

Virginia State University Outstanding Faculty Award 2020-2021
Rising Star Stellar Award in Teaching, Research/Scholarship, and Service
Chantel Wilson, PhD

Assistant Professor and 4H STEAM Extension Specialist
College of Agriculture

Dr. Chantel Wilson is an assistant professor and 4-H STEAM Extension Specialist in the College of Agriculture at Virginia State University. While her appointment is 100% extension, teaching, research, and service are a part of her responsibility as a tenure track faculty member. Dr. Wilson joined the VSU faculty in August 2018. She received her Master's degree in Plant Pathology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her Ph.D. in Crop and Soil Environmental Science from Virginia Tech. She has an interest in youth development; generating interest or cultivating success in Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture and Math (STEAM), especially targeting first-generation students and underrepresented youth.

Dr. Wilson described teaching as her passion. Much of her experience is in a non-formal setting with a large emphasis on student-focused experiential learning creating a safe, low-pressure space for effective learning and developing interests based on what students want to learn. Dr. Wilson has been successful teaching adults, volunteers, college students, and K-12 youth (target audience) in a wide range of both formal and informal settings. She believes in a pragmatic, progressive approach to STEM education. According to Dr. Wilson "dissemination of the latest scientific knowledge is important, but imparting critical thinking skills is even more important to ensure that we can survive in the best conditions possible and preserve the environment for future generations."

Dr. Wilson's scholarly, research, and creative activities focus on STEAM in the context of 4-H Positive Youth Development. Many of her works intertwine teaching, research, and service. Dr. Wilson has developed curriculum and activities for youth that not only interest them, but also empowers them to develop a STEAM identity. One such program, Grass, Goats, and Uninvited Guests! is a low-cost curriculum developed to help youth learn about parasitism in goats and sheep without the use of live animals. The purpose of this curriculum was to teach old concepts in a different way, open up the doors to economically-disadvantaged programs, and expand the world of agriculture to urban youth. This curriculum was selected as the Virginia winner for Excellence in STEM from the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals and has been presented at multiple national conferences.

Dr. Wilson has worked with colleagues from Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension successfully securing a competitive grant to design the National 2020 4-H STEM Challenge Mars Base Camp kit. Further, she has worked to secure grants from Google and the National Science Foundation to expose youth to computer science activities, broaden participation in computer science from traditionally underrepresented groups, and to develop computer-science teaching competencies for educators and 4-H volunteers. Dr. Wilson is currently working on a project to meet Virginia's water quality goals while developing a career pathway for students interested in turf grass or environmental science. This project was funded by the VA Dept. of Conservation of Recreation and supported by the Deputy Secretary for Natural Resources/The Chesapeake Bay, Ann Jennings.

Dr. Wilson serves on the State Staff to direct 4-H programming throughout the state, the chair of the STEM Subteam of the Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H Positive Youth Development Program Team, and participates in national 4-H workgroups for both STEM and Urban Programming. She is currently serving as the Secretary of the VSU Faculty Senate and routinely serves on committee within the department and

college. She also volunteers as a Virginia Master Naturalist through Virginia Cooperative Extension, and strive to develop projects or other opportunities including the VSU community4-H is a volunteer-based positive youth development organization/Cooperative Extension service. Dr. Wilson noted that one of the most significant honors in her career to date “was to be mentioned by name by President Abdullah during testimony to the United States Congress. During his testimony advocating for 1890’s Institution Funding Equity at the Agriculture Committee hearing, he emphasized the fantastic job both I and my counterpart have done to create an excellent 4-H program at VSU.”