The Riley Institute at Furman

Leadership through education, diversity, and empowerment

The Riley Institute has so many important initiatives happening at any given time that it’s difficult to wrap your arms around it. But what is important to note is that the same principles and priorities hammered out 15 years ago by former Governor Dick Riley ’34, Political Science Professor Don Gordon, Ph.D., and Furman University President David Shi ’73, Ph.D., still guide the work today.

Like finding innovative ways to attack poverty through education in South Carolina. Nearly 20 percent of South Carolina citizens live in poverty. And the one critical element in combating poverty is education—an area of the Institute’s work in which Assistant Director Jacki Martin is deeply involved.

“The New Tech schools are a great example of that strategy. We identified New Tech schools from the range of national models—they are project-based STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) focused learning models that are highly engaging for students, and drive incredible outcomes in the way of graduation, persistence in college—a great spectrum of metrics.

“Project-based learning teaches kids to collaborate and work in teams: it’s how today’s students will get through college and into the workforce. To engage them, you have to let them be part of their own learning process. And in these types of schools, they work like we work.”

Another goal of the Riley Institute is developing leadership, especially in Furman students. Through the Riley Institute, a group of students travel each year to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, (APEC), where they interact one-on-one or in group settings with their counterparts in other countries, plus heads of state from around the world. And on campus, students help coordinate the Institute’s visiting speakers and scholars series which brings leaders like Hillary Clinton, Howard Baker, and Tom Brokaw

117 teachers who participated in Teachers of Government

$4.1 million funds raised for the Riley Institute Endowment as of February 2014

1,300 South Carolina leaders who are Diversity Leaders Initiative graduates

141 past and active Riley Institute Student Advance Team members
to campus to teach students and speak to them and the community at large.

"This very public conversation piece is a fantastic opportunity for students to learn from those on the frontlines," Martin says. "Plus, they get private time with these larger-than-life figures."

The Institute's third focus is on diversity leadership. "The state's economic future depends on breaking down the cultural divisions that bar progress from many of our people," said Martin. "The Diversity Leaders Initiative (DLI) is about developing new leadership tools to address complex diversity issues and maximize organizational outcomes." Now numbering more than 1,300, DLI graduates gather each year for a three-day event called OneSouthCarolina, an opportunity for this statewide leadership group to network and hear from state and national leaders about issues critical to the state.

THE RILEY ENDOWMENT

The Riley Institute is funded through a blend of support from Furman, program fees, and one-time gifts, grants, and sponsorships designated for specific initiatives. Endowment funding will stabilize ongoing operating budgets, while also growing the Institute's capacity to serve as a state, regional, and national leader for strategic education initiatives and economic development.

The endowment campaign will sustain the Riley Institute’s work in four critical areas: **refining the strategies for public education** that grew out of the Institute’s landmark 2008 study on education in South Carolina and its role in economic development; **extending the network of innovative high schools** implementing project-based learning and STEM curricula to develop competencies that create intellectual capital and new opportunity; **expanding the reach of the Diversity Leaders Initiative** throughout the state, strengthening economic and social change by convening core leadership groups, notably the Diversity Leaders alumni to collaborate on initiatives to drive progress in the state.

In early 2014, The Duke Endowment gave $1 million to support Riley Institute initiatives.