



PHOTO BY SHERYL HAGAN-BOOTH

# Distinctive Programs

BY CAROLINE LYNCH

**DR. BLAINE FERRELL SHIES AWAY FROM TALKING ABOUT HIMSELF. HOWEVER, AS THE DIRECTOR OF WESTERN'S FIRST PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION, THE APPLIED RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM, HE PROVIDES AN EARFUL.**

The Council on Postsecondary Education in Kentucky sets aside money each year for Programs of Distinction. All state schools are eligible for the money, but the schools must match the \$1.2 million state funds with external funds or internal reallocations. Three years ago, Western's Applied Research and Technology Program (ARTP) was the first to qualify for the money, which must go to create educational opportunities for Kentucky students and have impact on the region's economic development and quality of life.

At Western, the program has twelve different centers, all of which work together to create hands-on applied re-

search opportunities for students. Dr. Ferrell describes one such example, a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which funds a technical assistance center for small drinking water systems. Five Centers and external agencies are collaborating on this project to provide safe drinking water for small rural communities in a cost-effective manner. Numerous students are applying classroom learning to solve a real-world problem. This project has recently been expanded to include wastewater. A sister grant from the EPA will fund the wastewater research.

The Council on Postsecondary Education has invited Western scholars to collaborate with the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky on a project highlighting the Commonwealth's biotechnology infrastructure at a forthcoming conference. The goal of this Governor-directed effort is to attract biotechnology companies to increase employment opportunities in Kentucky. "It's hard

to entice students in Kentucky to go into science if they cannot get a job in the state," Dr. Ferrell said. "I want the Applied Research and Technology Program to generate more interest in science and engineering in the state and ultimately to lead to high-paying employment opportunities."

Another example of the power of collaboration is the Institute for Rural Health Development and Research. Faculty from three departments within Ogden College are working to provide health screening for citizens and offer continuing education for emergency medical personnel in disadvantaged counties. These activities should improve the quality of life for citizens in these counties. Money for this project is being obtained through a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services with assistance from Senator Mitch McConnell's office. "Students get involved in real-world applied projects and see that what they've learned in the classroom has a real application and they get excited," Ferrell mentioned. Dr. Ferrell said, "The Governor was correct when he stated that if institutions of higher education could forget about turf and work together for the common good, there will be more opportunities than they can handle." This concept has certainly held true for the Applied Research and Technology Program.

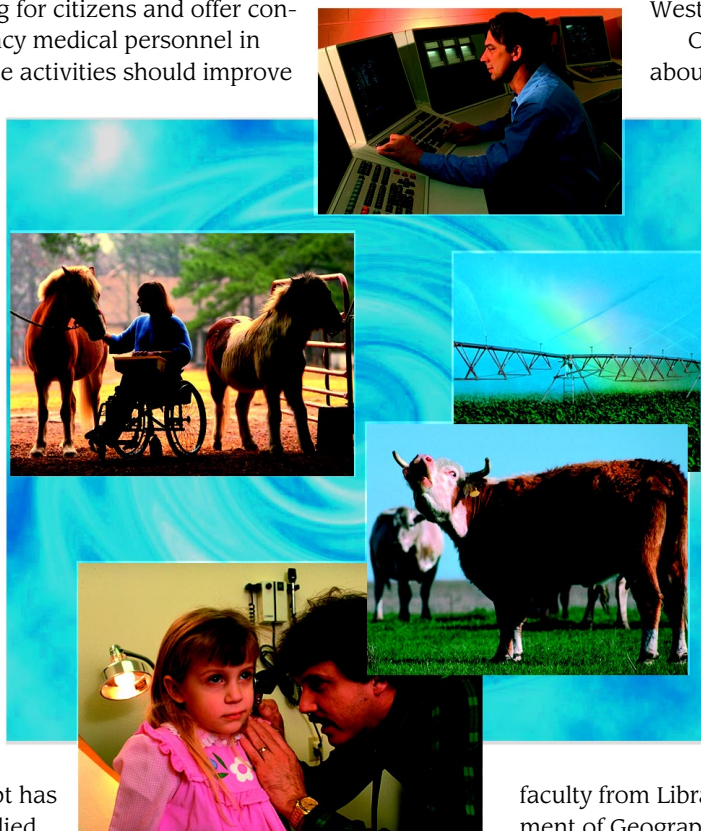
The Governor and Kentucky Science and Technology Corporation co-sponsored the Kentucky Science and Engineering Strategy. The General Assembly then enacted portions of this into law, and venture capital is now available for economic development in the Commonwealth. However, high-tech companies that want to take advantage of these funds must partner with a university. The Applied Research and Technology Program has placed Western in a strategic position to take advantage of these funds for regional economic development, as well as for hands-on applied re-

search for our students. The Program is working in concert with the Bowling Green Chamber of Commerce on three such partnership ventures at this time. Dr. Ferrell said that one of these ventures might create a large demand for computer programmers with salaries starting at \$45,000. Dr. Martin Houston, Dean of the College of Science, Technology & Health, says that better programs and better jobs after graduation mean more students for Western.

One of the things Ferrell touts about the program is the way it reaches into many different disciplines and departments, even beyond Ogden College, to tap expertise to solve problems. Grant proposals to the National Science Foundation and EPA to study watershed protection were developed by faculty associated with several Centers and faculty in sociology and business. The Biotechnology Center involves faculty and students from the Department of Psychology, and the Center for Biodiversity Studies involves computer programming students and

faculty from Library Sciences and the Department of Geography and Geology. "This is only our third year, and we want to continue to attract students to be involved in activities of our Program of Distinction."

And while the students are in classrooms or out in the field getting hands-on training, Dr. Ferrell isn't always in his office. Since he came to Western, Dr. Ferrell has been teaching the kind of classes, such as Comparative Anatomy, that some students wish they could avoid at all costs. Other student-related activities include Dr. Ferrell's role as academic advisor, and 13 years as advisor for Alpha Epsilon Delta, a pre-medicine honor society. Making time for classes and student activities remains an important part of Dr. Ferrell's busy schedule. He says, "I like interacting with students!"



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