weekly meetings with me/weekly canvas announcements to students/video breaks/Kahoot review sessions/etc.
- Grades fall on me—leave TAs out of it. Don't discuss individual student grades in class; have student submit written explanation to me if disagreement occurs



My 2022 AAEC 3504 TAs: Sara Rheintgen, Marchant, Ava Showalter & Kristen Frick at 2023 AAEC Graduation Party in the Ag Quad

TEACHING TIPS—Student Skill Development

- Marchant key theme in ALL my classes: Include assignments that **develop & use the skills that employers want our students to possess:**
 - (1) **Communication**—written & oral
 - (2) **Teamwork**
- Examples from AAEC 3504—
 - Two individual written “Current Event” assignments linking class concepts to the real world;
 - Team term paper--marketing plan for a top VA agricultural commodity;
 - Two team presentations on the above with one-page “Executive Summary” to accompany the final presentation
 - Conduct peer reviews to deter free-riders & decrease their grades, if needed
- Reinforces the importance of active learning—students learn by doing--“hands-on” application
- Acknowledges & applies different learning styles—visual/hearing/doing



Student presentation for International Trade Class

TEACHING TIPS – What I Do – Class Structure

- Use **1000 point scale** so students know where they stand throughout the semester
- Treat students with respect
- AAEC 3504 “Marketing Ag Products” assignments:
 - 2 current event discussion posts
 - 5 quizzes—drop lowest one
 - 2 midterms with optional comprehensive final that may replace lowest midterm
 - Team project—term paper & 2 presentations with project milestones to keep them on track—ground rules/outline/data sources/references—and peer evaluations
 - **Term papers due before Thanksgiving; final presentations due AFTER Thanksgiving.** The first class after Thanksgiving focuses solely on them—students review comments on term papers & create DRAFT PPT (due that night for minimal points) for upcoming final presentations (worth many more points)
- **Lectures:** Note: I have been teaching on-line for last 3 years; got my highest SPOT scores ever
 - Use **“fill-in-the-blank”** student PPT posted Sunday evening as part of **weekly Canvas announcements for what to expect for the coming week.**
 - TA posts draft announcement on Friday with delayed posting on Canvas; I edit and add **fill-in-the-blank lecture on Sunday & post**
 - Zoom lectures are recorded as back-up & posted on Canvas—students do come to class to learn and for **class community as well as work with their team members—“Team Time” at the end of class + Q/A**



Student presentation for International Trade Class

TEACHING TIPS – What I Do – Review Sessions

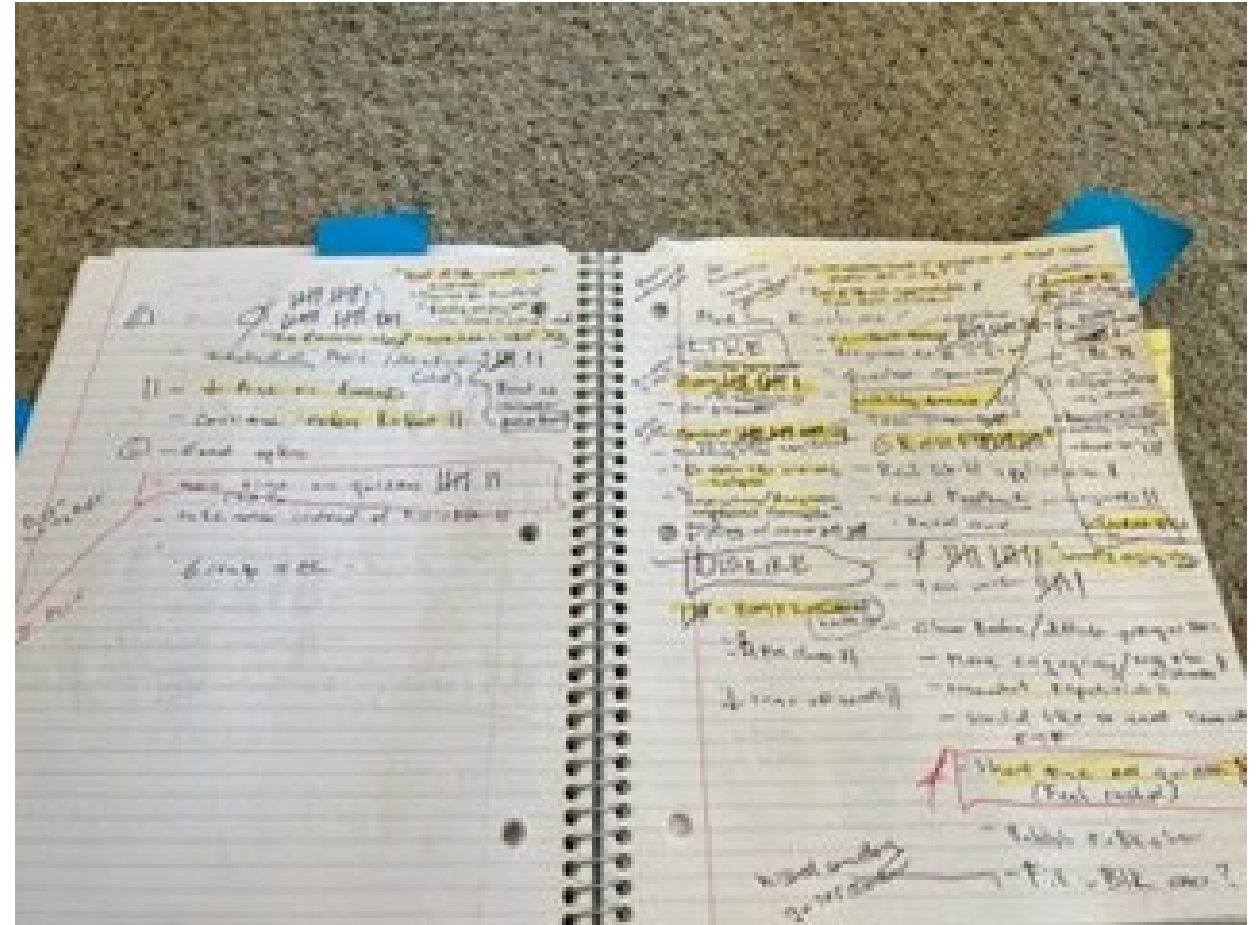
- Host **review sessions** before exams: Two types—(1) out-of-class & (2) in-class:
 - (1) Prior to COVID—in-person "Pizza Party" out-of-class review session on Sunday late afternoon in Hutcheson. Since COVID, on Zoom. No new material; their time. Often reviewed quizzes. Always fun and my way to get to know them in a less formal setting
 - (2) Jeopardy/Kahoot. My time; in-class structured review by class topics administered by TAs.



Dr. Marchant introducing student presentations for International Trade Class

TEACHING TIPS-What I Do-Midsemester Evaluation

- Conduct **midsemester evaluation** with 3 questions:
 - (1) What do you like best about this class?
 - (2) What do you LEAST like
 - (3) What would you like me to change for the rest of the semester?
- At a future class, I give students a summary of their midsemester feedback and address what I will & will not change & why.





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—General Tips & CPD

- Be nice to everyone!
- Networking is essential to finding a job
- Know people's names and call them by their name
- **Career and Professional Development** offers A LOT of resources for students:
- <https://career.vt.edu/>
 - Free interview clothes – “Career Outfitters”
 - Resume/cover letter review
 - Mock interviews
 - Professional pictures
 - Career fairs
 - Self Assessment
 - **Career Planning Guide**- “The Bible for how to get a job”
<https://career.vt.edu/about/publications.html>

If you do nothing else, get this!!!

(2025 Update: Instead of the *Career Planning Guide*, similar content can now be found in “Career Resource” and “Video Resources” tabs on the Career & Professional Development website.)



<https://career.vt.edu/about/publications.html>

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT--Interviews

- **What to wear:** See Career Planning Guide-starting on page 17 <https://career.vt.edu/about/publications.html>

Basics: Go conservative; “Sunday best;” well-pressed clothes; No sunglasses, gum, hats, dirty shoes

Women—Not cocktail party—**not** too tight, short or low-cut; wear closed-toed shoes

Men—Look most professional in long-sleeved, solid-colored shirt (e.g., blue); Pay attention to shoes—leather is best, but NOT boat shoes & NOT sneakers; clean cowboy boots are OK

What to wear: Unlocking dress codes

When deciding what to wear for an interview, career fair, business meeting or professional event, it is always best to research the organization, industry, and event to determine which dress code is expected or most appropriate. Here are some general guidelines about common dress codes for business and professional occasions.

Business Professional

This is the most formal business attire. It is appropriate for most interviews (particularly corporate, legal and business settings, as well as education and health professions), career fairs, formal networking events and some work environments.



Be Professional

- Clothing should be professional, conservative and timeless, consistent with both your brand and the company's image.
- Suits should be neat, clean, ironed, stain-free, tailored to fit you properly, and a current cut and style.
- Skirts should be knee-length and skin-toned pantyhose are encouraged (especially in colder weather).
- White or light colored long sleeved, button down shirt or blouse should be worn under suit jackets.
- Low-heeled, closed toe pump/flats, or classic leather lace up shoes should be worn with dark colored socks that match your pants. Shoes should be polished and in good condition.
- Belts should match your shoe color.
- Ties should have a conservative pattern.
- Hair should be neatly trimmed or pulled away from your face.
- Nails should be clean, make-up natural, and accessories should be simple.
- Avoid overpowering perfume and cologne.

Career Planning Guide, page 17.

<https://career.vt.edu/about/publications.html>

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT-Thank You Notes

- Send thank you e-mail within 24 hours of the interview
- If you truly want to impress them, follow-up with hand-written note via “snail mail.” People tend to keep cards and will remember you!
- A “thank you note” may be a tie breaker for who gets the job. I’ve seen it happen!



Interview Follow-Up Correspondence

Sample Email

Dear [Recruiter/Contact Name],

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me about [Title/Position] during our interview on [date or estimated timeframe]. I am writing because I wanted to follow up after my interview. I would like to inquire about the status of my application. I also want to reiterate my interest in the position. Our discussion has furthered my interest in the position and increased my enthusiasm for joining the team at [Company Name].

My skills, experiences and values are in alignment with the requirements of the position and the work culture at [Company Name].

An update on the search and/or feedback on my interview that you can provide would be greatly appreciated. I can be contacted by phone at [your phone number] or via email, [your email address]. Thank you so much for your time and consideration of me for this position. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
[Your name]

Sample Voicemail

Hello my name is [your name] leaving a message for [recruiter/contact name]. It is [time] on [day, date]. I am calling to follow up with you regarding the [Title/Position] that I interviewed for [date or estimated timeframe]. I would appreciate an update on the status of the opening. I would also like to reiterate my interest in the position. Our interview discussion has furthered my enthusiasm for the position and joining the team at [Company Name]. I believe that my skills, experiences and values are in alignment with the requirements of the position and the work culture at [Company Name]. If you need additional information from me, please contact me via email [spell out email address] or by phone at [your phone number]. Again this is [your name] calling for [recruiter name] following up from our interview on [date]. Thank you again for your time and consideration of me for this position. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank-You via Email

Dear Mr. Wright,

I enjoyed interviewing with you during your recruiting visit to Virginia Tech in February. After learning more about the management position, I think I would find the position both challenging and rewarding and would thrive in the company culture at your office.

As mentioned during my interview, I will be graduating in May with a bachelor's degree in management. Through my educational experience I have gained many skills, as well as understanding of how management works. This plus my two related internships would be an asset to your company.

Thank you again for taking the time to interview me. I look forward to your decision. Please contact me if you need additional information from me at (540) 555-1111 or at smith@vt.edu.

Sincerely,
Marianne Boles

Handwritten Thank-You Note

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to visit with you and see your facilities last Wednesday. Both the interview and the tour made for an exciting and complete day.

I was particularly impressed with your warehousing procedures. Mr. Allen was so thorough in explaining your process to me, and I will be corresponding directly with him to express my appreciation. Incidentally, the process you use is quite similar to one I have been researching through an independent study this term. Perhaps I can share my final report with Mr. Allen and you.

The expense report you requested is attached.

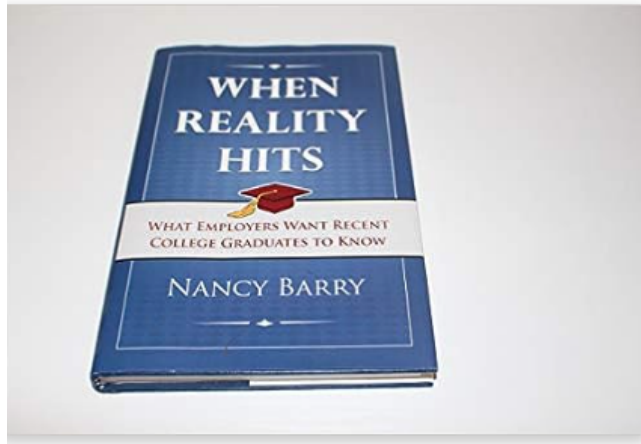
Again, thank you for your hospitality. I am quite interested in Sheldon Computers and Electronics, and look forward to your decision.

Sincerely,
Jim Richardson

Attachment

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT-You got the job; now what?

READ THIS BOOK:



[See all 2 images](#)

When Reality Hits: What Employers Want Recent College Graduates To Know

by [Nancy Barry](#) (Author)

4.6  15 ratings

[See all formats and editions](#)

Hardcover

\$12.02

34 Used from \$1.18

10 New from \$5.90

6 Collectible from \$13.99

Paperback

\$12.61

19 Used from \$3.50

5 New from \$8.61

2 Collectible from \$13.99

What do all college graduates have in common? A degree. So, what is going to separate you from the rest of the pack? Your success will be largely measured by your soft skills, such as: the right attitude, a professional demeanor, the ability to communicate on a professional level, being a team player, proper etiquette, and much more. In a flash, you have gone from college student to employee and may not realize there is a lot more to

[Read more](#)



CONCLUSIONS



CONCLUSIONS

- I hope this helps
 - Don't be too hard on yourself
 - Have some fun
 - We are in a unique position with research/teaching/outreach position
 - We travel the world for our work & to attend conferences. What a gift!
 - Thank you!
-
- Close with some highlight pictures from my time at VT!

USDA-AFRI China Research Team

- Mary Marchant (Virginia Tech)
- Jim Hansen (USDA-ERS)
- Francis Tuan (USDA-ERS, retired)
- Agapi Somwaru (USDA-ERS, retired)
- Funing Zhong & Crystal Jin Zhu (Nanjing Ag. University)
- Mina Hejazi & Wei Zhang (Virginia Tech graduates)
- Jue Zhu (Graduate Student-Nanjing Ag. Univ. & Visiting Scholar at VT)



RESEARCH TEAM IN BEIJING; SPOKE AT CHINA'S 2018 AG. OUTLOOK CONFERENCE & NANJING AG. UNIVERSITY



CHINESE PARTNERS CAME TO VT & GAVE AAEC SEMINAR, 2017



VA GOVERNOR'S 2020 AG. TRADE CONFERENCE- RECEPTION AT THE GOVERNORS' MANSION



THANK YOU!!!

