To the SEAHO Awards Selection Committee:

It is my honor to write this nomination for Donald Walker for the James C. Grimm Outstanding New Professional Award. Although I have not had the opportunity to supervise Donald throughout his time at Virginia Tech, I have had the opportunity to witness a strong professional with a passion for student engagement, a commitment to bettering a department and a colleague that focuses on shared opportunities.

One of the most notable things about Donald is his ability to create connections throughout the University. Not only has Donald worked closely with his resident advisor staff to build a strong community in the Slusher Complex, a primarily freshman building, he has used his charisma to create relationships across the campus. Currently, Donald works in conjunction with the Office of Equity and Inclusion on the Mosiac theme community, a community focused on understanding and appreciating differences. Throughout this year and last, Donald sat in on countless meetings and offered ideas on how to increase the student interest in the Mosiac community, eliminate student stereotypes about residents of the community and to find ways to make it a meaningful and intentional experience for the residents. In addition, Donald serves as the liaison to the School of Engineering through his involvement with the Hypatia , the women in engineering learning community. Donald is also the representative on the Student Affairs divisional diversity committee.

Beyond creating University networks, Donald is skilled at student engagement. Upon arriving at VT less than a year and half ago, Donald took it upon himself to create a “curriculum” based model for student interaction with his Resident Advisors. This new “model” in Slusher was unique to the student staff and department at Virginia Tech. It was through his hard work, that Donald was able to help the RAs understand the need for community development and how to engage a student and make the on-campus experience both intentional and education. Now, Donald is an active member of the Residential Curriculum development committee in Residence Life. Beyond working with his direct staff members, Donald was actively involved with the creation of a chapter of Future Leaders In Student Affairs (FLSA), an organization designed to assist graduate and undergraduate students in understanding Student Affairs as a career, on the VT campus. He works closely with two of his colleagues to design lesson plans, recruit presenters and serve as mentors to VT students that are interested in pursuing a career in Residence Life.

While Donald is great at creating connections and understanding the importance of student engagement, his most impressive skill as a new professional is his commitment to the students and the institution. Donald is often volunteering his time to create opportunities to get to know students better and to create a positive experience for our residential students. For example, Donald sought out the opportunity to teach the first year seminar class on-campus. This was in addition to his teaching responsibilities for the first year resident advisors and his hectic schedule as a complex director. This year, Donald also volunteered to take a delegation of student staff members to the VACUHO RA conference. He and his fellow advisor spent countless hours preparing the delegation, making sure the logistics were attended to and then following up the RA conference with a presentation the professional staff about what the students learned while at the conference. His attention to the one-on-one needs of the VT on-campus students is impressive. It is not unusual to look at Donald’s calendar to see an hour or two a week blocked off to have “mentoring” time with students that have turned to Donald for academic and social support. He gives his all to these students, in hopes that someday, they are able to return the favor and be a mentor to someone that really needs help as well.

While Donald’s accomplishments on the VT campus have been numerous, too much so for me to list them all in a brief nomination letter, he also understands that his development as a professional has not stopped and he has many more things to learn. He consistently volunteers for opportunities outside of his “expertise” and is willing to lend a helping hand to anyone that needs it. He keeps our professional staff motivated and excited about their position by consistently raising the bar and pushing everyone to keep achieving more than they thought possible. It is for all of these reasons and more that I would like to strongly recommend Donald for the James C. Grimm Outstanding New Professional Award. His accomplishments and commitment speak for themselves. While he is still young in the field, I am confident that is will leave his mark on Residence Life and Student Affairs throughout his career, he has already left his mark in a short year and a half at VT.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Bannon  
Assistant Director of Residence Life  
Virginia Tech  
540-231-6706  
jrbannon@vt.edu