



the

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# briefs

## Local and VCU

### Richmond to break ground on elementary schools

For the first time in more than a decade, the city of Richmond isn't just talking about building schools.

Sporting the obligatory hard hats and commemorative shovels, Mayor Dwight C. Jones and other city leaders gathered Friday on Ferguson Lane in South Richmond to break ground on a new Broad Rock Elementary School.

On Nov. 30, they will celebrate the start of construction on a new Oak Grove Elementary School on Webber Avenue.

Scheduled to open in September 2012, the new Broad Rock and Oak Grove facilities will be the first schools built for Richmond Public Schools since Blackwell, Linwood Holton and Miles Jerome Jones elementary schools opened in 1999. In that period, Chesterfield, Hanover and Henrico counties opened 27 schools.

Then-Mayor L. Douglas Wilder, who led City Hall from 2005 to 2008, introduced a plan to build or renovate 15 schools, but it stalled as he clashed with school officials over consolidating or closing underused buildings.

*Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch*

### Ecology school planned for island in James

Plans are under way to build a nearly \$1 million environmental education center on a James River island.

The James River Association, an environmental group, is working on a project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create a center on the 1,329-acre Presquile National Wildlife Refuge, in the James between Richmond and Hopewell.

At the center, high school and middle school students would learn about the science and history of the James. They would explore the island on foot and prowl swamps by canoe.

Bill Street, director of the James River Association, said the center should help combat "nature deficit disorder" – an apparently growing disconnect between the great outdoors and kids glued to computer screens.

"We want to provide opportunities for our youth to experience the outdoors and learn how to become responsible stewards of their environment," Street said.

The center and its programs would be called the James River Ecology School.

Plans call for building a 30-person bunkhouse, a wetland boardwalk, a classroom pavilion and a canoe launch.

*Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch*

### Controversy over president has VCU on edge

Michael Rao was welcomed to VCU last year as a young president – not much older than the school he would lead – who was just hitting his stride.

With his warm smile and knack for remembering names after even brief encounters, Rao was seen as a president who would herald a happier era for a campus recently roiled by scandal.

Now, 16 months into his tenure, VCU's board of visitors plans an independent assessment of his performance to determine if recent flare-ups represent growing pains or are symptoms of something more.

Rector Anne G. "Panny" Rhodes said it had always been the board's intent to have an outside consultant evaluate Rao early on.

Several people who have worked with Rao said expectations that staff members baby-sit the couple's two young sons caused tension in the office.

They also said Rao gave inconsistent explanations about how changes were made at the top of the administration and question why he is advertising for the position of assistant to the president after eliminating the job of chief of staff as unnecessary.

*Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch*

## National and International

### Okla. death row inmates protest new execution drug

Two death row inmates in Oklahoma asked a federal judge on Friday to stop their pending executions after the state said it planned to substitute the anesthetic used during lethal injections because of a drug shortage.

Oklahoma is one of several states that have been scrambling after the sole U.S. manufacturer of sodium thiopental – an anesthetic that renders the condemned inmate unconscious – said new batches of the barbiturate would not be available until January at the earliest.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections ran out of that drug earlier this year, and instead, the state plans to substitute a similar drug called pentobarbital, which is used in animal euthanasia.

Death row inmates Jeffrey David Matthews and John David Duty have challenged the use of the new drug, alleging it would violate their constitutional rights to be free from "cruel and unusual punishment."

An anesthesiologist testified on Friday that pentobarbital is used primarily as an anti-seizure drug or in small doses as a sedative but not as a general anesthetic. Dr. David Waisel said substituting pentobarbital increases the risk that an inmate could be paralyzed but aware when the third drug that stops the heart is administered.

*Brief by The Associated Press*

### Ga. federal judge pleads guilty to two drug charges

A veteran Georgia federal judge arrested after a stripper claimed he used cocaine with her has pleaded guilty to two drug-related charges.

U.S. Senior Judge Jack T. Camp pleaded guilty Friday and agreed to step down from the bench.

Camp pleaded guilty to charges of possessing cocaine and other drugs and helping the stripper get drugs, too.

The 67-year-old judge also pleaded guilty to giving a government laptop to the stripper. The charges carry up to four years in prison.

Camp was arrested in October after authorities say he tried to buy cocaine and narcotics to use with the stripper, who was secretly a federal informant. They say they also found two firearms in the front seat of his vehicle.

*Brief by The Associated Press*

### Vatican: nothing changed on condom use

The Vatican on Sunday cautioned that there is nothing "revolutionary" in Pope Benedict XVI's startling assertion that condom use in exceptional circumstances can be a responsible act in the fight against the spread of HIV.

The Holy See's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, issued a statement stressing that the pope's comment in a book being published Tuesday neither "reforms or changes" church teaching, which forbids use of condoms and other contraceptives.

Neither was Benedict "morally justifying" the unbridled exercise of sexuality, Lombardi added.

The pope maintains that condom use to lessen the danger of infection is a "first assumption of responsibility," the statement said, quoting from the book.

"The reasoning of the pope cannot certainly be defined as a revolutionary turn," the spokesman said.

Lombardi noted that the pope emphasized the church's main advice in the fight against AIDS – sexual abstinence and fidelity among married couples.

"With this, the pope isn't reforming or changing the teaching of the church, but reaffirming it," the spokesman said.

*Brief by The Associated Press*

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Monday, November 22, 2010

COVER PHOTO BY CHRIS CONWAY





# news

## Panelists' definitions of marriage

"Marriage is between a man and a woman. ... The circumstances of defining (marriage) is rather vacuous. I have never seen one definition of what marriage is when we talk about same-sex marriage."

— *Delegate Robert G. Marshall*  
State delegate, sponsor of the Virginia Marriage Amendment

"Marriage is a constantly shifting institution. Over time, it's never had one meaning in one place."

— *Sarah Warbelow*  
State Legislative Director, Human Rights Campaign

"The apostle Paul addresses those who reject God as he sees it, and included what he described as depraved behavior, and the 'uncleanliness of our daughters' and he noted that 'women burn for lust for other women and men for men.' Now, it's clear that the apostles had a problem with what he was seeing as an unnatural act."

— *Eric Huszar*  
VCU and University School of Law Alumnus, former opinion editor of *The Commonwealth Times*

"We don't say 'you're too greedy to get married, I'm sorry,' although we should, and that's probably why we have pre-nups. God's love is most important, and that gay marriage is just as accepted by God than a heterosexual marriage."

— *Cameron Hunt*  
VCU Queer Action, VCU enrolled in Episcopal Discernment Process for ordination as a priest.



PHOTO FROM THE CT PHOTO ARCHIVE

Del. Bob Marshall R-Manassas, debated with three other panelists about the legality of same-sex marriage. Note: photo above was not taken Sunday.

## Panel discusses same-sex marriage

Hillary Huber  
Contributing Writer

In partnership with the University of Richmond School of Law and the First Freedom Center, VCU hosted a mock trial on Sunday that debated same-sex marriage in religion, public policy and the Constitution.

Virginia delegate Bob Marshall and VCU graduate Eric Huszar were opposed to gay marriage and civil unions, while Sarah Warbelow, the State Legislative Director for the Human Rights Campaign, and Cameron Hunt, a Queer Action member in the Episcopal Discernment Process for ordination for priesthood, were supporters for gay marriage and the attainment of the same rights current heterosexual marriages are granted.

Delegate Bob Marshall began his argument with a discussion of equality, and whether or not legalizing gay marriage was a matter of treating all persons equally.

"The argument comes down to the legal sense, that the 14th Amendment requires that all people be treated equally. Well, treating persons equally is one thing. Treating actions equally is another," Marshall said. "You cannot use

the 14th Amendment as a springboard to justify same-sex marriage."

Warbelow argued that extending marital benefits to same-sex couples is about protecting children in same-sex households and those individuals who have made a commitment to each other for the rest of their lives

"What the LGBT community is asking for is the legal rights granted by both the state and federal government, all of those many, many benefits, and those obligations that come with marriage," Warbelow said. "Last year in Florida, a lesbian couple was visiting, taking their children on vacation. They had a legal relationship out of Oregon, but the state of Florida refused to recognize that relationship, so her partner lay dying alone in a hospital bed in Florida. And she was not permitted, nor were her children, allowed to visit her (partner) by her bedside."

Huszar said while he understood his opinion could come off as "homophobic" and might seem like he was "attacking" gays and lesbians, he believed that Christianity is very clear on the issue of

homosexuality.

"The supermajority of Christians do believe that gays are people, just like anyone else, and deserve the same love, acceptance and support, despite what I said earlier when I described it earlier as sin," Huszar said.

He said that homosexuality is described as sin in the Bible, which he said is imperative to Christians because they should refrain from condoning sin, and supporting gay marriage would be doing just that.

Hunt argued that the most important aspect of Christianity is to teach God's love. He said that while the Bible is important to live by, many of the rules mentioned in the Bible are outdated.

"My mother is sitting right here, and it is perfectly within her rights to have sold me as a slave, according to Exodus 21:7 ... Then there's the fact that I should've been killed a long time ago because Deuteronomy 21:21 and Leviticus 20:9, says that I should have been killed for speaking back to her, which, of course, I did numerous times," Hunt said.

Marshall argued that a huge concern

for gay marriage was defining what exactly marriage is. He said that if gender what eliminated from the definition, the number of people and the age of people should also not be regulated, which would thus permit "a 50-year-old to marry a 4-year-old," and "bisexuals to marry two, three, four people."

Warbelow wanted to set the record straight regarding bisexuality.

"Bisexuality means a person is attracted to both men and women, and they do not discriminate when choosing a partner based on sex," Warbelow said.

Joe Blanton, a senior sociology, gender, sexuality and women's studies major, said, "I felt the delegate was arguing things that were completely inarguable, like the way he portrayed bisexuals, which was not only completely inaccurate, it was completely uneducated and it was a very dangerous generalization."

The trial was wrapped up with a question and answer session in which the panelists fielded questions from the audience. **CT**

Monday, November 22, 2010

news · commonwealthtimes.org · CT3





# Crime Log

11/13

At 7-Eleven, 1003 W. Grace St., a male visitor was arrested for drunk in public.  
At the Cary Street Gym, 911 W. Cary St., a male student advised that an unknown person(s) removed various items from their unsecured location.  
At the Stuart C. Siegel Center, 1200 W. Broad St., a male and a female visitor was arrested for extortion of private property.

11/14

At 1116 Floyd Ave., a female student advised that a known person assaulted her.  
At Brandt Hall, 710 W. Franklin St., a female student was arrested for underage possession and consumption of alcohol.

11/16

At the Blanton House, 826 W. Franklin St., a male employee advised that an unknown person(s) damaged a door and removed property.  
At the corner of North Lombardy and West Grace streets, a male visitor was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol and refusal of a blood/breath test.  
At the Broad Street Parking Deck, 1111 W. Broad St., a male student advised that an unknown person robbed him.

11/17

At the Gladding Residence Center, 710 W. Main St., two male students were arrested for possession of marijuana.  
At Student Commons, 907 Floyd Ave., a male student advised that an unknown person(s) removed property from an unsecured location.  
At Hibbs Hall, 900 Park Ave., a female student advised that an unknown person(s) removed property from an unsecured location.

11/18

At Gladding Residence Center, 711 W. Main St., two male students were arrested for possession of marijuana.  
At Johnson Hall, 810 W. Franklin St., a male student was arrested for possession of marijuana and underage possession of alcohol.  
At the Broad Street Parking Deck, 1111 W. Broad St., a male student was arrested for drunk in public, possession of an open container of alcohol and resisting arrest.

On the 1200 block of West Marshall Street, a female visitor was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol.

At the Physics Department, 701 W. Grace St., a female employee advised that an unknown person(s) removed various items from their secured location.

11/19

At the corner of Bowe and West Marshall streets, A male visitor was arrested for drunk in public.  
At 7-Eleven, 1003 W. Grace St., a male visitor was arrested for possession of an open container of alcohol.  
On the 300 block of West Cary Street, a female employee advised that an unknown person(s) struck three vehicles.



PHOTO BY JAMIE TRICE

With the economy driving more people to seek Food Bank services, the Central Virginia Food Band is dealing with shortages.

## Richmond food bank facing shortages

Jamie Trice  
Contributing Writer

The Central Virginia food bank in Richmond is facing food shortages. Because of the weak economy, the need for food is urgent this holiday season.  
The third annual Feed Richmond food drive was held Nov. 1 through Saturday, Nov. 20. Cox Media Group of Richmond has partnered with the Central Virginia Food Bank, Kroger stores, SunTrust Mortgage and Buick-GMC to collect canned foods.  
The food bank is collecting donations not only for this holiday season but year around. Many children, adults and homeless shelters are in need of food for this season.  
“Our mission is no one should go hungry,” Fay Lohr, president/CEO of the food bank, said. “But in this present economy, many people are going hungry.”  
More than 102,000 pounds of food were raised in 2008 for the Feed Richmond food drive. Last year, the program raised more than 135,000 pounds of food according to Kristin

VanStory, director of communications. The Food Distribution Center delivers food to needy people across the region. Distribution centers solicit donated food from manufactures, retailers and the public. The Food Distribution Center also purchases food at efficient costs to ensure a supply of the healthiest and most needed items.  
“The Community Kitchen serves four and six thousand meals a day, which are cooked from scratch,” Lohr said. “And have to be healthy and nutritious that go to homebound people and majority go to children.”  
The food bank needs canned chicken, ham, tuna and salmon, peanut butter, canned vegetables, canned fruits, spaghetti sauce, hot and cold cereals, and pasta and rice. The Feed Richmond food drive will be at four area Kroger stores collecting food and funds. **CT**  
If you're hungry and need food, call 804-521-2500.





A survey of VCU students found that more than half didn't get enough exercise.

## College obesity becoming a big issue

Michael Johnson  
Contributing Writer

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, according to the World Health Organization, with 1 billion people overweight and 300 million clinically obese, and college campuses are not immune to the problem.

The American College Health Association National College Health Assessment II, which was conducted with an Internet survey of VCU students in February of this year, shows how much obesity has taken hold within the college community. Approximately 1,500 students responded out of 5,000 who were sent the survey, and were asked about their weight, nutrition and exercise

recommendations for moderate-intensity exercise and vigorous-intensity exercise, set forth by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association.

The Well offers nutrition counseling for free to students, and ran a weight loss program called "Healthy Fit" this semester in conjunction with Rec Sports, which ran from September through November. The nutrition and exercise program had about 40 people signed up at the start, according to Vatalaro, but lost steam and now has about 20 participants.

"We've had, unfortunately, an attrition rate that is a bit disappointing," Vatalaro said.

A college in Pennsylvania took a more drastic step to combat the problem of obesity last year, when it required students with a BMI of 30 or more to take a "Fitness for Life" health and nutrition class before being able to graduate. In an interview with National Public Radio in November of 2009, James DeBoy, chair of the Department of Health, Physical Education

and Recreation at Lincoln University, defended the decision.

"We know that obesity and its comorbidities are going to rob individuals of quality and quantity of life," DeBoy said on NPR.

"What good is it to go through college, get your bachelor's degree at Lincoln University, go get your graduate degree, work for five, six, seven years, and all of a sudden, you experience a catastrophic health issue associated with the obesity. That would be a tragedy." **CT**

"Because we are dealing with such a young population and a third of our students are overweight or obese."

routines, among other questions.

"I think that these statistics are somewhat alarming," Katie Vatalaro Hill, assistant director at the Wellness Resource Center, said. "Because we are dealing with such a young population and a third of our students are overweight or obese."

The results showed that 13.8 percent of those surveyed had a body mass index of above 30, which is classified as obese. The survey also found that 51.6 percent of surveyed students are not meeting the

## Campus Outreach collects used books for charity

Mark Robinson  
Contributing Writer

VCU Campus Outreach's "Books for Africa!" drive is urging students opt to donate old textbooks to their book drive instead of shoving them under the bed or selling them back to bookstores for minimal gain.

The student-run project is collecting textbooks and workbooks that are less than 10 years old. Through a partner organization, all the books collected are sold and the profit is then given to Books for Africa to purchase books. Each textbook donated will provide enough money to buy dozens of books for the charity.

Boxes are placed in all the residence halls on the Monroe Park campus, as well as Snead and Hibbs halls, and Crossroads Music on Broad Street.

"I have been pretty surprised at the amount of support that we've received, both online and in person," freshman Adam Naccarato said.

"Everyone seems to want to put their best foot forward and help out."

Naccarato is the student leader of the book drive that started as result of a service project assigned in his Mass Communications 101 class.

Mass communications professor Jeff South assigned the service projects despite the enrollment of more than 200 students in the course. There are more than 20 groups with 10 members each; the topics of the projects range from raising awareness about certain issues in media, like sexism or violence, to social activism for specific causes like supporting imprisoned journalists or the local music scene.

"At minimum, I think the students will be able to raise awareness about important issues through their service projects," South said, "Who knows – maybe some of these efforts will result in policy changes or other actions."

South, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco in the early '80s, said that Books for Africa has sentimental value to him because he has witnessed the happiness books were able to bring to the young people there.

VCU Campus Outreach will be

"Books for Africa is a great opportunity to make a difference; that's really the main achievement – helping others."

collecting books until Dec. 3.

Naccarato hopes that VCU students embrace and support the cause.

"This time of the year is always a great period to really look at yourself and what you have done to actually help someone," he said. "Books for Africa is a great opportunity to make a difference; that's really the main achievement – helping others." **CT**

For more information about Books for Africa, visit <http://www.booksforafrica.org>. For more information about VCU Campus Outreach, visit <http://zh-cn.connect.facebook.com/pages/Books-For-Africa-VCU-Campus-Outreach/133746686678690> or follow them on Twitter at @VCU\_Outreach.



PHOTO CREDIT: BOOKSFORAFRICA.ORG

VCU's Campus Outreach's charity aims to buy books for impoverished African nations.

# sports

## The garden of meaning: VCU relishing role at the 'Mecca of basketball'

Jim Swing  
Assistant Sports Editor

Seven months ago, when the VCU men's basketball team was overlooked for the 2010 National Invitational Tournament's 32-team field on Selection Sunday, it left a sour taste in their mouths.

This time, when the 16-team bracket was being assembled for the NIT Season Tip-Off, the Rams made sure that they weren't an afterthought.

After defeating reigning Big South Champion, Winthrop on Tuesday night, VCU took Havoc 2.0 – the team's self-named style of play – to another level the following night, routing ACC's Wake Forest and scheduling a date with No. 23 Tennessee, Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden.

The privilege to compete at what is known as the "Mecca of basketball" is any college basketball player's dream and for the Rams, an opportunity such as this has significance of all sorts.

"It's my dream for sure," senior point guard Joey Rodriguez said. "It's a great opportunity on a national stage in front of the world, and we couldn't ask for more at the beginning of the year so it's just so exciting."

While playing at the Garden might be a dream come true for some, the forthcoming experience has a different impact on Richmond native Brandon Rozzell.

"It's a great feeling for me coming from Richmond and not being in New York more than one time and not seeing Madison Square Garden ever but on TV," Rozzell said. "Getting to step into that building and play basketball as a VCU Ram is an honor for me, especially being from Richmond."

The senior guard has been a large part of a VCU squad that places a large emphasis on shots from behind the three-point line. Through the first three games of the season, the Rams have shrewdly peppered the three-point shot onto opposing teams, taking 85 shots from beyond the arc, second most in the nation behind Virginia Military Institute.

"We want to go get a good shot every time down, and we've got a lot of guys that are very good three-point shooters so if the other team is going to leave those guys open, then we are going to shoot the ball," head coach Shaka Smart said. "However, there are stretches in the



Senior forward Jamie Skeen scored 15 points and added five rebounds in VCU's 90-69 thumping of Wake Forest.

game sometimes where it makes since to get the ball inside; but for the most part if Brandon (Rozzell) is open, or Joey (Rodriguez) is open, or any other of our good three-point shooters, I want them to shoot it."

VCU has turned the three-point shot into its consistent "bread and butter," shooting 38.8 percent with help from a constant feeding source in Rodriguez. Coming off a pre-season ankle injury that kept him from participating in the Rams' exhibition against Virginia Union, Rodriguez is currently averaging 10.3 assists per game, which ranks second in the nation. Although Rodriguez admits that he is still not fully 100 percent, his efforts so far have been beyond par for VCU, leading the Rams in scoring with 18.3 points per game along with a 17 assist endeavor against UNC Greensboro that set a program record.

VCU's success stretches further than the offensive side of the floor, however; the Rams' defense is finally beginning to find its form following the start of the NIT Tip-Off. In Wednesday night's matchup against Wake Forest, the VCU defense unleashed havoc to full use,

forcing 23 turnovers, including 11 steals that sent the Demon Deacon offense into a state of turmoil.

"We definitely focused this year on our half-court defense and full-court defense, and we were pretty good in the press forcing turnovers," junior Bradford Burgess said. "It seemed like they didn't even get the ball past half-court for a good stretch of time; that's been the focus this year, and hopefully we can continue to improve."

The win over Wake Forest came as a confidence boost for an already especially confident Rams basketball team that has leaned on its four returning seniors from last year.

"It lifts us up a lot, playing an ACC team at their place and winning a game like that," Rodriguez said. "We always have confidence, but it helps out a little bit."

VCU will take its elevated confidence to New York City, competing with three other top tier schools No. 7 Villanova, No. 23 Tennessee and UCLA. Standing in the way of the Rams and a shot at the NIT Tip-Off Championship is a match against a highly-touted Tennessee Volunteer team coming off close wins over

Belmont and Missouri State.

While competing with a few of the nation's top schools might stand as a good challenge for VCU to assess themselves, Smart believes his team prepares an equally stiff challenge.

"Every team is different; I don't think the rankings makes much of a difference in terms of how you match up against them," Smart said. "Any team that makes it to the semifinals of the NIT is a high-level team."

Wednesday's semifinal winners of the Tennessee-VCU, Villanova-UCLA matchups will face each other in the championship Friday, leaving the two runner-ups to face each other in a consolation game.

Having started the year with a three-game win-streak, VCU heads into Madison Square Garden with its confidence in full effect, having achieved a great deal of success so far in the early stages of the season.

"The feeling is amazing that you achieved a goal that you set at the beginning of the season; it's a good feeling going into that tournament," Rozzell said. "We wanted to get to Madison Square Garden, and we did it by winning two games in a row, and now we're headed to New York City." **CT**

PHOTO BY KYLE LAFERRIERE

# Dick's Sporting Goods National Invitation Tournament Season Tip-Off

## VILLANOVA



## UCLA



## VCU



## TENNESSEE



## CHAMPION



### Teams:

VCU Rams (3-0)

Tennessee Volunteers (3-0)

UCLA Bruins (3-0)

Villanova Wildcats (4-0)

**When:** Nov. 24- Nov. 26

**Where:** Madison Square Garden, New York City

**TV:** ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN3.com

### Semifinals:

Semifinal No. 1

VCU vs. Tennessee

**When:** Wednesday, Nov. 24, 7

p.m. TV: ESPN2

Semifinal No. 2

Villanova vs. UCLA

**When:** Wednesday, Nov. 24, 9

p.m. TV: ESPN2

**Consolation Game:** Loser of semifinal No. 1 vs. loser of semifinal No. 2

**When:** Friday, Nov. 26, 2:30 p.m.

**TV:** ESPN or ESPN2

### Final:

Winner of Semifinal No. 1 vs. winner of semifinal No. 2

**When:** Friday, Nov. 26, 5 p.m.

**TV:** ESPN

### Tournament information:

Ticket prices: \$10- \$60

## Sports briefs

### Women's volleyball

VCU volleyball suffered another tough loss to Delaware (26-24, 25-16, 20-25, 25-16) for the third straight time this season. VCU (12-20) was looking to repeat its heroics from the 2005 season, when the Rams became the first No. 4 seed to capture the CAA championship. However, destiny was not in the Rams favor, as the Blue Hens hit .376 and got 50 assists from two-time CAA Setter of the Year Jess Chason.

Despite Jessica Ojukwu's 13 kills, the Rams fell out of championship contention with a 3-1 loss to the No. 1-seeded Blue Hens. Ojukwu hit .423 to help VCU in her finest performance of the season. Also, sophomore Kristin Boyd recorded 12 kills and hit .526. Boyd also supplied four blocks. Senior Kelsie Clegg (Boise, Idaho) added nine kills and three blocks for the Rams.

VCU will be back in action this Friday when they face Albany (N.Y.) in the final game of the season.

### Women's basketball

After defeating Virginia Tech 72-58 last season, VCU dropped its second game of the season to the Hokies 63-61. Junior Courtney Hurt posted her third-straight double-double leading all scorers with 26 points and 11 rebounds for the Rams. Freshman Jacqueline Brewer scored 14 points, while junior Jennifer Lane finished with 11 points, five rebounds and five assists.

VCU meets Virginia Tech today for the second year in a row and the 28th time in school history. The Rams have won three straight, but the Hokies lead the all-time series 17-10.

Last year, VCU defeated Virginia Tech in its season opener, 72-58. The previous two VCU victories came during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 campaigns.



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PHOTO BY CHRIS CONWAY

Batman shows off his wingspan to judges during the costume contest late Saturday afternoon.

Mark Robinson  
Staff Writer

Comic book collectors all over Virginia had their calendars marked months in advance for this past weekend's two-day Comicon event.

The comics culture convention, hosted at the Ramada Plaza West on Broad Street, featured both small and large publishers as well as a costume contest, charity art auction, and a Magic the Gathering Tournament.

The convention has grown in size and popularity over its 24-year lifetime.

"I've come the last three years and this is by far the biggest and fanciest it's been – its good," VCU senior Morris Reese said.

The convention layout designated areas for small publishers, anime, artists and vendors.

"I'm pretty impressed," Chrissie Boeson, a VCU student, said. "My sister went to the Comicon in New York and told me about it, so I was excited to come here."

Hundreds of collectors streamed through the vendor hall where they would stop and peruse through thousands of comics. Batman, Spider-Man, Superman, X-Men, Green Lantern, Iron Man, Hulk, Wolverine – every comic book imaginable, and many unimaginable, were available in mint condition.

Prices ranged from bargain bin \$1 comics to \$150 first editions; convention attendees haggled with vendors to purchase the last comic book to complete their collection.

Freshman Theresa Furbish grinned as

she succeeded in talking a vendor down to half price on a Wolverine comic book. "This is my first Comicon, and I already can't wait until next year," she said, as she showed off her purchase to her friends.

A sizable crowd gathered for Saturday afternoon's costume contest, which featured a variety of both children and adult costumes. They ranged from famous superheroes like Spider-Man and Superwoman – in the form of a 6-year-old girl – to a charismatic White Spy from Mad magazine's "Spy vs. Spy" and a cohort of Star Wars characters that fashioned their costumes out of PVC pipe.

The prize for "Best Overall" went to a 7-foot-tall Zombie Hulk that stomped around the convention all day smashing weaklings and occasionally posing for pictures.

On Saturday night, more than 100 original art pieces were up for auction at the Charity Art Auction. Proceeds from the sales went to offset artist travel costs, as well as charity causes like The Wieringo Scholarship and The Hero Initiative.

The Wieringo Scholarship, which raises funds at comic conventions across the country, was created in honor of "The Fantastic Four" creator Mike Wieringo, who died in 2007. The winner, selected by portfolio review, receives a year's paid tuition (about \$30,000) at Savannah College of Art and Design, "One of the most impressive programs in the world to focus on the medium of comics," according to comic artist Jeff

Story continued on CT10

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## Story continued from CT9

Parker, who worked with Wieringo in his lifetime.

The Hero Initiative strives to provide a “financial safety net” for working comic artists and their families – for example, in emergency medical costs, or in basic living support during a transition between paying work in the field.

Victory Comics of Falls Church, VA hosted a “Magic: The Gathering” tournament on Sunday morning; the event required a buy-in fee but attracted many card collectors to test their skills and prized collections. Attendees, ranging from teenagers to college-aged kids, competed for glory and the promised first place prize of eight new packs of “Magic: The Gathering” cards.

If the Virginia Comicon has made an impact on convention goers in its 24th year, next year’s 25th – the silver anniversary edition – will look to be even bigger and better than ever. **CT**



**ABOVE LEFT:** The costume contest featured other characters beyond typical comic-book characters. One contestant is dressed as the White Spy from MAD Magazine’s “Spy vs. Spy.”

**ABOVE RIGHT:** One Comicon participant dresses as Rorschach from Watchmen, which was popularized with the 2009 film adaptation of the series.

**RIGHT:** Comicon, with its variety of activities and vendors, was a family event with mini-Wolverines, Wonderwomen, and Star Wars characters in attendance.



PHOTOS BY CHRIS CONWAY



# Wizards, witches mob muggle theatres for Potter premiere



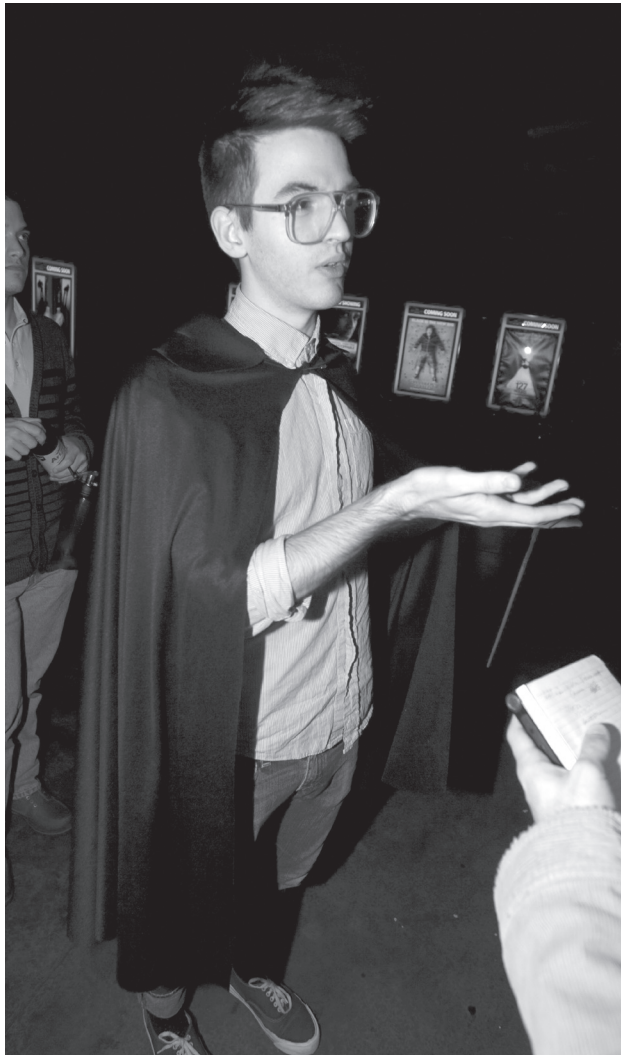
Nick Bonadies  
*Spectrum* editor

Last Thursday at midnight, the book and film series that held a generation of fans spellbound entered its final stretch with the premiere of “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part I.”

The young adult novel series turned pop culture phenomenon, which began more than a decade ago with the 1997 publication of “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone,” has earned more than \$5.5 billion with its film adaptations since the premiere of the first installment in 2001. A spokesperson for Movieland on North Boulevard said that at their midnight screening, nine theaters – more than half of the facility’s – had to be opened to accommodate an overwhelming ticket demand.

For most Potter diehards – the many of whom have “grown up” with series’ characters Harry, Ron and Hermione as they struggle through adolescence and face forces of unutterable evil – the idea that the film series is nearing its conclusion is at best, bittersweet, and at worst, devastating.

Full-on despair need not settle in just yet, however – “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II” is set for release next July. **CT**



**ABOVE LEFT:** Melissa Yacher, VCU School of Nursing alumna, dons emerald green robes in tribute to Professor McGonagall, played in the film series by Maggie Smith.

**ABOVE CENTER:** William Chandler Honeycutt, junior in VCU Cinema, said the \$5.5 billion grossing film series is “a really good adaptation,” although not in his list of favorite films.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** “STUPEFY!” Ian Hurdle, freshman Theatre major, said he counts himself among the countless in his generation who feel as though they’ve “grown up” with the characters in Rowling’s novels.

**BELOW:** University of Richmond American Studies major Jessie Kelley says she has attended Harry Potter movie premieres since “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” came out when she was 11.



PHOTOS BY KYLE LAFERRIERE



# Cutthroats bike gang gives back – starting with dance party



PHOTOS BY KYLE LAFERRIERE

Mechelle Hankerson  
Assistant Spectrum Editor

The Cutthroats, one of Richmond's most visible bike gangs, began its third annual Christmas Bike Fundraiser with their Fall Formal dance party at Strange Matter on Thurs., Nov. 18.

"This is the first thing we've hosted with the (Cutthroats)," Strange Matter bartender Ron Rogers said. "It was great, I had a lot of fun. It's fun for people but also there's a good outcome. Instead of just throwing a dance party, they hold a dance party to benefit others. ... They're not as scary as their name would imply."

Noelle Archibald, one of the founders of the Cutthroats helped organize the event.

"We give away helmets and locks with the bikes and like to focus on giving older kids bikes because the cut-off age to receive some of these donations is 16," Archibald said. "We do buy some bikes for smaller kids but we like to buy BMX bikes and other bikes for kids ages 16-19. We also (worked) with U-Locks of Love ... this year and that will help us buy one to two more bikes."

In addition to this event, the Cutthroats host other events throughout the holiday season.

"This is the first thing we're doing this season but we're also going to put out donation boxes in local businesses – definitely at Lamplighter and Carytown,"

Archibald said. "We're going to host a talent competition at Gallery5, the 3rd annual Bring it RVA, on Tuesday, Dec. 14."

The Cutthroats, who are best known for organizing Slaughterama and Best Friend's Day, will be working with Hell's Satans to host Bring it RVA and are also working on an art auction as part of their fundraiser.

The Fall Formal showcased dancers and rappers through a dance-off and rap battle, and had close to 300 attendees and raised more than \$200, all of which went toward the bike fund.

Crystal June Storey, a local physics teacher and a pledge for the Cutthroats, was the winner of the dance-off, but the winner of the rap battle was a Riders of the Apocalypse bike club member.

"The party was a ... good change of pace," VCU senior Sebastian Gocan said. "It was nice to see that many people just cutting loose and getting down. It's also really cool that the Cutthroats put on something that really benefits the community. They are good dudes and I honestly had a blast."

"We like to have a good dance party a few times a year," Archibald said.

"One of our biggest missions is to help our community. We don't want to sit around and wish to be in a better city – we'd much rather do something to better the community in order to make that happen." **CT**



**TOP:** Strange Matter is a usual spot for the Cutthroats during bike races, but has never actually hosted an event with them until this year's Fall Formal.

**ABOVE:** The Cutthroats brought in an MC from Brooklyn for the event. There was also an original bike built by the Cutthroats to be raffled off.



## Newsom brings unique style to Richmond



PHOTO BY BALIN KIM

Mechelle Hankerson  
Assistant Spectrum Editor

Still riding the success of her third full-length album, February's "Have One on Me", songwriter Joanna Newsom performed at The National Saturday, Nov. 20 to a full crowd.

VCU junior Travis Lyle said, "There was a really big turnout for Richmond. There was already a really big line that had formed 30 minutes before the door had even opened."

Newsom, who is a classically-trained harpist and pianist, powerhoused her way through almost two hours, with her devoted fans demanding a dual encore.

Chelsea Gilmer, a VCU senior has seen Newsom once before in Charlottesville, but was still riveted by Newsom's live performance.

"I thought it was hypnotic because Joanna is expressive and emotional while she sings, and it was exciting because it was quite different from what you hear on one of her recordings because she actually makes an active attempt to change her voice, make her songs different, and change musical arrangements from what is originally recorded on her CDs."

Lyle had never seen Newsom before and was impressed with her ability to keep all her fans, new and old, engaged in her performance.

"It was really nice that she played a bunch of music from some of her earlier

albums," he said.

Neal Morgan, who played drums on her latest studio album, opened for Newsom, and was, according to Gilmer, equally as interesting to watch.

"The opening performer was really good as well, he was the drummer for her," Gilmer said. "I think he did a really good job getting the crowd ready for her."

"I thought it was cool that someone that she worked with got to show their own project they were working on," said Lyle.

"She seemed to be having a lot of fun," Gilmer said. "The audience was really enthusiastic."

Newsom will be performing in New York City the evening of Monday the 22nd, and has no other tour dates until January, when she tours Europe. **CT**

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V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y



# opinion

## Prohibition at VCU: A plus or a minus?

Robert Showah  
Opinion Editor

VCU is the only major four-year institution in Virginia that prohibits plus-minus grading in its classrooms, and a lot of people would like that changed, faculty and students alike.

This is not the easiest issue to navigate largely because the questions raised are not just about students' concerns that adding pluses and minuses will affect their GPA and potential postgraduate-admission hopes, but it also questions the philosophy professors teach by and whether they place emphasis on improvement, performance or accuracy.

A question that arises, is if there are two legitimate points of view on either side, why not let the professors decide which grading scale they believe is best?

Virginia Tech, University of Virginia, William & Mary, James Madison and George Mason all leave the choice of grading scale to the discretion of the professors.

According to a professor I spoke with in the School of Humanities and Sciences who requested to remain anonymous, VCU has not transferred to the grading scale because folks down at the VCU Medical Campus have a problem with it.

Those students who support the status quo believe that a plus-minus system would have a detrimental effect on their GPA, and professors who agree argue that one letter is sufficient in evaluating a student's performance in a class, that a "B" is a "B." Straightforward, no crazy symbols.

Students in support of a plus-minus system have concluded that it is fairer and more accurate. Many students placed their own experiences at the center of their rationale. Students who support the change said they have had experiences with the current system where the professor either refused to round-up their borderline final grade or corrections were made after a class had ended for the semester, yet the extra points rewarded made no difference because they remained within the margin of the same letter grade.

The anonymous professor supports switching to plus-minus grading, primarily because it is fairer and breaking grades into "B-," "B" and "B+" can better

allow them to distinguish between good students and better students.

As much as professors for plus-minus grading like to distinguish between an 85 and an 88, it is hard to believe anyone who dare makes the case that there is a substantial difference between students separated by mere points. Then again, the red line at which we reject or accept students must be drawn somewhere.

The deeper problem of both grading scales is that they are an attempt to conclude a student's performance with a letter or digit. Maybe it is laziness or our obsessive culture to endlessly compare GPAs, rankings, C-pluses and B-minuses.

If given the choice to remain with the status quo or transfer to a plus-minus system, I would choose the latter, and not necessarily because it is a better policy, but rather the lesser of two evils.

Viewing this strictly from the unfortunate hyper-competitive culture we've created over grades as labels, grading with pluses and minuses would help raise our standards as a university, which we desperately need to do in order to compete for more academically-diverse students. It would potentially motivate students to work harder to raise their grades to pluses rather than settling with one indistinct letter grade. It would also give professors options as to how they would like to evaluate students. After all, a simplified and fixed grading scale like the current system is not compatible with classes that have different curricula.

Or we can go with a better idea. We can do what Brown University, one of the eight Ivy League schools, does.

We can come to grips with the fact that no grading mechanism based on numbers, letters or rankings can measure the true capability of a student and the qualities they need to succeed academically and in their careers. Qualities like analysis, independence, creativity, communication and leadership skills not reflected in GPAs.

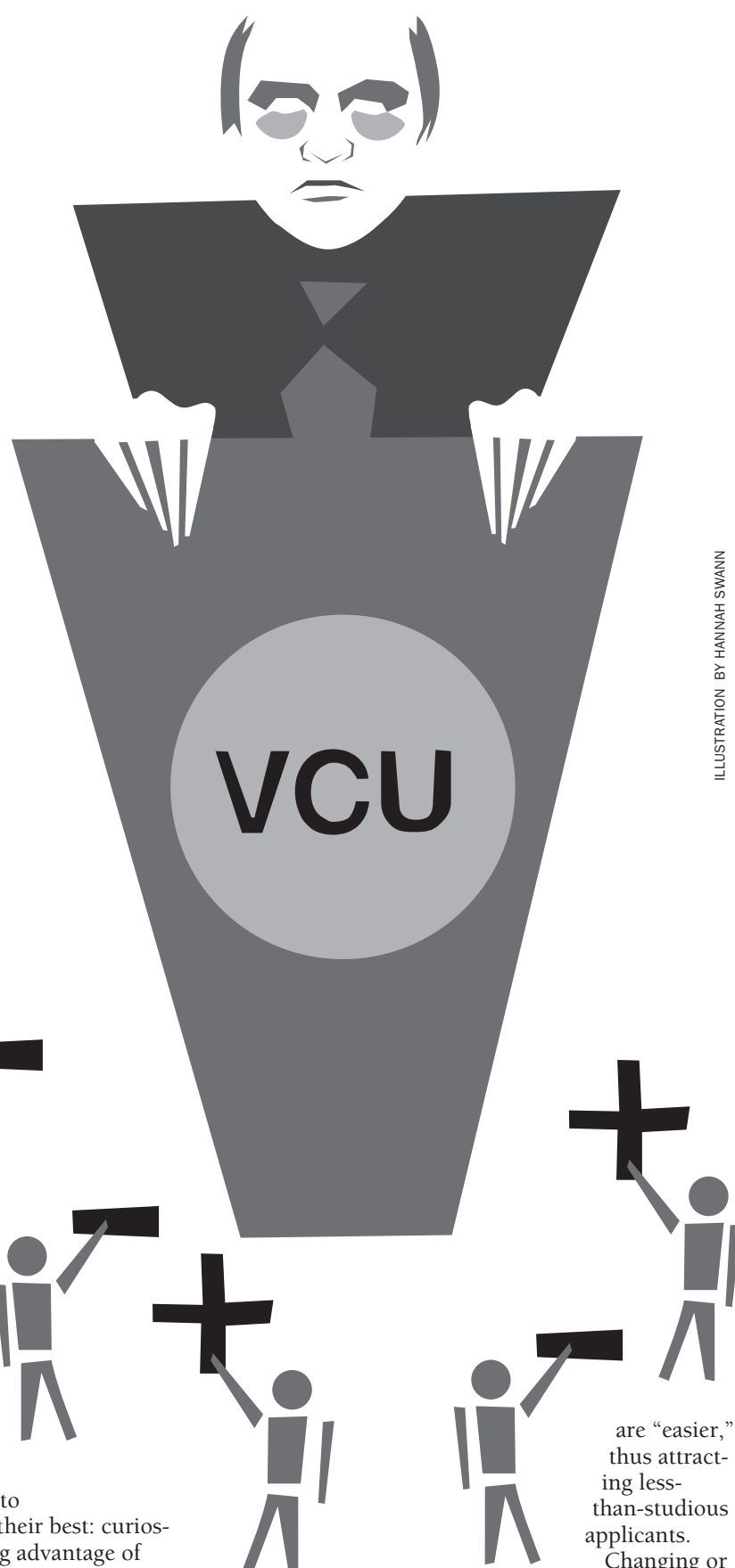
Since 1975, Brown gives their students options as to how they would prefer to be evaluated and places emphasis on letters of recommendation and written evaluations. Brown has also eliminated rankings and Dean's list placements in order to focus on the values that

should motivate students to perform their best: curiosity, taking advantage of opportunities, solving problems and generally enjoying the learning process.

Of course, Brown has an undergraduate population of about 6,000, nearly one-fifth the size of VCU. Unfortunately, with 32,000 students, VCU must resort to a more manufactured, mass-produced form of grading that lends itself to more inaccuracy and a misconstrued notion that courses without plus-minus

are "easier," thus attracting less-than-studious applicants.

Changing or permitting professors to choose what grading scale they prefer would be a step in the right direction. Whether university administrators come to their senses and bring plus-minus grading to VCU this question encounters much the same wonder as the mythical VCU football team. **CT**





## A statement from the Opinion Editor

There has been some so-called controversy coming out of the office of President Michael Rao. He has recently required his staff to sign an unusual non-disclosure agreement barring them from speaking about any matters pertaining to VCU, himself and his family.

Little detail about a potentially controversial issue has led the local media to predictably speculate and blow a very underdeveloped story out of proportion.

Anytime we as either students,

residents of the Richmond community or Americans hear of potential controversy in the offices of those in power, we waste no time harping on or cynically scoffing at whatever we hear, whether it is speculation or solid fact.

President Rao requiring his staff to sign a confidentiality agreement is fact; everything else is speculation.

This statement does not defend the use of this confidentiality agreement but urges those to consider possible extenuating circumstances for the necessity of it.

If the media and people alike can dream up possible unfounded reasons for the agreement, they can surely think of reasons where it might be appropriate. The latter, however, is a choice the media has not taken, and in the interest of ratings and profit, cannot consider.

For anyone who has held office for only 16 months, the best mindset the community can have with regards to President Rao's actions is positive intent.

Those who have been doing the most speculating, who want to play the

transparency card, are implying that President Rao is abusing the system for personal gain all without actually saying it. While more transparency is always better, there are exceptions, and they exist because in some cases, the public does not react well to the truth.

As badly as the media needs its ratings, readers and page views, it must realize that this is a classic case of "wait-and-see" journalism. It is the main reason the opinion section at The Commonwealth Times has initially decided not to feature this topic in a column. **CT**

## Proposed cigarette labels communicate the obvious

Karey Harrigan  
Columnist

The Food and Drug Administration has legally had its say in the tobacco industry since President Barack Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act in 2009.

Now, the FDA is proposing big changes. Through this legislation, they attained the power to regulate packaging, marketing, place bans and to control the amount of nicotine in tobacco products available to the public. Their inability to get rid of the tobacco franchise altogether

seems to be the only course of action remaining.

The Department of Health and Human Services is asserting their new role after issuing the Required Warnings for Cigarette

Packages and Advertisements Rule, which introduced 36 possible new warning labels for cigarette packaging. The nine that are chosen will be enforced to circulate after Oct. 22, 2012. These new labels, that will be covering half of the front and rear sides of cigarette packs, are meant to visually warn regular and first-time consumers of the dangers of smoking. Pictures of a body on an autopsy table and a man with a hole in his neck next to grim phrases like "smoking can kill you" and "cigarettes cause cancer" will now grace cigarette boxes.

These new attempts at deterring smokers are cartoons compared to the gruesome images foreign countries have chosen to cover their cigarette products. It seems very unrealistic that this will truly make a difference for those who are already users.

The reward that a cigarette provides has outweighed the consequences for decades and shows no signs of changing. Although, this effort is commendable, it will probably end up a failed one because the FDA is simply preaching to the choir.

VCU student Eric Bobber agrees. "I already know the consequences," he said.

This seemed to be a unanimous response among student smokers. The cost proved to be the biggest reason people quit or chose not to smoke, not the health consequences. The attempt of the labels to discourage potential smokers does not seem like it will be successful. Once an individual has their hands on a pack of cigarettes, chances are the warning has come way too late. The graphic labels are

not providing any new information, ideas or images. These labels are facts individuals defiantly know but have chosen to ignore.

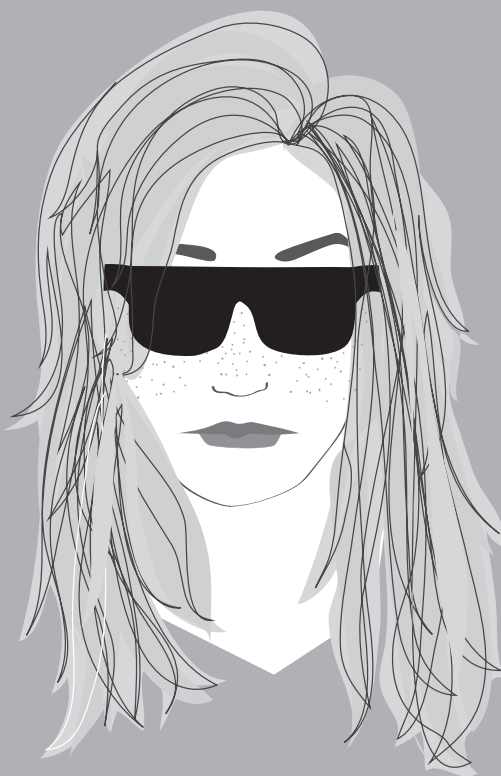
However, this is still a very important measure from the government in their anti-tobacco policies. Tobacco accounts for 443,000 deaths per year and with more than 1,000 children and teens becoming regular smokers every day, a more substantive effort than a picture label is needed.

Vapor cigarettes could be a better alternative for smokers; health risk assessments should be encouraged since the FDA regulates that as well. Possibly even putting limits on hours where cigarettes are sold and raising prices may help. The FDA needs a wide range of real citizens' opinions more than anything.

Still, unless there is a way to get rid of cigarettes entirely, it might be safe to assume that smoking cigarettes is and always will be a matter of personal choice that cannot truly be regulated. **CT**

## Reality Check with Sadie Zarkin

GRAPHIC BY MARLEIGH CULVER



Dear Sadie,

Okay, so my issue is with my roommate. This roommate keeps bringing over multiple girls and I need to study but I don't know how to ask him to take the girls away. I am tired of these girls always in my room overnight what should I do.

Sincerely,

Seriously. Stressed. Student.

*It seems to me like you need to have a very straightforward conversation with your roommate. Just remember, he has just as much of a right to have people over in his room as you do to study there. You two just need to work out a schedule of what times of day each of those activities can happen, and how often.*

*One thing is obvious though, these two activities shouldn't be occurring in the same space. Studying is not effective when done in the presence of a*

*procreating couple, and likewise I'm sure your scribbling, paper crumpling, and page flipping is really killing their mood.*

*If there are still times though where he brings girls over and you need to study you can always go elsewhere and leave him to get busy in your dorm. Alternately, stand your ground. Tell him that you can't study effectively anywhere but your own room, and suggest that he reserve a room at the library for him and his women's private interactions.*

*\*Private library rooms can be reserved by following this link.  
[www.library.vcu.edu/services/facilities/](http://www.library.vcu.edu/services/facilities/)*

Need advice? Send your questions to [CTadvice@gmail.com](mailto:CTadvice@gmail.com)

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