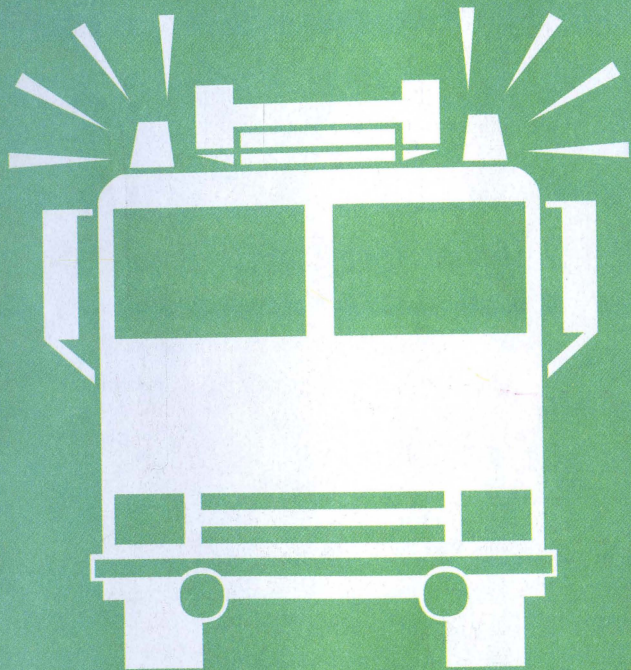


May 2007

the vine

live. learn. grow.



Emergency preparedness HOW SAFE IS VCU?

Va. Tech: why? • students remember 2006-07 • Carytown shopping, eating

the vine

Letter from the Editor	3
Profiles <i>people</i>	
McKenna Brown	4
Bethany Emerson	5
Geon Bae	6
Ron Corio	8
What's Going On <i>news</i>	
VCU Police seeks prevention through awareness	11
In case of emergency: Is VCU prepared?	12
Homeland Security Program picks up steam	16
Creative course cuts copy	18
Perspectives <i>opinion</i>	
Travel lightly	19
Cheap Eats with Julia Linden	20
Clinton or Obama: Do they have a chance?	22
Memorable moments at VCU	24
Reflecting on the Virginia Tech tragedy	26
Expressions <i>art</i>	
Artwork — Becky Carey	27
Poetry — Kayla White, Amy Clark	28
'Robin-Egg Blue' — Zaynah Qutubuddin	30
Your Staff	31

Dear Readers,

The semester is finally coming to an end. I'm sure most of you are breathing a sigh of relief right now, but for some unknown reason, I always tend to feel a twinge of sadness around this time of the year. I'm probably just being overly sentimental (as usual), but I find it hard not to look back fondly (or not) at the past couple of semesters without reflecting over the things I've done.

College can be a difficult and trying time for students attempting to enter into the work force and transition into a career. But I believe that even through the worst moments, when you are the most tired and most stressed, you should be able to look back at your accomplishments and feel proud of what you've done.

I feel that in order to succeed in life, you must be able to "look back in order to go forward." The VCU students featured in this issue are examples of people who are learning and growing from their experiences.

The Vine itself has been through an extensive growth period, and I feel that it has really found its footing this year. That is thanks in part to the wonderful staff of writers and contributors who have helped to make this magazine what it is. It can only go up from here.

A personal thank you to: Meredith, Cortney, Gergana, Terrell, Julia and Lewis, the talented staff, for being so dedicated to making the Vine the best that it can.

And lastly a special thank you to YOU, the reader, whose continued interest in this magazine motivates us to bring something better with every issue.

Good luck to all of you in your future endeavors; good luck to this semester's graduating seniors; and have a wonderful summer!

Sincerely,
Ashley Turner

live. learn. grow.

McKenna Brown

Meredith Kight

STAFF WRITER

If you asked most people about the language of the ancient Mayans, they probably wouldn't be able to tell you much.

If you asked McKenna Brown, Ph.D., however, you would likely get more information than you knew what to do with. Brown, the director of the School of World Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, has co-authored three books on the subject. He has also produced a video on the current Mayan movement.

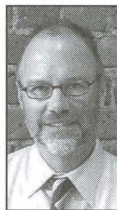
Brown, a Florida native, attributes his interest in the Mayan culture to his time at Tulane University, where he received his master's and doctoral degrees in Latin American Studies.

"I've always been drawn to the issues faced by indigenous peoples, as well as to other languages. My first semester at Tulane I had the good fortune to work under Judith Maxwell, a linguist with decades of experience working with Mayan languages in Guatemala," Brown said. "With a small summer grant in 1985, I traveled to Guatemala and started taking lessons in Kaqchikel."

Before coming to VCU 11 years ago, Brown taught at the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, and received a Fulbright grant to teach in Guatemala.

"I also had the chance to collaborate with the Mayan writer Gaspar Pedro González on the English translation of his poems, and also to practice my Kaqchikel," Brown said.

His interest in Latin American culture is not limited to the language. Brown says he enjoys the food and how it fits in with cultural traditions, as well as a few other cultural staples such as salsa dancing.



Irayda Ruiz, assistant director of the School of World Studies and a native of Guatemala, says she first heard about Brown when she was an international student at VCU. Then, when she applied for the assistant director's position, she was excited to work with him.

"I was surprised that actually someone from VCU was that interested in my country," Ruiz said. "A former professor of mine told me about this job and I knew that Dr. Brown was going to be my boss; I thought it would be a great idea. I really had a good image of him and his academic interest."

Ruiz, who is the internship coordinator for the School of World Studies, has worked closely with Brown on

several projects for the school, including the Grace Street Festival, the new advising office and a new community-focused internship.

"He had this idea of working with the immigrant communities in Richmond ... so we created a new internship program to help children whose mother tongue is not English," Ruiz said.

Catherine Howard, director of the Division of Community Engagement at VCU, also talked about Brown's interest in connecting VCU with the surrounding Latino community. Brown worked with Howard to develop conversational Spanish classes for VCU faculty and staff.

"Within a class what was fun was you may have a surgeon, you may have an artist, you may have a VCU police officer and you may have a secretary in a department," Howard said. "You have people from all disciplines and walks of life ... so not only were they learning together, they were really building a sense of community."

Brown's community outreach also extends to working with the American Red Cross by serving on the Multicultural Services Subcommittee. Peter Von der Lippe, the director of Multicultural Services for the Red Cross' greater Richmond chapter, says Brown's knowledge of other cultures has been instrumental

BROWN, CONTINUED TO PAGE 7

Bethany Emerson

Julia Linden

STAFF WRITER

Leaning over the rail to get a better look, Bethany Emerson peers down onto the scene below. She can see perfectly into the courtyard where the children play, accompanied by the afternoon light. Warmth fills her chest and she smiles.

Moments such as these remind Emerson why she traveled to India in the winter of 2005.

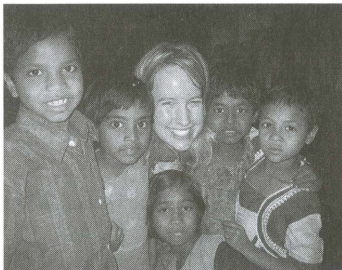
"I'll never forget the lessons they taught me," she said. "I learned from watching them selflessly care for each other — tiny girls hand-feeding sick friends, older children looking out for younger ones, wiping tears from the eyes of discouraged playmates. These moments gave me windows into their hearts."

Upon being accepted to VCU in 2004, Emerson was uncertain of her future goals. On a whim, Emerson decided to travel to south-east India in November of 2005 after attending a Passion Conference in Nashville, Tenn. One of the issues that the conference focused on was the recent devastation in India due to a tsunami attack. During a prayer for the children of India, Emerson said she felt fate pulling her in their direction.

"I knew God was leading me to go there," she said. Emerson was unaware of how much the experience would change her and

how as an outcome, she would trust God more than she ever imagined.

Emerson said living in India was an experience like that of a different world. In an orphanage called Love-N-Care Ministries, Emerson was assigned to tutor fourth and fifth grade children.



Never having traveled internationally before, she said, "it was quite a shock to find myself in Indian dress, eating plates of rice and curry with my hand, and sharing my testimony with more than 200 children."

At first, Emerson admits to being shocked at how unsanitary and rural the conditions were. The driving terrified her. When she first arrived in Visag, she thought she might die on the way to the orphanage. Cars were literally inches from one another.

"Before I knew it, I rather enjoyed the thrill - but it definitely took several weeks," she said.

Through Emerson's eyes,

the orphanage was nothing short of heartbreaking. The children's rooms were made of cement walls and floors where they were made to sleep with only a small blanket to keep them warm. Emerson said that each child had no more than two uniforms for school and maybe an outfit for play, both of which were often torn and tattered.

With a cold and empty room similar to the children's dormitories, Emerson found that her living quarters were a difficult place to call home for three months. But as time went on, she was able to

adjust to these harsh conditions and compensate. She placed her books on the empty shelves, and hung her Indian robes on the walls, which added some color and warmth to her surroundings.

Food was scarce. For breakfast, Emerson served rice and milk to the children. For lunch and dinner they had rice with curry. Her favorite dish was curry lentils and pouri (Indian flatbread). She said this was hard to digest at first, but she grew to love it. On Sundays, hardboiled eggs were a treat for the children, and Emerson shared in this delight.

"I think I was desperate for protein," she said. She had to

EMERSON, CONTINUED TO PAGE 10

Geon Bae

Cortney Anderson

ART EDITOR

With a family living 5500 miles away, pricey tuition and a few other looming difficulties, one international student works hard to be successful in the U.S.

At first glance Geon Bae might seem like a typical college student, but once he speaks, you may find otherwise. English is Bae's second language and he speaks it extremely well with a hint of a British accent.

Name: Geon Bae

Birth date: 11-02-85

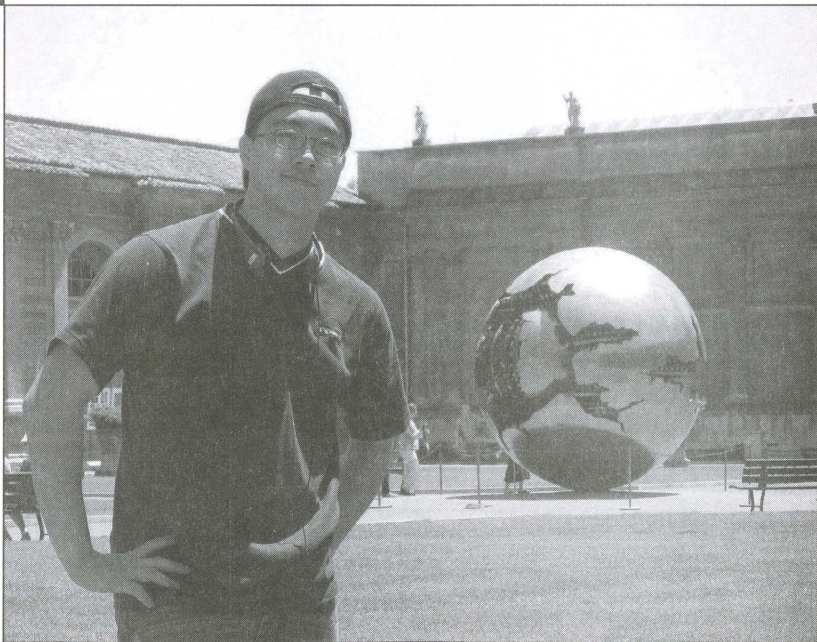
Major: Biology, pre-dentistry

Place of Birth: Seoul, South Korea

How would he describe himself?

Hardworking guitarist

BAE, CONTINUED TO PAGE 7



Bae photo

BROWN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

in helping the committee reach out to the Latino community.

Brown's focus on community and the importance of diverse cultures also shows in his teaching. He has created a class on Mayan literature at VCU, which he is teaching this spring. For the past several summers, Brown has also taken students to Guatemala, which he considers his second home, as part of VCU's study abroad program.

Brown received the PACME (Presidential Awards

for Community Multicultural Enrichment) award from VCU President Eugene Trani last spring. The award is given to people who have made significant contributions toward enhancing diversity at VCU.

Both Howard and Ruiz say that Brown is a great collaborator and a good person to work with.

"He's willing to take part in any kind of discussions and get involved, and that's just really very refreshing to have someone who's that interested in connecting

with other people and disciplines," Howard said.

Ruiz also added that this is an important trait in a director and described Brown as compassionate.

"As a supervisor he is a big visionary, so the danger of being a visionary is that you want to achieve so many things and everybody has to catch up behind you," Ruiz said. "We are hectic around here; ... it takes a special person to still want to take more on your plate."

BAE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Born in Seoul, South Korea, 21-year-old Bae moved to England when he was 15 years old for six years of secondary school. Before that he studied for eight years in Korea. It was not until he moved to England that he began to learn English.

"I had a desire to go to a bigger country to study dentistry," Bae said about his choice to attend Virginia Commonwealth University. "Also, the living cost was very expensive over in the United Kingdom compared to the United States."

Bae is majoring in biology at VCU, and he spends a lot of time working to make good grades. As an international student, he faces unique challenges.

"Since I'm alone in America, I miss my family a lot," Bae said. "I have to pay a lot of tuition which is kind of sad."

According to Bae the cost of tuition for international students is almost twice that for Virginia residents. Many out-of-state students face higher tuition, but they probably have more employment options than Bae.

"I can't find a job in America with a student

visa, it's illegal," Bae said.

While in America Bae misses his mother, father and older brother who live in South Korea.

"I loved the times when my brother and I could stay at home and chat without interruption," Bae said. "We also used to play basketball after school on Saturdays. It was so fun."

Now Bae spends much of his free time watching films, listening to music and playing guitar. He also teaches guitar and leads Bible studies.

"I'm a Christian, so I consider God the most important thing in my life, then my family and friends," Bae said.

All in all Bae would just like people to think of him as a friendly, optimistic person.

So, what does the future hold for Bae? He's not sure, but he hopes to apply to dental school when he graduates from VCU and go on to become a medical missionary.

Although Bae has traveled further and further away from home, it doesn't seem like any challenge will stop him from getting closer to his life goals.

Ron Corio

Gayland Hethcoat

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

An English instructor with VCU's Office of International Education since 1992, Ron Corio never expected to teach English in China, of all places.

When Peter Kirkpatrick, executive director of the OIE, presented Corio with the opportunity to become the first OIE instructor to teach abroad, Corio wasn't just taken aback by the proposal. He was downright uninterested.

"In my mind, I thought, 'No, no, no, no, I don't want to do this,'" said 71-year-old Corio, who previously taught abroad in Costa Rica. "I liked my life there in Richmond. I didn't want to disrupt that and go away for a year."

The more Corio pondered

living and teaching in booming China, though, the more his feelings changed.

"As I thought about it and talked it over with my family and some of my friends, I thought, 'This is a really good opportunity,'" he said. "It was just too intriguing to not take."

By early 2006, Corio's intrigue led him to pledge a whole academic year to teach English at Fudan University, one of VCU's partnership universities, located in Shanghai. Arriving in the city at the beginning of the fall 2006 semester, the instructor will teach until at least July, when Fudan's spring semester ends.

Corio currently teaches three sections of an academic writing course and one section of an advanced English course to

students majoring in everything from journalism to computer science. As mandated by China's Ministry of Education, all Fudan students are required to fulfill at least 12 English credits to graduate. Depending on their placement test scores, students may substitute lower-level English courses for electives, such as Corio's academic writing course.

The purpose of early-age English classes in China is to familiarize students with the language, said Ji Peiyang, deputy dean of Fudan's College of Foreign Languages and Literature. University English classes, however, are intended to promote practical language usage.

"At the university level, our focus is on developing students' real ability to speak English or to use English to communicate with people," Ji said. "We do not only



John Zhou photo

emphasize the language itself; we emphasize that students should know how to use the language."

Corio follows the same utilitarian thinking in the classroom. One of his class assignments is for students to listen to English-speaking news stories on the radio or Internet and then summarize them in front of their classmates. The hope is that by giving students freedom to choose the news reports they want, they will sustain a genuine interest in learning.

"If you can make learning fun, there's a better chance learning will take place, and students will be engaged," Corio said.

One thing Corio himself has learned since he began teaching at Fudan is that the learning process is not one-way. Just as he has tried to give his students a better understanding of English, his students have given him a better glimpse of China and its youth.

Corio noted how surprised he was to see how significantly western culture influences China's younger generations. Wearing popular clothing brands such as Nike, his students often talk in class about their favorite TV shows, including "Friends," "Desperate Housewives" and especially "Prison Break."

"My question is, if they're getting their knowledge of the U.S. through TV situation comedies and situation shows, are they building misperceptions or thinking that all Americans are like this or are they truly seeing what Americans are like?" Corio said.

As students, Corio said, the Chinese in his class have demonstrated excellent manners and a genuine interest in grasping English. Overall, he said, Fudan students have better language abilities than

the international students he has taught at VCU, many of whom presume that because they are in the United States, their English is good enough to take a full load of English-speaking classes.

More than anything, however, Corio said, he has observed an exceptional level of motivation among his Chinese students. They realize academic success usually translates into career success.

"China is going through a rapid phase of increased development, and people want to better their lives," Corio said. "Most all people recognize education is the

Follow Ron Corio's China travels by visiting his blog, "Postcards from China," at <http://blog.vcu.edu/rcorio/>

way to do that."

For many of Corio's students, the desire to study abroad, primarily in the United States, is their motivation.

Qiang Sheng, a junior management science major, is one such student. After he graduates, Qiang hopes to enroll in a U.S. graduate school to study business. Good English skills are "very, very, very important," he said, because foreign graduate school applicants are required to take two standardized tests in English, the Graduate Requirement Exam and the Test of English as a Foreign Language.

Qiang said he hopes to get to know Corio better as the semester progresses, so he may use him as a reference in the future. As competitive as U.S. graduate schools are, Qiang said, a recommendation letter from an American is almost mandatory for foreign students. Otherwise, "we have no chance," he said.

Like Qiang, freshman economics major Yumeng Zheng wishes to further her studies in the United States. Instead of waiting until graduate school, though, Yumeng seeks to transfer from Fudan to Cornell University. Having already submitted her application, she hopes to begin taking classes at Cornell this fall.

Yumeng said studying abroad would force her to rely on her English to communicate with those around her. By the time she would return to China, Yumeng said, her English would be substantially more developed.

"When you apply for a job, English is usually required," she said. "If you don't possess an English certificate, your chance of getting a job will be really low."

Corio said he understands the pressures his students face. As a foreigner in China, he, too, has to deal with his own challenges.

Although he has studied Chinese for a few months on his own, he commonly struggles to communicate with native Chinese speakers. Routine situations such as asking the maintenance staff to respond to a problem in the apartment VCU has furnished for him, can prove to be difficult.

Despite the cultural barriers, Corio said he has adjusted well to life in Shanghai. Since he arrived more than seven months ago, he has built a network of friends, many of whom are fellow foreign professors at Fudan. The socializing has helped him transition, as have jogging and biking, two long-standing habits from home.

Looking ahead, Corio wonders what he'll do next. VCU recently asked him to teach another year at Fudan.

"Part of me wants to get back to my life in Richmond, my friends in Richmond, riding my bicycle," Corio said. "But another part of me feels that

EMERSON, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

learn to eat with her hands, which she found to be challenging and somewhat of an art.

"The children are amazing at it - they eat so quickly and efficiently with their hands and don't even drop grains of rice," Emerson said.

During her time in India, Emerson experienced a difficult lifestyle in opposition to her own. The children were often hit with sticks when they misbehaved in school and she said it was difficult for her to adjust to these harsh tactics to which she was unaccustomed.

"These children's lives are structured, disciplined, and filled with little excess," she said.

Even though their lives seemed almost unbearable at times, Emerson said the environment in India proved to be one of happiness and faith in God. She eventually came to realize that she was "among heroes ... people who treasured a life of servanthood."

Emerson began to grow from her encounters. In contrast to her Americanized faith, she said she was able to gain a new perspective on life by witnessing a culture that was absorbed in the same faith as her own but in uniquely different and inspirational ways.

Emerson's experience in India was full of challenges and continuous hardships. An excerpt from her diary describes the worst part of Emerson's trip.

"December 18, 2005. I'm not quite sure I've ever been in such a desecration for quite a while. India has, for sure, been filled with struggles, and yes, many trials, but this one is different. I feel as if the 10 plagues have been upon us and are not feeling their time has been sufficient. We have - I don't even like writing it, it turns my stomach - lice."

Outside Schafer Court on a sunny fall day, Emerson has just finished a daily workout at the Siegel Center. Her story is filled with detail and her face lights up with excitement and knowledge in recalling the circumstances of her heartfelt mission.

"My trip to India put into perspective a lot of the things I would normally see as problematic, and gave me a broader perspective on life," she said.

Upon her return and in adjusting back into her daily lifestyle, Emerson began to witness a change within herself. She found that God would meet all of her needs when she put her complete trust in him, and her uncertainties began to transform into happiness and faith. She ate healthier and slept more soundly. This gave her much focus on her studies and a broader understanding of her future.

As a 21-year-old college student at VCU, Emerson has found her focus in print journalism. She is working on becoming a free-lance journalist and her ambitions and strengths will no doubt lead

her wherever she wishes to go.

Emerson is currently a member and active religious observer at Kings Way Community Church in Richmond, where she also works. Emerson has found her focus in life through her Christian faith and interests; however, she was especially influenced by her winter abroad in India. It was here that Emerson said she was able to find an inner trust in God that she had not fully grasped previous to her foreign encounters. Being in an unknown place made her grow close to her faith.

"I realized I had nothing to hold onto but God," she said.

The sun still blazes across the cobblestones in the center of the VCU campus, creating large dark shadows beneath the trees. Students go about their daily routine traveling to and from class with backpacks slung over one shoulder as they move swiftly toward their destinations.

Emerson has been traveling too -- into the past. Her voice is calm, collected and focused on her thoughts as she speaks of her hopes and dreams in her future career as a journalist. Emerson says she wants nothing more than to provide Americans with an understanding of her journeys and to portray a message of truth to the public. Traveling is key in her career and she says that one day she will return to her friends in India and thank them for the lessons they taught her.

VCU Police seeks prevention through awareness

Christopher R. Broskie
VCU STUDENT NEWS SERVICE

Providing an environment for the VCU community to prevent crime is the main objective of the VCU Police Department this semester.

Capt. Grant J. Warren, deputy chief of Support Services for VCU Police, says the main focus for VCU's 30,000 students and 17,000 staff members should include raising the awareness level concerning crime prevention. Warren says VCU Police will partner with the community to raise awareness so citizens can police themselves and help manage or decrease crime and fear of crime.

"Twenty-four years ago, we'd get 1,200 crimes a year and now we get 600 to 800 so we're doing something right," Warren said. "Our crime has been split in half while our population has tripled and that is living proof that the concept of community policing works. Partnerships, problem solving and prevention pays."

Larceny, the wrongful taking of property, ranks highest of crimes committed on campus. Warren

says most larceny is preventable if the opportunity is taken away from offenders. There are precautionary measures in the James Branch Cabell library.

"There are signs all over the library that let students know theft is a reality. Students need to take the proper precautions when leaving the study areas to grab a cup of coffee," Warren said. "There isn't one college student out there who doesn't need extra money or a new laptop."

Warren says out of 609 crimes in 2006 on the VCU campuses, 541 of those crimes were larceny. About 95 percent of VCU crime is property theft.

Adam Long, VCU adjunct professor for media graphics says safety is not an issue.

Long says the VCU campus is safe, but the outlying areas are the main problem; the police should be aware of who is coming on campus and who is not a student.

Homeless people are among the non-students who frequent the campus. VCU junior Saet Mun does not think homelessness is a problem.

"I don't think it's that big of a deal. They (homeless) aren't

hurting anyone and they just need some shelter," Mun said. "The violent ones should be dealt with, but the others should be left alone."

Warren says homeless people are a factor the VCU Police take into consideration. There are no current laws against vagrancy.

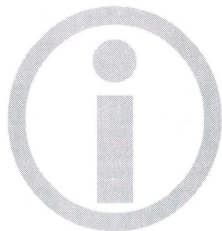
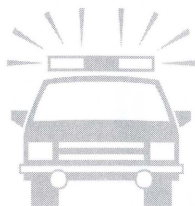
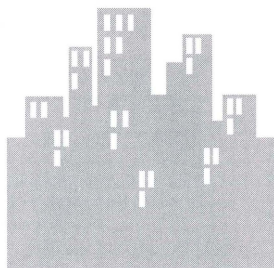
"Homelessness is a problem in almost every American city. Most of them (homeless) are on a first-name basis with us," Warren said. "We know them and they know us. It isn't against the law to be homeless or on the street. It's our job to educate them and let them know there are places available for them."

Warren says VCU is one of the safest campuses in the state and the community can continue this tradition by being aware of their surroundings.

"Awareness is prevention," Warren said. "It's what we're all about and we put a great deal of energy into getting that message out to the community."

For help, students can contact the VCU campus police by calling 828-1234 or the non-emergency number at 828-1196.

In case of emergency



Chris Rogers

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

An unremarkable building on Grace street forms the nexus of Virginia Commonwealth University's emergency planning. Halfway down the ground floor hallway is the office of Larry Mullendore, a collected-looking man with a powerful stare. Mullendore is the key architect of VCU's continually evolving emergency preparedness plan. His office is stuffed with visual aids.

Mullendore has no qualms about his role with the university.

"I am the senior emergency preparedness planner for VCU, which includes the VCU Health System," Mullendore said, handing over a standard-issue university business card. "I'm a staff of one – I'm the guy. But the important thing you need to know about is that there are not many colleges or universities that have taken the initiative to establish a position for somebody who does this 100 percent of the time."

Instead, Mullendore said

the duty of emergency planning usually falls on faculty members who often have one or two other jobs.

"I cannot think of single college or university, except for VMI (Virginia Military Institute), where there is somebody who specifically does this as a full time job," Mullendore said. "So they're not full-time dedicated to looking at the threats, analyzing them and keeping the administration informed."

The average student at VCU probably knows next to nothing about the university's emergency preparedness plan, but deep-rooted procedures exist nonetheless. This is exactly the way Mullendore said he likes it.

Mullendore said that most students do not know what steps VCU would undertake in an emergency because they really do not need to know.

"When you and I were growing up, there were a lot of things in our families that they knew was going on, but they never told us about," Mullendore said. "That's kind of the way it is

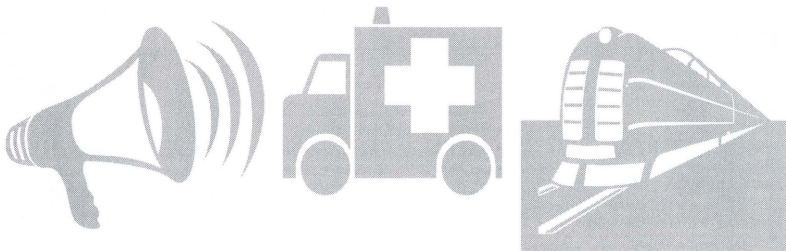
around here. In other words, the staff and faculty are the 'mom and dad.' It's not important that we tell the students about 192 plans and read them all, and have them study them and compare them.

"What is important is that we have an architecture – a system, a process set up with a mission, a purpose, priorities – with a structure of people and organizations."

Some might view this as pulling the wool over the eyes of students who might otherwise be concerned about their safety, but not Mullendore. He said VCU's emergency plans have been activated almost completely unnoticed to students on numerous occasions – situations like the 2004 fire in the university's Ramz Hall dormitory, or during tropical storm Isabel a year earlier.

In addition, Mullendore said the preparations taken by VCU's staff – from President Trani down – are enough to maintain the university's goal of academia. Mullendore said the university maintains this constant state of preparedness by a cyclical process of reevaluating its procedures through

EVEN BEFORE THE TRAGEDY AT VIRGINIA TECH CAMPUS SECURITY HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN A HOT-BUTTON ISSUE FOR COLLEGES ACROSS THE COUNTRY. IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS, OTHER UNIVERSITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN EXAMINING IF THEIR SCHOOL HAS THE CAPACITY TO PREVENT THE HORRIBLE EVENTS THAT BEFELL TECH FROM EVER HAPPENING ON THEIR CAMPUS.



communication and tabletop exercises modeling potential threats to the university.

These exercises and evaluations, however, only reach so far down the chain of command. Some teachers, like the students, say they are unaware that VCU has a specific emergency plan at all, let alone 192 separate plans. Mullendore acknowledged this lack of communication with the majority of the professors and said a large part of the problem with educating them about the school's emergency planning comes from the transient nature of the faculty.

"Professors come and go – they don't have the same classes in the same location all the time – so they're not always in the same mode," Mullendore said. "This is unlike the staff, who work in the same facility and out of the same location, so they're a little more in tune to the development of a plan. That's typical of literally everywhere. I would bet a month's worth of pay that every university has this problem because it's just that tough."

To that end, Mullendore said

that the faculty's lack of specific knowledge in regards to the emergency plans should not interfere with their ability to react in an emergency situation.

Kathryn Murphy-Judy, the president of the Faculty Senate at VCU – the organization that acts as a decision maker for faculty matters across both campuses – said faculty have very little training in emergency matters.

Murphy-Judy said emergency planning has never come up on the discussion agendas during her two-year term and that she cannot remember it being a topic even before she was elected to her position.

Murphy-Judy underscored Mullendore's concerns that faculty and students feel secure in the university's plans, even if the specifics are unknown, but she said the awareness has to go further than that.

"We do know that there is a system," Murphy-Judy said. "It's out there, it's in place but I think we also need to have it underscored for us that we

need to take personal responsibility as teaching professionals to know more about each building that we're in and in a variety of possible instances – which through critical thinking we could transfer to other instances – to at least have thought through what we might need to do quickly."

Aside from the difficulties involved with keeping teachers informed about VCU's emergency plans, Mullendore said the need to instruct students in those plans also raises ethical concerns over controlling what should be taught in classes.

Initially, Mullendore said there was a handbook that faculty members were supposed to read from at the start of a new course, outlining emergency procedures. The biggest concern, he said, was that students should know how to safely exit the building and should pay attention to the fire evacuation routes posted in the classrooms and hallways.

After checking with the provost's office, however, Mullendore later reported that no handbook actually existed.

PREPAREDNESS. CONTINUED TO PAGE 14

PREPAREDNESS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

The office of the provost, which regulates the academic affairs of the university, does not require professors – who may be largely unaware of VCU's emergency policies themselves – to pass that information along to students, Mullendore said.

"In other words, the period of instruction belongs to the professor," Mullendore clarified. "Professors are not told what to teach. You can see the obvious implication if they were directed to incorporate something in their lesson plan that was not part of the class."

Mullendore stressed, however, that just because teachers themselves may not be directly familiar with VCU's emergency plans doesn't mean that the academic community at the university isn't involved. He said the provost's office is the main point of contact that implements university policy in academics. In fact, some officials in the provost's office – including Teresa Atkinson, the vice president of academic finance and administration – are themselves directly involved with emergency planning procedures.

Atkinson, whose job concerning emergency planning is to provide direction for academics in case of a crisis, said that academic administrators are heavily involved in the process. She said that the varied makeup of the Monroe Park campus' educational buildings provides a unique challenge to the administration

during an emergency.

Atkinson also stressed that students should not think the university is unprepared for emergency.

"We get better every year and we think more and more about it, but I think the key for students is to realize that there is a very intensive planning effort that has gone on and continues to go on," Atkinson said. "The fact is, VCU does extensive planning and the students are well-served by that."

However, Murphy-Judy said she can remember one specific failure involving VCU's emergency plans when tropical storm Gaston drenched Richmond in late 2004. The heavy rains caused extensive flooding throughout the city and drowned the downtown district known as Shockoe Bottom under six feet of water.

"I was teaching a night class and I was facing the window and my students were facing me," Murphy-Judy said. "I just kept looking at the rain and every two minutes of my discussion the rain grew heavier and heavier. I was sitting there thinking, 'There's no way we can handle this,' and I was wondering why the university hadn't been called off."

Murphy-Judy said the university should have improved upon its methods after enduring tropical storm Isabel in 2003, but that the decision to close the university came much too late to help

students who were attending evening classes.

"For whatever reason, the university closed at 6:30 or 7 and we didn't get notified until 9:00 at night," Murphy-Judy said. "I really got worried, but I had no means of connecting with anyone because everything was down. Then finally, somebody came and said the university was officially closed and I didn't know what to do."

After wading through the storm to her office on Schafer street, Murphy-Judy said there was no way to get back to her home because the bridges crossing the James river were all closed. She said some of her students – teachers from across the state who came to VCU once a week – had to stay in hotels for the night.

"There was no plan. We didn't even know what was going on. That scared me," Murphy-Judy said. "Now I've thought through what would happen if we had a natural emergency. But I'm sitting here thinking, what if we were at the senate meeting and there was an attack? What would we do?"

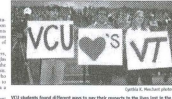
While the administration is not willing to reveal specific information from VCU's preparedness plan, Mullendore said that the 192 plans meet with state and federal standards for operation under emergency conditions.

"I work with the point of contact for the Department of Homeland Security. I get intel-

"It's so amazing like this happens, it's riveting. It makes us all come to understand that it can happen anywhere." News Richard Kiser, L. Douglas White

It can happen anywhere: Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center

SARAL HESTER Siegel Center



VCU students held a funeral... Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center

VCU students held a funeral... Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center



VCU students held a funeral...

of an incident... Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center

VCU students held a funeral... Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center

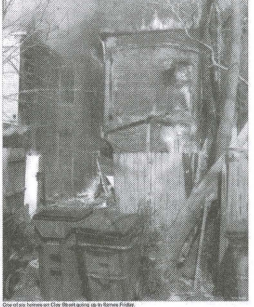
VCU students held a funeral... Hundreds mourn at Siegel Center

VCU students held a funeral...

Students lose residences in fire COMMUNITY IMPACT

Students lose residences in fire

Students lose residences in fire



Students lose residences in fire

Students lose residences in fire

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Virginia Tech tragedy and Ramz Hall fire coverage from The Commonwealth Times' April 19, 2007 and March 29, 2004 issues.

I've had the FBI in here as a participant in our tabletop exercises," Mullendore said. "Not only the FBI, but other external agencies - the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the Virginia State Department of Health - so they have been there to provide the right answer at the right time to compliment the information that is being provided and discussed by our incident response team."

The plans' compliance with state and federal policies also ensures that emergencies can be handled as smoothly as possible, because a large-scale emergency would undoubtedly require VCU to work with local and state agencies, Mullendore said. The university's work to adopt government standards in emergency planning came to fruition in 2004, when the newly-built Ramz dormitory caught on fire. The blaze stalled

traffic on Broad Street for several hours and endangered nearby homes with flying embers.

Mullendore said that VCU's seamless work with the Richmond city fire department as well as local and state police departments earned them commendation from the city.

"People started gathering up there to watch it, bringing their hotdogs and marshmallows, but those of us who had to work came back here," Mullendore said. "It was a good test of capability. Some of the emergency plans that we had were used crossed over from other plans. It provided a good checklist for us so we could ensure we were doing all the right kinds of things. To that end, we got an A+ grade from the city in terms of how we coordinated with them, how we responded, the way we operated our emergency operations center, the way it worked

very well with the way the city's fire department was set up."

Cutting through the varying opinions surrounding the issue of emergency preparedness at VCU is a message of tremendous effort on the part of the university to improve its stance on emergencies. Since 2001, the university has improved its methods every year, drawing in state officials and experts to help formulate plans dealing with unforeseen crises. Some staff feel their efforts have been sufficiently proven through the last few hurricane seasons, countless tabletop exercises, and high commendation from the city of Richmond. However, some faculty believe this success falls flat in the face of poor communication. Regardless of differing opinions on the matter, the university has taken a stance to continually expand its emergency procedures - a task that looks to continue well into the future.

Homeland Security program picks up steam

Christopher R. Broskie
VCU STUDENT NEWS SERVICE

The opportunity to experience all that the homeland security master's degree program has to offer will be available for VCU students this fall.

Col. William H. Parrish, a veteran of Department of Homeland Security and associate professor of Homeland Security and Emergency Planning, assisted in the development of the program at VCU.

"We are getting interest from students who are currently in the school, but I think there's going to be a tremendous response from people in the work force; especially in Northern Virginia when they see there's going to be a homeland security program they can take online," Parrish said.

Parrish said there are several job opportunities available within the Department of Homeland Security. Recently, offices of emergency preparedness and homeland security have increased their staff within the state and local governments.

"I firmly believe that this program will prepare any student to go into service, whether it's the

federal government or any other entity," Parrish said. "There are 22 different agencies in the Department of Homeland Security."

Hiwie Yohannes is a VCU senior and a double major in homeland security and political science. She's enrolled in the homeland security senior seminar and is interested in the intelligence field.

"After the aftermath of Sept. 11, I want to become more actively involved with the government and protecting the homeland," Yohannes said. "I want to go to law school and work with the state departments."

Parrish says there is a growing interest for jobs in homeland security. He believes homeland security college students will be more qualified job applicants.

"In order to be more judicious with the taxpayers' dollars, you need to have people who understand the breadth and depth of homeland security," Parrish said. "They must understand the roles and functions of what agencies are capable of doing and what they (the agencies) should be doing with respect to other agencies."

VCU mass communications major Jessica Young said she understands the importance of this program.

"I absolutely feel that it's important for colleges to have the homeland security program. I think since Sept. 11, people, including college students, need to be more aware of what exactly homeland security is," Young said.

Students who are interested in the homeland-security program can enroll in a basic 101 class, which is open to both major and undeclared students.

"I've used homeland security 101 as an introduction to homeland security and it's turning into a marketing course," Parrish said. "I'm finding many students who are freshmen and are coming to school, not really knowing what area they want to go into, and they take 101 and suddenly see this as a great opportunity."

Parrish entered the Marine Corp in 1971 and was the commanding officer of the Marine Corp Security Forces, which encompasses approximately 4,000 marines around the world. He began the Office of Anti-Terrorism in the U.S. Customs Office and directed the Office of Anti-Terrorism. In 2003, the Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge asked Parrish to join the staff as a senior adviser.

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of the
student
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fades and
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Creative course cuts copy

Tommy Izzo

VCU STUDENT NEWS SERVICE

Virginia Commonwealth University students are getting a professional taste of newsroom standards by feeding on heavy doses of editing.

VCU Adjunct Professor Mary Ann Owens runs the VCU Capital News Service, a course designed to allow student reporters to cover the General Assembly for community newspapers around the commonwealth.

To raise the educational bar and increase efficiency, Owens created another course to act as a copy desk for CNS. The class, consisting of a small group of students with strong editing skills, edits the stories for grammar, punctuation, AP style, information holes and write headlines before the articles are distributed for publication.

"I believe we are a real newsroom and the copy desk lets us compete with the pros," Owens said. "Through human resource and technology we are expanding CNS to meet the needs of more people in less time."

VCU Associate Professor Jeff

South is the brains behind the technological side of the program. South is the chief professor of CNS, but Owens is substituting for South while he is on a Knight Foundation Fellowship teaching journalism in the Ukraine.

At Owens' request, South created a queue. A queue is an electronic slot that all the students in the program can access. South also created a distribution system to act as a "quasi-wire." This system mimics the professional media wire system, which is a live news feed that allows newsrooms to pick and choose from breaking stories around the globe.

Students on the copy desk communicate with the CNS reporters through the queue built on VCU's Blackboard discussion board function. Student reporters can post stories and the editors can repost corrected versions. Stories must pass through the hands of at least two editors before the pieces are sent to local papers.

CNS serves more than 60 newspapers around Virginia. The Alexandria Times has a section called Richmond Report in which many CNS stories are published.

Owens thinks the copy desk will improve student portfolios

and the students will be more prepared for editing tests given at many journalism job interviews.

Amy Capistran is a senior on the copy desk. Capistran is a public relations major, but she thinks the class will give her an edge in the work force.

"There's so much writing in public relations, to be able to say I have real copy-editing experience would set me apart," Capistran said.

VCU junior Rebecca Landau is a print journalism major on the copy desk. Landau is the news editor for the VCU student newspaper The Commonwealth Times. Landau likes that the editing class allows her to concentrate on improving her editing skills.

"It gives me a lot of hands on experience with purely editing," Landau said.

CNS and the copy desk are examples of learner-centered education. The Arizona Faculties Council states that in this type of environment, the responsibility for learning lies with the students.

Owens admits this type of system is tough, but she has seen her students step up their game to meet the challenge.

Travel lightly

Meredith Kight

STAFF WRITER

In the ever-changing world of *Ephemera*, nothing is what it seems. Bridges connect the different landscapes, but they take you where you belong, instead of where you want to go. *Ephemera* responds to the “heart wishes” of the Landscapers, who have the power to change the physical characteristics of the land itself, and balance the forces of dark and light.

Author Anne Bishop introduced this world in “*Sebastian*,” and further explores it in her thrilling follow-up, “*Belladonna*.” “*Sebastian*” told the story of the defeat of the Dark Guides, the most powerful allies of the Eater of the World, and the half-wizard half-incubus Sebastian finding love with Lynnea. However, all is not well in many parts of the world. The Eater of the World, imprisoned for so long it has nearly been forgotten, has escaped to spread its darkness across *Ephemera*. It begins by destroying the infamous landscaper’s school, where nearly all the known landscapers are killed.

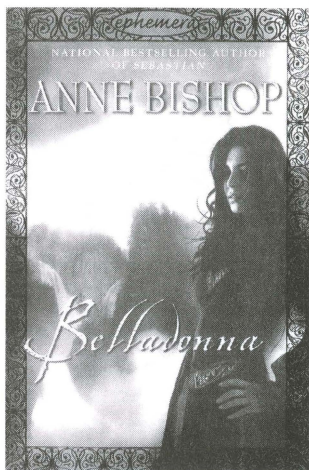
“*Belladonna*,” part epic love story, part classic fantasy journey, picks up the story here. Glorianna Belladonna, Sebastian’s cousin and a powerful landscaper descended from the heart guides, must figure out a way to defeat the Eater of the World before all is lost. Feared for her power, she has been an outcast all her life. Soon, however, she begins dreaming of a strange man, who comes to her in the form of Michael the Magician. Michael, able to manipulate the

light and dark as well, soon falls in love with Belladonna. He and his sister Caitlin, a powerful but inexperienced landscaper with similar abilities to Belladonna, soon join her, Sebastian, Lee (Belladonna’s brother) and Nadia (Belladonna’s mother) to fight the Eater of the World.

This journey takes them through several landscapes of *Ephemera*, from seaside towns and the land of the waterhorses to the infamous Den of Iniquity, home of the incubi, succubi, and other such creatures.

Balancing the light and the dark is a delicate process, and simply cutting off the landscapes touched by the Eater of the World may be just as dangerous as the Eater itself. The light and the dark are both necessary for *Ephemera*’s harmony, and its people depend on traveling between different landscapes. However, the Eater’s ability to find and feed the innermost darkness inside each human being, bringing it to the fore makes it a difficult enemy to fight. The Eater of the World has no permanent form, and is often nothing more than that little voice in the back of your mind confirming your worst suspicions about your neighbor. All of the landscapes the Eater has taken over are bleak, dangerous places filled with creatures like the terrifying bonelovers, gigantic ant-like creatures who feed on human flesh.

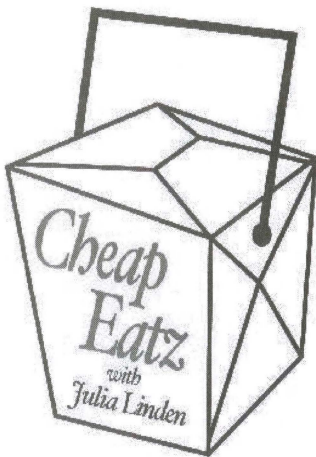
Along the way, each character must confront something about him or herself in order to find their way. Belladonna must confront her feelings for Michael, Caitlin and Michael must confront the



meaning of their power – a process made all the more dangerous by the nature of this power and of *Ephemera*. Powerful emotions in a landscaper can literally change the world, and even random thoughts can manifest in strange ways. In the end, one of them must confront their destiny and destroy the Eater of the World.

“*Belladonna*” is well-written, and Bishop’s unique world and interesting characters draw you in. At 436 pages, Bishop has created a complex fantasy world and storyline while maintaining a good pace. The worlds and peoples of *Ephemera* seem real, and are described in vivid detail, which means the reader is never bored. Beneath the surface of the journey the characters go through is a powerful subtext about finding oneself and where you belong. In *Ephemera*, your emotions and thoughts control your path, so you can only find where you truly belong when you know who you are. Taking this journey can be dangerous if you don’t know what you want, which leads to the traveler’s blessing: “travel lightly.”

Looking for your next hot meal? Give this list a try. Keep us informed about YOUR favorite Richmond restaurants by e-mailing lindenja@vcu.edu



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Looking forward to 2008

Ashley Turner
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Eighteen months until the 2008 presidential election and things are already getting ugly.

Democratic frontrunners Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama are the favored candidates within their political party and with the public. However, as 2008 gets closer, the jabs and putdowns are becoming harder and more personal.

On March 5, a campaign video surfaced on the internet, featuring an Orwellian theme of a dystopian future, complete with a tyrannical Hilary Clinton gracing a giant jumbo-tron, scenes reminiscent of the movie *1984*.

The appearance of the video caused an uproar, with both Clinton and Obama's camps denying any affiliation. In the end, the creator of the commercial stepped forward and revealed himself to be a designer with the web design company that created Barack Obama's web site.

Political pundits and news outlets have been looking on in interest as Clinton and Obama's formerly friendly relationship has dissolved into the typical political back-and-forth between opponents. And while the increased scrutiny

could become damaging to either of the candidate's campaigns, there is no denying that they will both find some way to benefit from the increased publicity.

But, despite their political superstar statuses, and joint press coverage that surpasses that of any other 2008 hopeful, do either Obama or Clinton have an honest chance of becoming President of the United States?

Many people see the two democrats as each having a prominent handicap that could keep them from winning the race - Obama's race, and Clinton's gender.

I believe that a black man could be elected President, as

probably his lack of experience, but he's a natural born political star, he has charisma, he looks like a poster boy for family values, and people relate to him and his life story. That's what Powell and Obama have in common -- their life stories are basically realizations of the American dream, and people can connect to that, regardless of their race.

One reason I believe this however, is that in some ways, racism to me in America is usually subject to mitigating circumstances like class, appearance, presentation, etc. Racism thrives and survives off of the notion that another group is permanently seen as "other" and

RIGHT NOW, OBAMA AND CLINTON HAVE ALL THE PRESS COVERAGE, BUT COME ELECTION TIME, DO THEY HAVE A CHANCE?

long as it's a person who seems to translate well to middle of the road and heartland Americans. I think Colin Powell, especially before the Iraq War, could have been elected in a second, and I think Barack Obama can as well. His main roadblock is

alien. But American racism can be negotiated and tempered somewhat by other factors that make the "other" seem more relatable.

Also, most people don't like to think they are prejudiced. And so when they see a black person who they can accept as relatable and



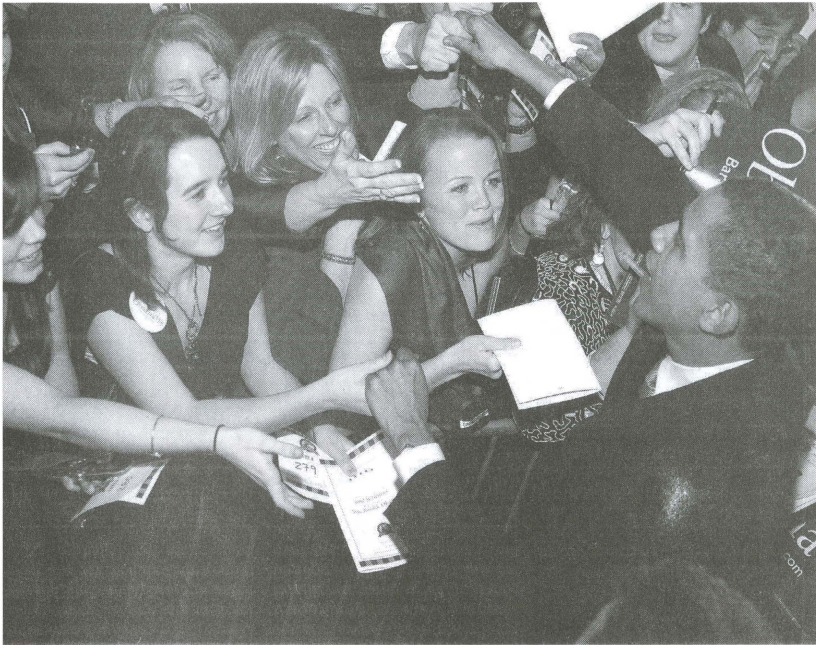


PHOTO REPRINTED COURTESY OF THE COMMONWEALTH TIMES

Presidential contender Barack Obama spoke to Virginia Democrats during the annual Jefferson Jackson Dinner held February 17 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

admirable, like many Americans have with Powell and Obama, in many ways they want to promote that support because they see it as absolving them of any suspicion of prejudice. I think in many ways, a lot of people would feel very satisfied with voting him into office in that sense.

As for Hilary, the problem that could potentially hold her back is not necessarily her gender, but the fact that she is so rabidly disliked by the right. She could serve to rally the right to bring out the vote for whatever Republican candidate is running, which would

help bring a cohesion to that particular group. Obama has the chance of pulling in a lot of Republican votes; in my opinion, Hilary has little chance of that.

But the a primary factor in all this, as I mentioned earlier, is experience ... and fundraising. Even though there is a contingent of voters and politicians who dislike Clinton, she has a large camp behind her with tons of money, she's been in politics longer, she knows how to fundraise and she also has her husband, popular former President Bill Clinton behind

her. Any of this could tip the scales in her favor.

The next President will have a lot to deal with. Many people voted to re-elect Bush because they felt that you shouldn't "change horses in the middle of the race" (dealing with the war), but isn't that exactly what the next President will be doing anyway?

Ultimately, Obama and Clinton have a lot to overcome, and many detractors and naysayers waiting for them to prove them right. However, regardless of what happens, 2008 will likely be a history making event that I cannot wait to witness.

What will you remember most about this school year at VCU?

Interviewed by Gergana Bobeva
and Cortney Anderson
MANAGING EDITOR AND ART EDITOR



Nadiya Abraham, Print Journalism, senior, pictured above

"...going to Bird Park. I go every so often to sit there, lie in the grass and watch the sky or something."

Leila Freeman, English, sophomore, pictured right

"My English teacher and his wife were having a baby... so our TA taught the class and it was really awesome. It was the most enjoyable class that I've had since I came back to school."

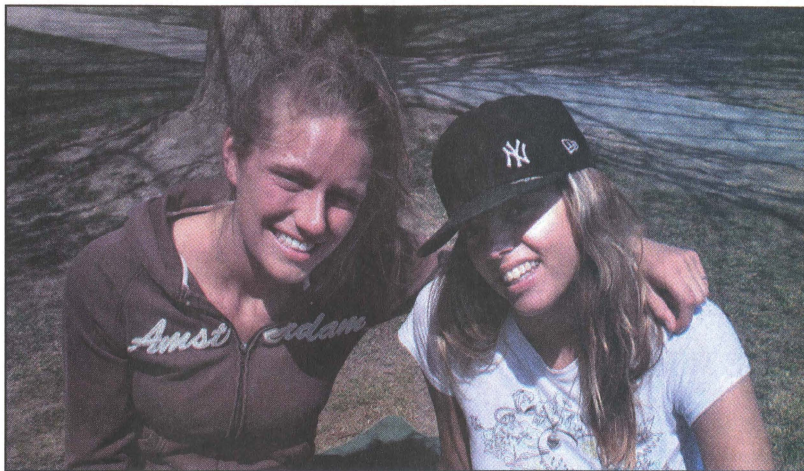
Carrie Burleson, Psychology, junior, and Sara Morton, Creative Advertising, transfer student, both pictured right, next page

"To have this little mobile munchy thing in school.... The environment is really chill, weather is beautiful, it's a great place to meet people."

"Sitting outside. We come out here after class, when we have 30 minutes to spare so we can sit here and eat food and get drinks and talk, sit on the grass."

"One other thing I thought was cool was how big the classes are. It's really awesome to see how people communicate with each other, whether it's in person or online via blackboard."





Alex Foxworthy, Post Bach pre-med certificate student, pictured right

"It was the whole experience of the ups and downs of trying to live some place else and work there. I like Thailand. I think I would like to go there on vacation, but I don't think I would want to work there."

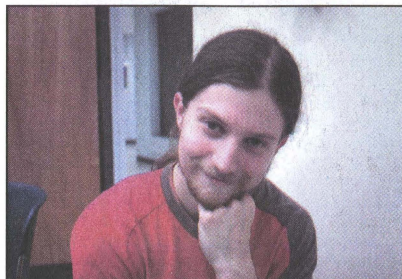
Adam Block, Mass Communications, pictured below

"When I went to the dining center and there was a bunch of people there watching the game... everybody is cheering and I felt a great adrenalin rush for the fact that we were about to go on and win. I was very excited."



Kariss Rogers, African-American studies and Psychology, senior, pictured below

"I was a TA. That was fun, it was good times. It makes me look special."



The Question With No Answer

THE VIRGINIA TECH TRAGEDY: WE WILL NEVER KNOW WHY

Meredith Knight

STAFF WRITER

We know their names. We see their faces on television and the Internet. We know a little bit about their lives, and we know how they died. We don't know why. In spite of the disturbing media package Seung Hui Cho sent to NBC News, it is unlikely that we will ever really know or understand why he decided to kill those 32 people.

It is a hard truth to face. Losing a loved one is always painful, but when there is a reason, such as disease or simply old age, that is at least something we can comprehend. Death is a part of life, and we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that they lived a full life or that they are no longer in pain due to their illness. The families of the victims at Virginia Tech tragically will have no such comfort, and my heart goes out to them.

Their loved ones were stolen from them. These people were not seriously ill, and only a few were more than 30 years old. By all accounts, the students were like college students from just about

anywhere. They went to class, spent time with friends, participated in clubs and sports; maybe held a job. I'm sure they all had goals and dreams, and something that made them unique. They won't get to achieve those goals now. It is cruel that there are so many experiences they will never have because of one man's decision to kill. This decision is incomprehensible to all except perhaps other mass-murderers, and that only makes an already difficult situation harder.

We can ask ourselves the questions, like did he have particular targets? Was there something that pushed him over the edge and caused him to go on this rampage? What was going through his mind as he fired off the countless shots? How did he justify the taking of another human life in cold blood? We can ask the questions, but I doubt we will ever get satisfactory answers.

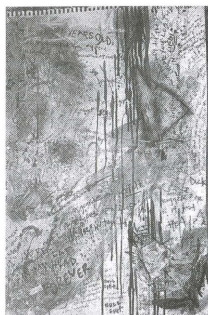
The media have published some of the photographs and videos Cho sent to NBC News, and they are frightening. He is shown pointing guns at himself and the camera, and holding a knife to his throat. One photograph shows several rows of hollow-pointed bullets, probably the ones with

which he killed his victims. The videos and 1,800-word document contain many expletives and a lot of anger, but offer no real explanation for his actions.

This young man was clearly disturbed, but that alone doesn't seem to explain his actions. Neither does his anger. They are clues to the puzzle perhaps, but the mind of a human being driven to kill is something that we many never understand. There is a piece missing in that puzzle, and we many never find it. Even if madness alone can explain his actions, that is of little use because we can't understand madness. Either way we are left without an explanation, and this adds to the pain of those involved in tragedies such as the shootings in Blacksburg.

As someone who went to Virginia Tech for a period of time, I know the community there is strong. They will go on in the wake of this tragedy, even if it is never fully explained. There is much grief, and it will not pass quickly, but it will fade in time. Life will go on, but those who lived through this will carry it with them forever. There will always be a scar, and nothing will ever be quite the same again.

Artwork by Becky Carey



Poetry

.Concrete.

Looking out my window,
 All I see is concrete.
 Concrete, Metal, and Fog.
 No Clouds. No Sun.
 No Grass. No Fields.
 At Night- No Stars.
 ...Just Concrete.
 Powerful, looming creatures
 With millions of windows.
 But what good is a window...
 With nothing captivating to view?
 Under my feet is a permanent hardness
 Reminding me that I miss.
 I miss...
 The cool, dew soaked blades
 Tickling my toes.
 The warm, fresh breeze caressing
 My face.
 The mile-wide corn fields-
 Full of age old secrets.
 The mountains cloaked in
 Every shade of green.
 I miss the orchestra
 Composed of the bubbling creek,
 Mooing cows, and chirping birds.
 I miss the morning fog lifting off of
 The still pond
 And the two-lane country roads.
 I miss it all.
 Because what I have now
 Is artificial and...
 Concrete.

—Kayla White

Forget the Facade-I Want Something Real

Why is it surprising that
 People are always so negative?
 Hate, Ignorance, Judgment,
 Insecurity and Fear
 All mesh together
 To form one colossal weapon
 Aimed at humanity.
 People claim to be love
 And have love
 And know love.
 Yet we all see them.
 The look on their faces
 When a homeless man smiles
 In their direction.
 The way they "politely" tell the
 Tattooed and Pierced
 That they are going to Hell.
 Their excuse for condemning
 Interracial marriage
 "Be ye not unequally yoked..."
 A small number of radicals ruin
 The chance of obtaining real and pure
 Love for so many people.
 But I...
 I KNOW love.
 I HAVE love.
 I AM love.
 And so is God.

—Kayla White

Our Song is Fortissimo

Rooted in God,
 Our love is a symphony-
 Music to His ears.
 Pure, Passionate,
 Unbridled-yet restrained

LOVE

Beauty beyond compare.
 Every moment reflects

A LOVE

Words dream about describing.
 Simple "I love you"s
 Are mere windows
 Of a love so deep-
 No offense can penetrate.

Every Kiss

Hug

Second

Minute

Hour

Beams with perfection.
 Because we are a manifestation
 Of God's love,
 And He is pleased.

—Kayla White

Alligators on Polo Shirts

Sliced. Invisible damage
 inflicted on clear, clear blue
 the windex roof
 it's left streak-free
 with Cassius Clay's intensity
 it's cutting, carving,
 colliding, colliding now.
 The blanket, green
 silences the crash

(shhh small smash)

the smash instigates
 a leap! The spherical
 athlete bounds!
 Bounds! To a saunter,
 A stroll...

The dimpled golf ball
 stops rolling
 eleven inches
 from the flag
 marking the hole.

—Amy Clark

Robin-Egg Blue

Zaynah Qutubuddin

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Wendi gritted her teeth as she stared at the crevices of the termite-ridden walls, tightly clutching a broken handle of a paintbrush in her right fist. The robin-egg blue paint had chipped in several places caused mainly by the water that leaked down the walls during the fierce winter storms. Attics normally didn't possess such a pleasant color but her mother had insisted that every room in the house have its own theme. Not a single house in the room had escaped the torrent of décor provided by Wendi's mother. "Its so dark and dusty up here," she had said and then lifted the can of paint. "This color will make it a happy place!" Wendi's response had been to simply take the paintbrush she was offered and carelessly slap the paint across the walls in no particular fashion. "Do you want to be with your friends that much?" her mother had asked after

a few moments of silent observation. With a shrug Wendi had lifted the brush off the wall to dip it into the paint when her mother took hold of her hand and gently pried her fingers off the handle. "Go." Seconds later, Wendi went. Years later, she finally came back. So here she was, sitting on a carpet of dust in the silent hours of the night. Her gaze shifted to one particular corner of the room, where the painting remained unfinished. Only a few strokes had been delivered but nothing more. Wendi's gaze lifted to the ceiling above that forsaken corner to stare at the spot where a few wooden beams were missing. They had never been replaced since then. A sharp, dry laugh escaped her chapped lips as bitter hot tears pooled within her eyes but she refused to let them make their descent. She had absolutely no right to cry. Her privilege to shed tears at the memory had been revoked the second she had released the handle of the paintbrush all those years ago.

the vine

The Vine is a free, independent publication written by the students of Virginia Commonwealth University. The magazine is a forum of expression through feature and news articles, artwork, poetry, short stories, essays and photography.

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