

# The Class of 2015: Catherine Goggins brings awareness to prison injustices

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Catherine Goggins plans to pursue a career in therapeutic prison horticulture.

*Editor's note: This story was updated to clarify that only some of the nine trips coordinated by Catherine Goggins for Newman Community were to Alderson Hospitality House. It was also corrected to more accurately describe her role in maintaining two community gardens at Alderson.*

BLACKSBURG, Va., May 4, 2015 – It's not hard to see all of the injustices in the world today. Wars, environmental issues, orphans, inequality, and poverty can fuel a passion to stand up for people in circumstances beyond their control.

But it takes true courage to advocate for those marginalized for reasons in their control. **Catherine Goggins of Newport News, Virginia**, a senior majoring in applied economics in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech, is doing just that.

When she developed an interest in therapeutic agriculture, Goggins visited Alderson Hospitality House, a home that serves the families of women incarcerated at a West Virginia federal prison. As she saw first-hand the injustices in the prison system, her trip to Alderson changed her career path.

“Through her courage, leadership, and commitment to challenge the status quo, Catherine works to shed light on the injustices of the incarcerated, who are

vulnerable, marginalized, and have no voice to speak out for themselves,” said Irene Saul, director of development for the [Newman Community at Virginia Tech](#).

In November 2014, Goggins organized the Prisons in Appalachia Panel at Virginia Tech, recruiting sponsors, gathering panel members, and promoting the event to the community. The event began with low expectations, but when many students expressed interest in attending, Goggins moved it to a larger venue. Even so, students lined the back wall, sat on the floor, and overflowed into the hallway.

As the Newman Community’s justice and service coordinator, Goggins set up projects that sent more than 100 students on nine trips, including trips to serve at the Alderson Hospitality House.

She immersed herself in the Alderson community and in 2014 maintained two community gardens to grow produce. Goggins collaborated with other gardeners and provided seedlings and produce to the local farmers market. That summer, she planned and participated in weekly food and literacy lessons for elementary children in the small West Virginia town.

“I’ve learned that people in community are incredibly resilient,” said Goggins.

Outside of her work in Alderson, Goggins lead many efforts for sustainable practices at Virginia Tech. She represented the [Environmental Coalition](#) in the Student Government Association’s House of Representatives, which worked to add water bottle refilling stations for students and created opportunities for engagement and economic exchange between students and local farmers. For this work, Goggins was named Representative of the Year in Student Government Association in 2013.

But when asked what she is most proud of, Goggins answered, “Virginia Tech’s chapter of Be the Match on Campus, without a doubt.” She co-founded the chapter her sophomore year to help find lifesaving matches for patients with leukemia, lymphoma, sickle cell anemia, and more than 60 other diseases. About 1,000 Hokies have joined the registry since the chapter was founded.

“The Virginia Tech community has taught me so much, and it has fostered a love of both learning and community,” said Goggins. “Four years ago, I never could have imagined how wonderfully rich this experience would be, but I’m so thankful to have been able to study subjects I love, always with an eye on their practical applications for communities today.”

After graduation, Goggins will travel to Argentina to work with a study abroad program and continue work in therapeutic prison horticulture.

*Written by Holly Paulette.*