

Grants and Marketing Help Advance Virginia's Only Junior College

Richard Bland College receives \$5 million in grants and eclipses 5 million in YouTube views.

SOUTH PRINCE GEORGE, VA, UNITED STATES, November 12, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Just four months into fiscal 2025, Richard Bland College of William & Mary (RBC) has secured more than \$5 million in grant funding. Also of note, the College's YouTube page is among the top-viewed of the Commonwealth's two-year schools, recently amassing more than five million views.

Grants Awarded to RBC ORI

The RBC Office of Research &

Innovation (ORI) received two grants from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV): \$3.4 million for its Rural Student Success Program, also known as the REACH4 (Rural Engagement, Achievement Center for Hope, Happiness, Harmony and Healing) Project, as well as \$1 million for its Mobile Marketing Engagement Unit.

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“With this funding, we can delve deeper into student success initiatives that drives innovation in educational outcomes,” said Dr. Kimberly Boyd, RBC Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer.

In September of this year, the College unveiled its Academic Innovation Center (AIC). The 24,000 square foot center, which connects to the freshly renovated library,

features a host of modern classrooms, offices and collaboration spaces. The AIC serves as a hub for STEM-H (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Health Sciences) research and education for RBC students, faculty, staff and the local community.



(L-R) RBC Research Program Coordinator Mandy Allen, RBC President Dr. Debbie L. Sydow, RBC Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer Dr. Kimberly Boyd

The ORI, which has offices in the AIC, is committed to unparalleled research and innovation, as well as providing students with a world-class education that will prepare them for success in their future endeavors.

“Our office is committed to diversity and inclusion to achieve its mission and to foster an environment where all individuals are valued and respected,” Dr. Boyd added.

Dr. Barry W. Simmons Sr., Financial Aid Associate and Program Administrator for the Pell Initiative at SCHEV, applauded the College’s intentionality in exposing rural and underserved populations to state-of-the-art technology. This has the potential to have a reverberating impact in the Greater Crater Health District and beyond.

“RBC's approach echoes portions of the K-12 Invitational Education Movement,” he said.

The movement is a recent phenomenon that advocates for student holistic wellness and empowerment. The RBC REACH4 project incorporates mental health support and resources, which was often overlooked in higher education until recently, according to Simmons.

Artificial intelligence (AI) research and education will also be foundational in the work the ORI is conducting. In fact, within the next few months, the College will be welcoming Ameca to campus. The humanoid robot, which was created by British robotics company Engineered Arts, is one of the most advanced in the world. It is designed to interact with humans in a fascinatingly natural and engaging way.



Dr. Kimberly Boyd (center); Lisa Pond, RBC Associate Director of Administrative Services, Office of The Vice President (far right); and the Office of Research & Innovation at RBC interns



(L-R) RBC Creatives Group team: Creative Director and Producer Jesse Vaughan, News Host Amy Lacey, and Senior Videographer and Producer Derek Wright

"Presently, artificial intelligence is ubiquitous in all aspects of life," Dr. Boyd said. "However, there are students who aren't exposed to it on a frequent basis.

"By way of the SCHEV grant funding, the College's Office of Research & Innovation will help close this accessibility gap for middle and high school students, as well as underrepresented and underserved rural college students in the Greater Crater Health District. AI technology is pivotal to enhancing students' educational experiences." Additionally, the office received more than \$600,000 in grant funding from a federal agency for its Distance Learning Training Program. The ORI will utilize a mobile center to travel to various parts of the state to educate learners about career discovery and exploration. This initiative will primarily service first generation and rural area students, as well as non-traditional adult learners.



Dr. Kimberly Boyd reviewing her notes



Amy Lacey anchoring in the "Inside RBC-TV" studio

RBC President Debbie L. Sydow projects enormous growth opportunity for the ORI and the compounded impact its research and projects will have on the campus and surrounding community.

"Since its inception three years ago, the Office of Research & Innovation has been leading paramount research and community development initiatives financially backed by several prominent state and federal organizations," Dr. Sydow said. "The work not only elevates the College's value proposition, but also lifts up the surrounding community, especially our rural and underserved neighbors."

RBC Marketing & Communications Surpasses 5 Million YouTube Views

The RBC Marketing & Communications team also has cause for celebration as the College's YouTube page recently eclipsed five million views. This is a testament to the team's tireless efforts to revamp RBC's multimedia presence and its partnerships with local media stakeholders to grow public knowledge of the College and its value proposition.

“The team has worked diligently to ensure and sustain the growth of RBC’s multimedia footprint,” RBC Chief Marketing & Communications Officer Jesse Vaughan said. “It’s rewarding to see the fruits of our labor in real-time.”

Prior to Vaughan’s tenure as head of the Marketing & Communications team, the College’s multimedia work was largely outsourced, which wasn’t sustainable due to rising video production costs. But once he came on board, Vaughan and his team looked for ways to work more efficiently and cost-effectively.

“Self-sufficiency saves Richard Bland College money and it also gives us a chance to highlight the talent of the RBC Creative Services Group,” Vaughan said.

CSG is an in-house advertising agency and production support company that consists of Vaughan, who serves as Creative Director and Producer; RBC Senior Videographer/Producer Derek Wright; RBC Associate Director of Communications Sterling Giles; Graphics Designer LeeAnn Wilson; freelance News Host Amy Lacey and ancillary partners from all over the globe. “We build brand awareness by creating immersive multimedia content,” Vaughan said. “We don’t outsource any of our advertising or production services—it’s all created right here on campus.”

To date, the College has garnered nine Capital Emmy Award nominations from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. It notched its first-ever win in June of this year for the second installment of its [“Inside RBC-TV”](#) program.

The accolades and success were a byproduct of the invaluable partnerships the College established with Richmond, Va.-based media conglomerates, Lewis Media Partners and WTVR-TV CBS 6.

In its first digital commercial campaign with Lewis Media, the Marketing & Communications team produced a [set of spots](#) and the partner provided media-buy support. In total, the videos garnered more than 1.2 million YouTube views with over 11 million social media impressions.

“There’s a great trust between Jesse, the team and us,” said Aurelia Lewis, Founder and President at Lewis Media Partners. “We keep them up to date with all the changes that are happening in the industry. We’ve invested in all the tools and technology to make sure that our clients are reaching the pertinent target audiences.”

To facilitate its marketing services, Lewis Media uses several applications such as Domo, a business intelligence and visualization tool; Skai, a data driven marketing platform and Resonate, an AI-powered consumer data and insights research program.

From the outset, the Marketing & Communications team has sustained an impressive content output, which translated to the surge in the College’s social media followers and YouTube views. Currently, RBC and its affiliate pages have roughly 19,000 followers across all social media platforms and more than 230 videos on its YouTube page.

By leveraging RBC's content, Lewis Media optimizes multimedia channels to target prospective students and their families, as well as the general public. The return on investment has been fruitful. Namely, Richard Bland College saw a significant year-over-year increase in student enrollment.

With WTVR-TV CBS 6, the College partnered with the station's "Virginia This Morning" program to conduct interviews with several RBC faculty and staff about the newsworthy happenings on campus. The station has also run a slew of RBC content ranging from [awareness commercials](#) aired during the Super Bowl to the Capital Emmy Award-winning "Inside RBC-TV" show. "The team at Richard Bland College of William & Mary represents best-in-class ability to think outside the box in reaching potential students and their families," WTVR-TV CBS 6 General Manager Stephen Hayes said. "From Emmy Award-winning, long-form programming to linear content integration, it's refreshing to witness how RBC connects and engages with the Central Virginia community."

With both Lewis Media and CBS 6, the Marketing & Communications team has been able to expand its reach in traditional and digital media spaces. The marketing campaigns have been resounding successes due to the synergy of the Marketing & Communication team's high-quality content and the media partners' intentionality and expertise in audience marketing. "We are eternally grateful to work with partners who are equally invested and aligned in raising awareness about Richard Bland College of William & Mary," Vaughan said. "I believe the College is one of the most unique and invaluable educational institutions in the country and it deserves to be marketed as such."

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