Humanities Institute established

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Building on its liberal arts tradition, Wake Forest University has established the Wake Forest Humanities Institute to support innovative scholarship and collaboration in the humanities.

Wake Forest President Nathan O. Hatch announced the Institute’s launch Friday at a gathering of faculty and others from the campus community in the atrium of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library.

“The Humanities Institute both honors the liberal arts tradition that has long stood at the center of the Wake Forest experience and promotes innovative scholarship that is already invigorating our faculty and enhancing our intellectual community,” said President Nathan O. Hatch.

The goal of the Institute is to enhance and build a collaborative community of scholars in the humanities through initiatives such as faculty seminars, reading groups, round table discussions, long-term collaborative research projects, guest speakers, events and symposia.

Four faculty members—Sally Barbour, professor of Romance languages; Mary Foskett, Zachary T. Smith Associate Professor of Religion; Dean Franco, associate professor of English; and David Phillips, associate professor of the program in humanities—have
worked for the past three years to lay the groundwork for the Institute. More than 45 Wake Forest faculty across the university have been involved in research projects and creative activities started during the planning stages for the Institute.

“We anticipate the growth of new and evolving seminars, increasing engagement between Wake Forest and national and international humanities scholarship, a reaffirmed role for the humanities in the Wake Forest curriculum, and unique contributions to the public life of the humanities, in the spirit of our motto, Pro Humanitate,” said Franco, who spoke at the event.

The Humanities Institute began as a grass-roots initiative among a group of Wake Forest faculty who received a planning grant in 2007 from the provost’s office to fund humanities-focused initiatives. From a reading group exploring the relationships between neurobiology and music to collaborative research on peace and conflict management, to a faculty seminar on “Landscape and Place,” the group has already supported creative connections among faculty in departments across campus. The results of such collaboration have included panels at national conferences, guest speakers on campus, new books and new courses.

“The Institute is poised to make Wake Forest a leading national site for collaborative humanities research and education,” said Wake Forest Provost Jill Tiefenthaler.

A faculty director for the Humanities Institute will be named this fall and begin serving in that role in January. Also in the fall, the Institute will release a new call for proposals from Wake Forest faculty that will provide funding for new projects in the spring. In March, the Humanities Institute will host a two-day symposium featuring Edward Ayers, historian and president of the University of Richmond, who will give a keynote address on new directions in humanities research.