



THE HILLTOP

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Serving the Mars Hill College Community Since 1926

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CHC CHOSEN BY AAC FOR PILOT PROJECT

Mars Hill College is one of 18 schools in the nation chosen by the Association of American Colleges to participate in a three-year pilot project entitled "Assessing in Academic Majors Using External Examiners." The project has been underwritten by 2 grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), an agency of the U.S. Department of Education.

The Association of American Colleges is a national organization of nearly 600 colleges and universities who have in common a mutual interest in liberal education as the mainstay of American higher education.

According to Dr. Donald Schmeltekopf, academic vice-president of Mars Hill, the major issues in education today is how to effectively evaluate academic majors. Traditionally, this assessment has been done in a class by class manner. Students who received a passing grade in a class were deemed "competent" in that area as was the class itself. Students passing a series of inter-related classes had to have an academic major (major field of study) and were awarded a degree in that area.

The type of assessment, notes Schmeltekopf, clearly had its shortcomings. It did not take into account the total experience of the student's progress through the program, nor was the true effectiveness of the program evident. The new project aims to assess the learning of students who are completing major areas of arts and sciences. Participating schools have been arranged into six "clusters," each composed of three schools of the same general size, and character. The same three academic majors must be selected by

the three schools in the cluster. Faculty members from each of the departments will then begin to meet and devise the methods by which the "peer review" of programs will be conducted. A primary means of evaluation will be to select 15 senior students in each department--for a total of 45 students from each school--and administer written and oral tests to them each year.

There will be time allocated for an examination of the evaluation process midway through and for adjustments to the process, if necessary. This increases the likelihood of producing useful, reliable results. The examiners will then give the host departments constructive feed-back on the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

When the project ends, the association will prepare a report which will be distributed to the presidents or chief officers of all American colleges and universities. The association will also publish the report in several of its own academic journals.

Dr. John Chandler, president of the association and a Mars Hill alumnus, states that the project will accomplish much. According to him, the methods the project will develop will give the tax- and tuition-paying public assurance of the quality of college programs; schools will be able to speak with greater confidence about the degree of mastery by their students of the skills and knowledge their degrees certify; a continual refinement and improvement of teaching skills will be encouraged by the faculty; students will have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills; and new professional ties will be created among cooperating institutions which will foster both healthy competition as well as mutual support.

For Mars Hill, the benefits of being a member of the pilot project includes the immediate benefit of continuing its own "in house" evaluation process, which began this year and "fits in rather nicely with the proposed project," states Schmeltekopf, who believes that one of the reasons Mars Hill was chosen for the project was its reputation of being able to examine itself and make necessary changes.

Schmeltekopf believes that the project will gain success as a national model which will add a new dimension to the evaluation of schools across the country. He also recognizes that the college's participation and association with schools such as Cornell University, Wellesley College, and Louisiana State University can only reap benefits for the mountain school.

HONORARY DEGREE BESTOWED

MARS HILL - Dr. W. Otis Duck, Mars Hill physician who has cared for several generations of townspeople and Mars Hill College students, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters during the school's annual Leaders' Day Convocation October 21.

Dr. Duck officially retired from his medical practice at the end of June, ending a 25-year career of health care in the area. He is now an adjunct member of the college faculty and will serve as the school's medical director.

A native of Madison County, Dr. Duck traces his family heritage to one of the founders of the school, Berry Duck. He is an alumnus of Mars Hill, Class of 1922, and completed his undergraduate studies at Wake Forest College. His

medical training was conducted at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, and his initial residency was at Knoxville General Hospital. He was commanding officer of a combat medical unit in Europe during World War II and returned to Mars Hill after the war.

He established the Community Medical Center in Mars Hill and was joined in a partnership agreement with Dr. Ernest Powell in 1952. Until he stopped delivering babies nearly 14 years ago, Dr. Duck delivered thousands of babies, many at home. He is especially proud of never having had a maternal fatality. He worked vigorously to improve the quality of medical care of mothers and infants with the Maternal Welfare Committee of the N.C. Medical Society.

Dr. Duck has also been active in supporting many of the programs of the college, especially the natural sciences academic program. He has served four terms as a trustee of the school and has been named chairman of the trustees several times. In civic affairs, he has been a member of the Mars Hill aldermen and served briefly as mayor. He has also served on the board of education. He is a deacon of the Mars Hill Baptist Church and has served as chairman of that body.

In recognition of his contributions to the college and the community, the college recognized him as "Alumnus of the Year" in 1974.

The degree awarded to Dr. Duck during the ceremonies was only the eighth such honorary degrees ever to be given by the college.



(See our special sections on Homecoming, page 10 and Appalachian Poverty, page 8.)

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