



FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY™

Office of Sponsored Programs

September 4, 2025



SPECIAL FEATURE

It Takes a Village: Campus Collaboration to Realize West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy 2022 - 2024

Since the inception of the West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy (GHA) in 1984, Fairmont State University has served as host for GHA four times. The Academy is a yearly summer experience for some of West Virginia's best and brightest rising high school seniors. Students live and learn on campus for multiple weeks, taking courses designed to better prepare them for college and expose them to topics beyond the scope of a traditional high school curriculum.

During the 2022 - 2024 GHA, Fairmont State served a total of 269 students. This cycle of the Academy was led by Robin Payne, Ph.D., Professor of History and Director of the Honors Program, and Keisha Kibler, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Education and Program Coordinator for the Master of Arts in Teaching and Secondary Education, who both worked diligently to provide GHA students with a worthwhile experience. These students lived on campus in Bryant Place while taking courses with faculty in a wide range of disciplines. All the courses were designed to increase student exposure to collegiate level academic coursework. Beyond the classroom, GHA students had the opportunity to visit off-campus destinations, including Washington, D.C., and to develop a strong sense of community through peer connections.

"Watching the students form community bonds with their classmates and come into a greater sense of self over the course of the Academy was the most rewarding part of GHA for me. Though the students were only on campus for three weeks, over the course of that time so many of them transformed into such self-possessed, confident young people," shared Payne. "Many of them had never before been so deeply embedded in a community of peers who shared their passion for learning. Their excitement and energy were contagious and at the end of each year's GHA, I was full of hope and optimism for the wonderful things these young people are going to do in and for the world we all live in together."

Not only did students benefit from GHA, Fairmont State did as well. Serving as the host institution for GHA raised the University's profile within the community and within the state. Similarly, students' positive experiences in Fairmont State's residence halls and facilities and with faculty members supported University enrollment and recruitment efforts. Drs. Payne and Kibler acknowledge that this success is largely because of the way in which the campus community at Fairmont State came together in support of this state-sponsored program.

"Fairmont State University is the perfect host institution for GHA due to its geographical location and the people who work here. Dr. Payne and I were always supported throughout the duration of the academy. All campus offices and departments were generous in the physical and cognitive lifting needed to ensure these students had a well-rounded, inclusive experience," said Kibler.

While many campus offices and departments were involved in GHA, Payne and Kibler feel that some in particular deserve special acknowledgement. Housing & Residence staff went to great lengths to ensure that the living accommodations were comfortable for students, faculty, and staff. Moreover, Facilities staff went above and beyond in providing access to buildings, setting up for events, and delivering a mountain of supplies and packages to the Honors Office in the lead-up to the Academy. Falcon Center and Information Technology staff ensured access to amenities, spaces, Wi-Fi, and necessary technology equipment. Dining Services, including Aladdin, provided delicious and nutritious meals while accommodating a

variety of dietary restrictions. Student Health provided quality care to GHA students, and University Police were available to assist with GHA move-in and maintaining a safe, secure campus community.

"I'd be remiss if I didn't give a special shout out to my 'boo,' Dr. Keisha Kibler! I didn't know Dr. Kibler very well before GHA, but by the end of that first academy, I had come to rely heavily upon her for her GHA know-how, her infectious enthusiasm, and the resilience and compassion with which she conducted herself even in the most trying of circumstances," added Payne. "Ally Quigley, who started as an RA for our first year and had become the Resident Director by the end, was also indispensable. Those partnerships, as well as the many lasting friendships forged with so many of the committed GHA faculty and staff whose passion for education inspired me daily, are what I will cherish the most from having had this experience."

Other groups Payne and Kibler would like to recognize for their assistance in making GHA a success include the Finance Office, the Theatre Department, the Office of Admissions, the Ruth Ann Musick Library, and the Office of Sponsored Programs, as well as President Davis and University Leadership.

As evidenced by this long list, Payne and Kibler feel deep gratitude for the campus community who contributed to this venture. They express their sincere thanks for all the assistance and support that made this experience possible for students. As the directors of GHA, Payne and Kibler feel that the experience changed them as much as it changed the students.

"For me, GHA is an authentic representation of the learning process that is driven by curiosity, crosses multiple disciplines, and is maximized through collaboration. It is life changing to watch these young West Virginians step outside of the comfort of a traditional classroom. For some, this was their first time away from home. This transformational experience can serve as a catalyst to them finding their passion and purpose," said Kibler.

Many educators go into the field hoping to have a positive impact upon their students. Payne and Kibler were able to help their students forge community bonds that will last a lifetime, experience new and exciting things, and develop a strong sense of purpose to excel and improve the world in which we live. They describe the experience as both an honor and the professional privilege of a lifetime, only possible because of the many wonderfully dedicated faculty and staff who devoted their time, energy, and expertise to GHA.

Live Grant Assistance Training Opportunity

The West Virginia Grant Resource Centers are hosting a virtual Live Grant Assistance Session, "Developing a Project Timeline," on Tuesday,

September 16, 2025, at 12p.m. This session will provide an overview of developing a project timeline, communicating project partner responsibilities, and more.

Click here to register for the free September 16 virtual training.



SPECIAL NOTE:

Any grant application, proposal, or request for external funding must be reviewed and approved prior to submission through an internal process managed by the Office of Sponsored Programs. Please *visit our website* for more information and to access the required forms which facilitate the internal review and approval process.



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Fairmont State University | 324 Hardway Hall 1201 Locust Ave. | Fairmont, WV 26554
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