
Interview

Chemotaxis and the New Administration

*An interview with the new Associate Vice President for
Graduate Studies at UVA*

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In the fall of 2004 the Office of the Vice President for Research added a new feather to its cap. This feather came in the shape of Professor Roseanne Ford, the dynamic, newly appointed Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies. Ford's appointment is part of the University's recent mission to centralize aspects of its graduate program. Professor Ford granted us an interview early last fall, promising to give us an inside look at the new strategies the administration will soon be unveiling.

Professor Roseanne Ford graduated from the University of Delaware with her bachelor's in chemical engineering, and then moved on to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania where she began her studies in chemotaxis: the movement of bacteria in response to a chemical gradient. Ford enjoyed her time in graduate school, despite the usual day-to-day frustration of experiments not working. Something must have gone right somewhere along the way, however, because her fonder and more lasting impression is the final satisfaction of seeing all the pieces of her research fall into place. The expertise she gained in graduate school and a healthy dose of good fortune enabled her to bypass the post-doc trap and jump straight to the position she now holds as a professor in chemical engineering at UVA.

In the 15 years she has been on faculty, Ford has published nearly 40 papers on chemotaxis. Her research has immediate relevance to the industrial world, where ecofriendly ways for managing waste cleanup and pollutant degradation are issues of vital importance. The modeling procedures Ford has developed at UVA enable her to predict the efficacy of bacterial clean-up operations on a variety of time and length scales.

Ford's interest in the office she now holds as Associate Vice President stems from her inherent curiosity and desire to apply her abilities to the administrative aspects of campus life. Ford is clearly an innovator and her dynamic personality meshes well with an enjoyment of her interactions with graduate students, whom she calls "a typically bright, young and energetic bunch". Ford will be holding this position for five years with the possibility of renewal at the end of her term.

The traditional roles of the Vice President's office are in the development and certification of research protocols, intellectual property management and federal relations. Ford sees the recent addition of graduate studies to this list to be a natural progression, providing a centralized approach for certain aspects of the graduate school program. The University's goal to be recognized as a strong research institution will only be achieved when the graduate program is strong and well consolidated: graduate students are critical to this mission. The difficulty with coordinating the graduate program, however, lies in discerning the appropriate separation of powers between local and central graduate administrations.

Professor Ford foresees the new arm of the Vice President's office becoming a portal for many students considering graduate studies at UVA, especially those with interests not easily confined within any one of the traditional disciplines. The office also aims to work with the careers center to provide graduates with greater assistance in job placement.

Recalling her own time in graduate school, the new Associate Vice President aims to promote the key graduate student interests of competitive compensation coupled with a bounty of innovative research opportunities. With this in mind, beginning in Fall 2005, the Vice President's office will be offering scholarship enhancements of \$10,000 to outstanding applicants, renewable up to three years. To facilitate recruitment, travel funds will also be available for grads to return to their alma mater to give research/recruitment talks. The office will also be working with the Provost to establish "quality benchmarks" to evaluate the strength of the UVA grad research endeavor, including metrics such as the number of NSF fellows and other such awards.

Current graduate students can assist the Vice President's office in these endeavors by doing more of what they do already: keep attending professional meetings, encouraging siblings and peers to consider research at UVA, and be available on recruiting days to make prospective grads welcome. Ford encourages graduate students to notify the Vice President's office when they receive special honors or attend meetings to help keep the office up to date with what the current cohort of graduate students is doing.

Hitherto, the Vice President's office has primarily operated behind the scenes, although this may soon be changing. The office provides some assistance to secure funds for many research and interdisciplinary endeavors and offers a number of matching support projects. Another example of how the

Vice President's office helps facilitate graduate student research behind the scenes is when a graduate student undertakes an interdisciplinary project with a principal investigator outside their department. Such a case involves the careful management of funds and departmental protocols by Ford's office in such a way that the student's research is not hindered and the process appears totally seamless.

The Vice President's office is also sounding the issues of research assistant compensation, health insurance and the availability of university scholarships, issues that directly impact the current grad student population, via the conduction of campus-wide surveys and comparative studies to other institutions.

The opening of this new branch of the Vice President's office coincides with the opening call for papers of *Amalgam*, the University's first graduate student research journal. Indeed, the Vice President's office is the dominant sponsor of this new publication. During the interview, Ford expressed the office's interest in *Amalgam* as a potentially exciting way to spawn interdisciplinary connections and cultivate awareness of the diverse research areas blossoming across the comprehensive campus. "Graduate students should definitely take advantage of that," she said, referring to both the opportunities created by *Amalgam*, and the diversity contained within UVA's campus.

Part of Ford's role as the new Associate Vice President means keeping an open door to graduate students with new ideas, inquiries or suggestions regarding the graduate program. Ford's office is in Room 109 behind Pavillion V, and an appointment can be scheduled by emailing Professor Ford at rmf3f@virginia.edu

As the academic year develops we should see more activity by the Vice President's new graduate student branch. While focusing heavily on recruitment, the office will also begin compiling data from the current graduate population and undertake discussions with deans at the local level to negotiate the appropriate separation of powers. As of the time of writing, randomly selected graduate students should be receiving invitations to fill out a survey regarding stipends and health benefit costs, an initiative taken by GSASC (Graduate Students in Arts and Sciences Council) in conjunction with the Vice President's office.

We look forward to the further development of this office, as it represents an institutional recognition of the vital role graduate students play in the research process, as well as providing a new means for graduate student issues to be brought to the fore and dealt with in a centralized way.
