

ANYA SCZERZENIE
Staff Writer

More than 600 freshman students decided against attending VCU after receiving their acceptance letters — a nearly 30% increase from the previous year — making first-year students the most significant part of an enrollment drop at the university during COVID-19.

The number of accepted freshman applicants increased, but the portion of accepted freshmen who chose to enroll declined. In 2019, 29% of accepted students attended. For the fall 2020 semester, that dropped to 24%.

“There was an increase of 200 students who changed their minds,” Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Tomikia LeGrande said during a board of visitors meeting. “This was during the time when many universities were releasing their COVID plans, and also during the summer of civil unrest in Richmond.”

Nearly 15,000 freshmen were admitted last year, but that was bumped to more than 15,700 students this year. About 4,400

accepted freshmen packed their bags and headed to VCU last year, but in 2020 that dropped to about 3,800.

According to information presented at a September board of visitors meeting, VCU’s student enrollment fell by 1,010 this year, totaling 29,093 students. Enrollment has trended downward since at least 2010, when the university bolstered more than 32,000 students. In less than 10 years and prior to the pandemic, it dropped by more than 2,000 students.

LeGrande said the university decided to accept more freshmen during the 2020-21 school year to offset an expected decline in enrollment.

“We realized early on that we needed to increase admitted students,” LeGrande said. “We were projecting an enrollment decline of 10%. Our enrollment was only down 2%, so still down, but a lot better than we could have been.”

LeGrande said this year’s freshman class was “uniquely vulnerable” because many graduated from high school during COVID-19. She said students who were planning to go to VCU, and then did

not enroll, often cited safety concerns as their reason.

Enrollment for degree-seeking graduate students has increased, however, from 5,292 graduate students in fall last year to 5,507 during this semester.

Some freshmen who were surveyed about why they did not enroll cited finances, course modalities, acceptance at other schools and not feeling ready for college.

Olivia Stark, who was accepted by VCU, decided not to enroll in classes after seeing that all of them were online. She is currently taking a gap year and working full-time for a mortgage company.

“Online learning just isn’t my learning style, and I knew I wouldn’t do well in my classes,” Stark said.

Stark said she had already been accepted to the school, paid her deposit and finalized her class schedule before deciding to take the gap year. She plans to either enroll at VCU next year or go to school internationally.

During the board of visitors meeting on Sept. 18, LeGrande presented the university’s plan to increase enrollment and student retention. The plan includes increasing com-

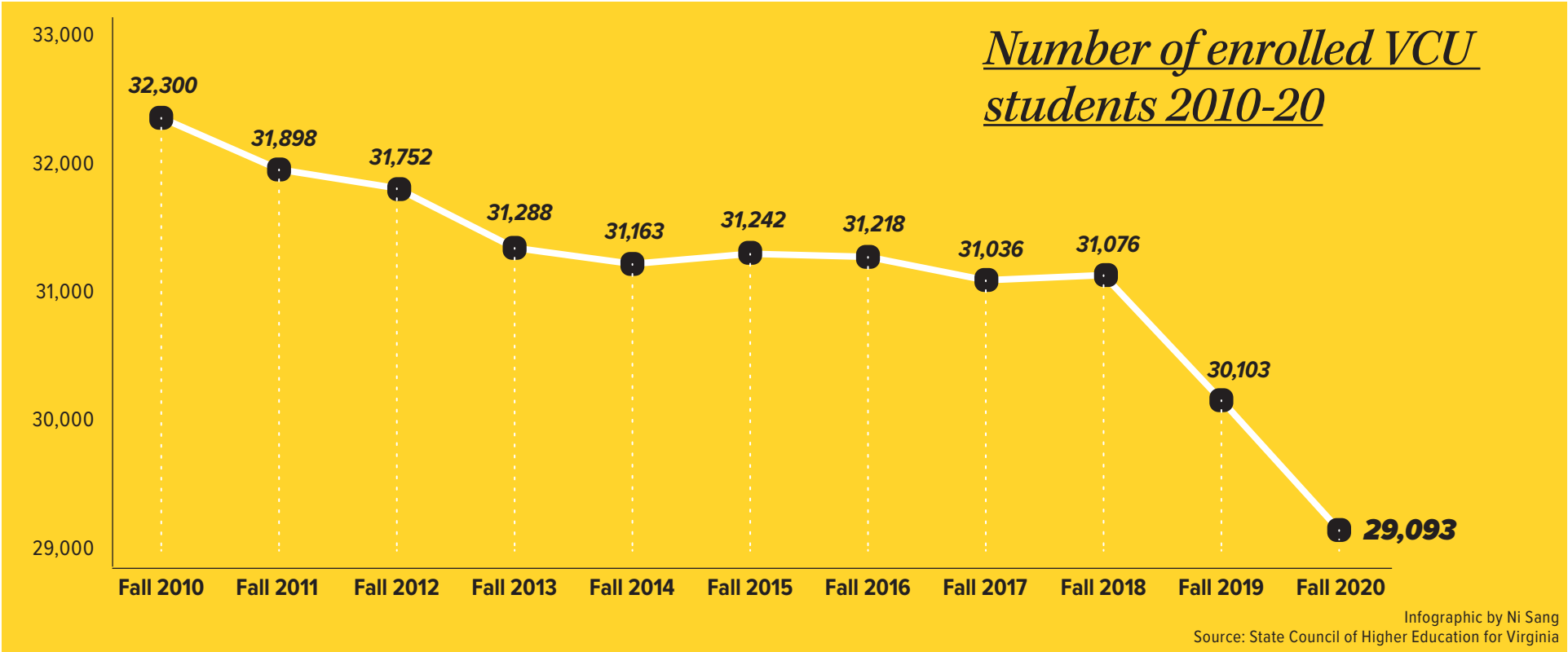
munication with prospective students’ parents and domestic out-of-state enrollment, as well as finding a way to show incoming students the campus when traditional college tours are out of the question.

“We won’t have the experiences our students are accustomed to, coming to VCU in large groups to get a feel for campus,” LeGrande said. “It will feel drastically different.”

VCU’s plan for increasing retention involves identifying students who are in danger of dropping out during their first and second years, and providing them with additional support. LeGrande said the university plans to focus on supporting male students of color.

Freshman Alexa Sorrentino, who went into VCU with an undeclared major, said she had concerns about starting college during a pandemic, but decided to go after seeing VCU’s reopening plan that included entrance testing for residential students and daily health check procedures.

“I was a little afraid, but then I saw how VCU was going to handle it and it definitely helped,” Sorrentino said. “At first, that helped my decision to come to Richmond.”



Stories of the week

NATIONAL: Officials in Nashville, Tennessee, are investigating a concert they said took place without a permit Sunday and attracted crowds of people who weren't wearing masks.

INTERNATIONAL: Eight countries have signed a pact to establish "safety zones" near future lunar bases, NASA announced Tuesday.



VCUarts freshman Olivia McCabe works on charcoal portraits for her art foundation drawing studio class in the Bowe Street Parking Deck. Photo by Enza Marcy

Art students build foundations in virtual settings

KATHARINE DEROSA
Staff Writer

Art foundation student Ken Truong found his way into the VCUarts program this year after exploring both biology and business majors. He watched his friends experience the introductory program, called AFO, and was looking forward to a similar hands-on experience himself.

"Prior to the pandemic I thought I would be all around campus, running to the workshop," the junior said. "Now all I do is just spend late nights in front of my computer."

Truong said his space research class sometimes has in-person requirements, but he typically tries to avoid campus due to COVID-19 risks. The class is meant to build students' understanding of 3D art. He said he wants to take advantage of AFO resources, such as the workspace at Bowe Street Parking Deck, but feels conflicted because he doesn't want to put anyone at risk.

The top floor of Bowe Street Parking Deck is a studio space for AFO students. According to the VCUarts website, the facility includes computer

labs, a woodshop and a media room.

Despite his disappointment with the shortfalls of online classes, Truong said he can't put the blame on any one person. He knew he wanted to enroll this semester regardless of the virtual format.

"I couldn't put things on hold because I have siblings who need to go to college," Truong said.

First-year VCUarts students are required to experience all majors through the foundations program. Though virtual learning has proven to be challenging, many are still pursuing their degree.

Freshman AFO student Olivia McCabe knew she wanted to go into communication arts before arriving at VCU, but she is still required to complete the foundations program. She said so far, her classes are going well.

"Not being able to do art outside my dorm without having to lug it to

Bowe Street or anything is kind of inconvenient, but I'm making it work," McCabe said.

McCabe said transporting her art occasionally doesn't feel worth the trouble, but it's necessary for working on things in the woodshop.

McCabe expected online classes when she committed to VCU, but she said her schedule changed just a few weeks before the semester started. McCabe's space research and drawing studio classes, which are required for AFO, are hybrid. The rest of her classes are online.

McCabe said she's happy with her experience in AFO and believes the format is working well. However, she's eager to have class in person.

"I believe I'm getting the best I can right now," McCabe said. "Being a new student, I don't really get what the original AFO experience would be."

VCUarts is hosting a variety of free, virtual events throughout the semester, including visiting artist lectures and a faculty speaker series. The next guest artist is Paul Sacaridiz, who will talk about his relationship with art and nonprofits on Oct. 19.

Sophomore communication arts major Grayson Bradstock said his only in-person class is a university college course, which is outside of VCUarts. He said he doesn't love paying the same amount in tuition as last year for fewer resources, but his parents didn't give him much of a choice in returning to school.

"I just thought I would suck it up and do the online courses," Bradstock said.

Tuition for the fall 2020 semester was \$12,094 for in-state undergraduate students and \$32,742 for out-of-state undergraduate students. All art students pay an additional \$1,850 fee for both in-state and out-of-state students. Neither price increased from the 2019-20 school year.

Bradstock said he finds it challenging to do his figure drawing class over Zoom. He said the model for the class sits in Bowe Street Parking Deck while the professor tells them to strike certain poses on video.

"It's really grainy, and you can't really see the people well enough," Bradstock said.

With the majority of classes online, Bradstock said he can't imagine what it would be like to take virtual AFO classes and called it "not much of an experience." Regardless of the class' modality, he said having a designated place to create art yields the best results.

"My experience revolved around Bowe Street," Bradstock said.

VCU clinic offers free vaccinations amid flu season

ANNA CHEN
Contributing Writer

As the flu season nears and Richmonders continue to contract COVID-19, VCU is offering free flu vaccinations.

University Student Health Services is offering flu vaccinations by appointment only. VCU provided 4,038 free flu vaccines last year, Margaret Roberson, director of VCU Student Health Services, said in an email.

"We have begun our flu clinics for this year and we will hopefully see a significant increase in students receiving the flu vaccine through our marketing efforts this year," Roberson said in an email.

The university encourages all students to receive a flu shot, especially those at high risk for complications. The VCU health center at 1300 W. Broad St. offers immunizations on Wednesday and Friday mornings, and Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

Sophomore psychology major Krista Crowell said she was unaware that VCU is administering free flu vaccines.

"I've been looking to get myself vaccinated somewhere and now that I know VCU Health is offering it for free, I'm definitely going to clear up some time in



Junior photography major Adam Santiago receives his flu shot at CVS Pharmacy on Sept. 26. Photo by Enza Marcy

my schedule and make an appointment," Crowell said.

Influenza virus and COVID-19 symptoms are similar, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated it is almost impossible to differentiate between the two viruses. Getting the flu vaccine can help your body build up antibodies to fight off the viral infections.

Gonzalo Bearman, chair of infectious disease at VCU Health, said getting the flu shot can reduce strain on medical experts dealing with COVID-19 cases.

"The influenza vaccination further decreases the burden on the healthcare system of potentially dealing with two viral respiratory pathogen outbreaks at the same time," Bearman said in an email.

Ruling out whether a patient is dealing with the flu or COVID-19 can help reduce risk by clearing up space in overwhelmed hospitals.

Bearmen said that although it's uncommon, some patients have had cases of COVID-19 and influenza simultaneously. The outcomes are potentially severe for those with a co-infection.

The CDC stated it's important to get the flu shot every year. The influenza virus evolves every year, meaning that last year's vaccine may not be adequate enough to fight off the swiftly-adapting flu virus. Health officials say it's more important than ever to receive the vaccine.

Sophomore psychology major Reshma Rajendran got her flu vaccine through her local doctor.

"I wanted to get my flu shot because I wanted to protect myself," Rajendran said. "I didn't want to possibly compromise my immune system further if I were to get COVID-19 too."

To schedule a flu shot at University Health Services, make an appointment by calling 804-827-8047 for Monroe Park campus and 804-828-9220 for MCV.

Delegate plans to reintroduce quarantine pay bill next session

ZACHARY KLOSKO
Capital News Service

Del. Elizabeth Guzmán, D-Woodbridge, said she is no stranger to the struggles of low-paying jobs. Guzmán said she immigrated to the U.S. from Peru as a single mother and worked multiple minimum wage jobs just to be able to pay rent and care for her daughter.

Guzmán has a mission to secure better financial benefits for minimum wage workers, but she said it's not going as planned.

Guzmán's House Bill 5116 was killed in a Senate committee during the Virginia General Assembly special session after being passed by the House. The General Assembly is currently meeting to tackle the state budget and other issues that have come up due to COVID-19.

The bill would have mandated quarantine pay for employees of businesses with more than 25 workers. It would require public and private employers to provide paid quarantine leave that could be immediately used by the employee, regardless of how long they had been employed. The paid quarantine leave could be used for the employee's health care needs or for care of a family member with an illness or health condition related to COVID-19.

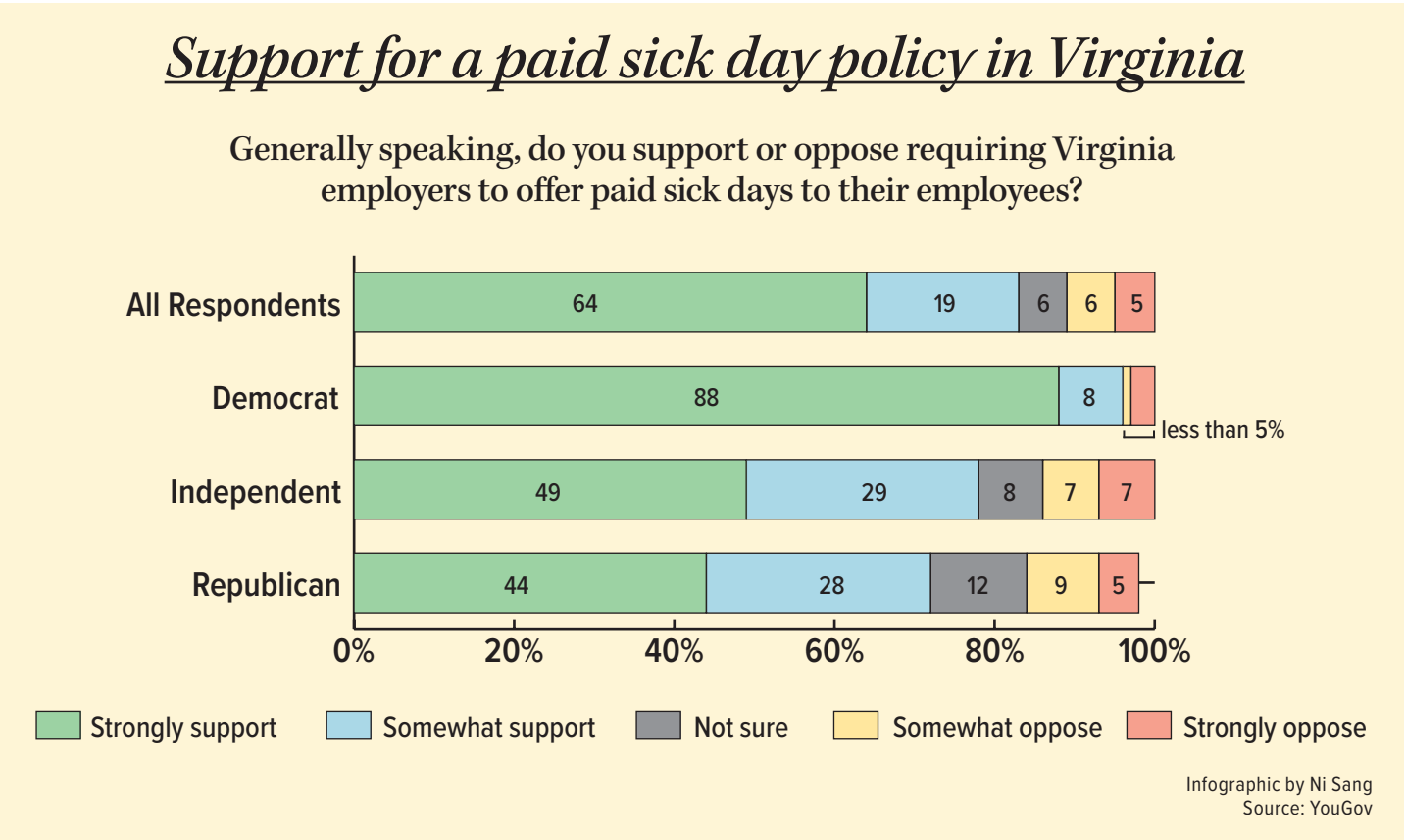
Guzmán said she's frustrated, but she plans to introduce the bill again during the next legislative session.

"Most of the arguments that I heard was because businesses are hurting and it was not the right time," Guzmán said. "I think it's like we hear a lot about businesses but we don't hear about the working class and who's going to be, you know, fighting for them."

Guzmán introduced a bill in the spring session before the coronavirus to require employers to provide paid sick leave for employees. After the Committee on Appropriations killed that bill, Guzmán introduced her current bill as an effort to keep advocating for worker's rights.

Kim Bobo, executive director for the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, said her organization is in favor of Guzmán's bill. Bobo said paid sick days and getting paid a minimum wage are basic standards employers should be able to provide for their employees without government assistance.

"We really don't believe that public funds should be used to subsidize employers providing such a basic core standard as paid sick days," Bobo said. "We will



not include anything like that in a bill going forward."

Being able to take paid time off can have a larger impact on the community because workers don't have to choose between their families' well-being and a paycheck, Bobo said.

"They will stay home when their children are sick and they won't send their kids to school sick, which is what happens right now," she said.

Bobo isn't the only supporter of Guzmán's bill. Eighty-three percent of Virginians support paid time off mandates, according to a recent YouGov poll commissioned in part by the Interfaith Center.

Del. Chris Head, R-Roanoke, voiced his concerns during the bill's third reading on Sept. 10. Head said Guzmán's bill largely mirrors federal legislation.

"This bill is going to cause businesses who might hire people to think twice about it," Head said. "It's going to raise their expenses for hiring people, and it's going to end up hurting many of the very people that you're trying to help with this legislation."

The Department of Labor and Industry estimated the bill would cost the department over \$46,000 in 2021 and an additional \$92,000 in 2022, according to the bill's impact statement. The

Department of Medical Assisted Services estimated the costs at \$28.8 million for fiscal year 2021 and \$29.8 million for fiscal year 2022. The bill would last until July 1, 2021, or until Gov. Ralph Northam's state of emergency for the coronavirus pandemic expires.

Guzmán said she isn't deterred. After Northam and first lady Pamela Northam announced they tested positive for

COVID-19 on Sept. 25, Guzmán said she needed to quarantine at home. She had visited a school with the first lady just a few days prior.

"Listen, there are 1.2 million Virginians out there that, if they were in the same situation that we are today, they would continue to go to work, because they don't have a dime," Guzmán said firmly. "Please pass the message to the governor and the first lady."



A House of Delegates bill that would have mandated quarantine pay for some Virginia businesses has died in a Senate committee.
Photo courtesy of Capital News Service

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Sports

Stat of the week

Former VCU baseball star Vimal Machin appeared in 24 games with the Oakland Athletics this season, logging a .206 batting average with 13 hits and 11 runs scored.

Former VCU basketball star shines on the gridiron, inspires fans

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Standing on the side of the practice field, a 6-foot-6-inch former VCU basketball star watches as his Indianapolis Colts teammates go through the plays. He visualizes himself running the routes and catching passes.

For Mo Alie-Cox, this was the beginning of the offseason workouts as he worked his way back from a thumb injury. Those mental reps prepared Alie-Cox for the season and allowed him to make a splash once he returned to the field.

"I knew what plays were being run so I just tried to put myself in that situation as if I was on the field and just get mental reps," Alie-Cox said on the phone Monday. "Mental reps are just as important as the physical reps on the field."

After fellow tight ends Jack Doyle and Trey Burton went down with injuries, Alie-Cox earned his first career start on Sept. 20 against the Minnesota Vikings.

Alie-Cox shined in the start, logging five receptions for 111 yards — a career-high.

"I've worked very hard at it and once my number was called, I just went out there and tried to make plays," Alie-Cox said.

After his breakout game, Alie-Cox recorded two back-to-back weeks with touchdowns. The Alexandria, Virginia, native said his preseason goal was to score five or more touchdowns, and the early success put him in a prime position to achieve his goal.

With the return of the other tight ends, the Colts coaching staff still wanted to keep Alie-Cox active in the offense.

"We have to continue to keep him involved. He's made too many plays to say, 'OK, now Mo, you take a back seat,'" Colts offensive coordinator Nick Sirianni told reporters on Sept. 29. "We want to get him the football and we have a variety of ways we want — we know what he does well and we know what he excels at."

Alie-Cox's previous role was as a run blocking tight end, and the transition to pass catching wasn't difficult when he ran routes at practice. The only difference: now it was in games.

"That's normally not what I'm asked to do, but that's what I was asked to do because of injuries," Alie-Cox said. "During the season, that's not what I'm asked to do. When they asked me to do it, I just went out there and shined in that role."



Left, Mo Alie-Cox played for VCU men's basketball from 2013-17. CT file photo. Middle and right, Alie-Cox recorded two back-to-back weeks with touchdowns for the Indianapolis Colts. Photos courtesy of the Indianapolis Colts. Photo illustration by Raymond Liu

When Alie-Cox signed with the Colts four years ago, he said he saw photos of fans wearing his football jersey in the Stuart C. Siegel Center. Now, each week during the NFL season, VCU fans have been posting about where to watch the Colts and highlight reel catches Alie-Cox has logged.

"I think VCU fans never stopped rooting for Mo as an individual," basketball fan

Judy Snead wrote in a Facebook comment. "As for rooting for the Colts, those who left football a while ago, now have a team, those who can't leave their team, now have an additional team to support."

Alie-Cox and the Colts are back in action Oct. 18 against the Cincinnati Bengals at 1 p.m.

Skateboarding community pushes for city-run park in Richmond's East End

JOE DODSON
Contributing Writer

After a push from local skateboarders, Richmond officials are exploring installing a skate park in the city's East End.

The City of Richmond's Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities asked Fulton and Montrose Heights community members for input on renovations through an online survey. Potential changes to the Powhatan Hill Community Center include improving basketball and tennis courts, adding pickleball courts and a skate park, along with sidewalks, landscaping and other amenities.

Sonny Fleming, an avid skateboarding enthusiast, said a skate park would give neighborhood kids more options to be active.

"This side of town, which is lower income, the kids need something to do," Fleming said. "Why not give them one more option?"

Fleming helped build the 28th Street Skatepark in Forest Hill and has built his own DIY skate parks for kids in the East End to use. For nine years, Fleming said he and his friends would build ramps only for them to be destroyed shortly after by the city.

After the first time, Fleming thought concrete ramps would be harder for the city to remove.

His most recent ramps were located on the tennis courts at the Powhatan Community Center, and they were in place for nearly a year until COVID-19 hit. Fleming said he took it upon himself to remove the ramps to prevent crowds of skaters. Once Fleming noticed basketball

hoops and tennis nets were reinstalled at the center, Fleming put his ramps back on the court. This time, the ramps were gone after two days.

"Legally, they should not have been placed there," said Tamara Jenkins of Richmond's parks and recreation department. "However, it is because of the skate community that we are looking at installing an actual skate park."

Fleming took to Instagram to get local skaters to express their interest in an improved skatepark.

Local skating professionals Gilbert Crocket and Ty Beall expressed their support by sharing the survey on social media. Fleming reached out to the BMX community and local skate shops as well.

Nine years ago, Fleming — a lifelong skater who's built DIY skate parks in Philadelphia and a 32,000-square-foot park in Utah — made his way to Richmond, where he met a group of skaters his age.

A year after moving to the area, Fleming began hosting a skate session for kids every Sunday at his home ramp. What originally

started with his son and neighbor Matt Conner's son grew into 13 families coming over to skate. With so many little kids to account for, the parents decided they needed a larger venue to host the skate sessions. Fleming said city-funded skate parks are few and far between in Richmond.

"Richmond is the capital of Virginia, and we only have one skatepark and DIY spot," Fleming said. "Look at cities like Norfolk, where there are four. Charlottesville just put in a multimillion-dollar facility."

Conner, who has lived in the East End for more than 20 years, said the DIY park got much more use out of the spot than tennis does.

"I skated there every single day," Conner said. "There were times when I stopped going over there because there were so many people skating there. Way more people than ever played tennis there."

The results of the city's survey, which ended Oct. 9, have not yet been released. The parks and recreation department said it is still formulating a plan for what to do with the park.

Fleming, 46, said he hopes the department decides to build a permanent park — not for himself, but for the skate community as a whole. The process for getting a new park has been slow. Fleming's child, who has been skating on the court since he was seven, is now in middle school.

"I understand it's a slow process, but at the same time it's a backwards process," Fleming said, "for a sport that's been around this long and obviously is only getting bigger."



Skateboarding enthusiast Sonny Fleming skates at one of his DIY skate parks in Richmond. Photo courtesy of Sonny Fleming



Senior Inigo Torre Martin said men’s tennis players treat open practices in front of fans the same as real matches. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics

Open tennis practices motivate players, garner attention from public

JOE DODSON
Contributing Writer

VCU men’s tennis players say they feel “pumped” and “motivated” to play in front of their fans, now that the team is incorporating youth and the community through open practices and T-shirt swaps.

The idea has been a success. Richmond tennis fans swapped old university T-shirts for a new shirt sporting the black and gold. Around 50 shirts have been collected and donated to the Salvation Army. The fans get to watch tennis, and the players get to play in front of a crowd and build a fanbase.

“People are looking for ways to be outside and be around other people,” said Rebecca Piner, assistant athletic director of marketing and promotions. “It’s gotten great exposure for our team.”

According to coach Anthony Rossi, nearly 50 people attended the first event at the Southampton Recreation Association on Sept. 19. The second event on Sept. 25 at Westwood Club was filled to capacity, and the third, held at Avalon Recreation Association on Oct. 2, had nearly 60 guests. Considering the small number of people that attend the men’s competitive matches, Rossi hopes this exposure will lead to a larger fan base.

“We have a good team,” Rossi said. “We are top 15 in the country and I think not many people know that. We don’t get that many fans at matches and we actually got some decent crowds so far at all three of the clubs.”

The original plan was for the team to run clinics for youth and adult players at the various clubs around Richmond. Due to COVID-19, the team made the decision to host open practices instead where fans could watch the team play from a distance.

“The fact that there are people cheering and watching us,” senior Inigo Torre Martin said. “We are more focused and more engaged and have more motivation.”

Martin said he thinks community events will lead to a stronger program in the long term.

“We are getting to be known in the community,” Martin said. “Maybe more people

will come watch us play and try to raise the program of course.”

The players, like many VCU students, have felt isolated this fall due to COVID-19. Rossi and the team viewed the open practices as a way to get a change of scenery.

“The fact that we don’t get to play matches and we are stuck in a way at VCU,” Rossi said. “It was good for them to go play at a different club, learn a little bit more about the city and see more people.”

Although it’s been seven months since VCU men’s tennis played a match in front of fans — the 6-1 home win against Campbell on March 4 was the last match before the season was canceled — the team was pleasantly surprised to find a strong tennis community in Richmond.

“I am impressed with how much people love tennis around here,” Martin said. “For me, Richmond is always going to be special.”

Martin said the players are viewing these outings like a tournament. With no matches until the spring, Martin said the events help with motivation.

“It’s a very good idea to change the scenario of where we are practicing because we are pumped,” Martin said about playing in a new venue. “We are more motivated.”

“

It’s a very good idea to change the scenario of where we are practicing because we are pumped. We are more motivated.”

Inigo Torre Martin, tennis player

Rossi and his squad understand the importance of passing the torch to the next generation of players. The team was happy to show what they could do in front of a crowd of youth players.

“Even if they are not professional it is still a good inspiration for the kids,” Rossi said. “Some of them don’t get to go to professional tournaments or watch tennis on TV that much. Just to see the intensity and what college tennis is all about is really good.”

The players are looking forward to the opportunity once the pandemic slows down to help local youth players with their game.

“It is sad that this is happening and we cannot do it,” Martin said about the originally planned clinics. “Of course we are role models for little kids, and it will be amazing to give them some knowledge that we’ve been learning throughout our lives.”

Although the players could not get as hands-on as they wanted, they still hoped they made an impact on young fans.

“Tell them and show them that this is a game and it’s so fun,” Martin said. “Maybe one of them could be a college player one day.”

VCU Athletics plans to host more open practices with T-shirt swaps this semester, Piner said, but none are scheduled yet.

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On this day

In 2007, “Keeping Up with the Kardashians” premiered on E! in the U.S.



‘Billboard House’ illuminates suburban neighborhood with political activism

Pearl and June, daughters of Chesterfield homeowners Tim and Lauren Barry, run on the lawn during one of the family’s daily projections on Oct. 8. Photo by Enza Marcy

IMAN MEKONEN
Spectrum Editor

ASQUARE WHITE HOUSE ON BUFORD Road has served as a backdrop to nightly projections for nearly a month as the surrounding neighborhood is lit up with vibrant colors. These projections have addressed issues like healthcare and climate change, and supported Democratic political candidates.

Dubbed the “Billboard House,” homeowners Lauren and Tim Barry decided to combine skills for their “passion project” after feeling devastated by the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

“We’re kind of sitting around in our backyard one afternoon with our friend who was over and saying, ‘I wish we could do something, I wish we could say something,’” Lauren said. “And I think I sort of jokingly said, ‘Oh, we should project something on the house.’ And it turned into a real thing.”

They borrowed a projector from a neighbor and premiered the first projection on Sept. 20, dedicated to Ginsburg with the slogan “Vote For Truth.”

With weather permitting, they’ve displayed a new projection every night with no repeating images. They said the project received an “overwhelmingly positive” response from local communities and on social media — with the exception of “trolls on both sides.”

“It just took off, and I couldn’t believe it,” Lauren said. “And it was a little scary at first, but the response and the messages that we’ve received from people have been really, really wonderful and inspiring, and everybody is supportive.”

The Barrys said they brainstorm topics to address by bouncing ideas off each other, as they both have experience in political grassroots movements and event management. They said some design ideas have a

quick turnaround, while others can take longer to finalize.

“I’m pretty good at coming up with kind of catchy ideas and slogans, and Lauren’s amazing at putting those in really gripping visual splits,” Tim said.

When brainstorming ideas related to communities they’re not a part of, the Barrys said they reach out to friends for consultation. In the past, they’ve contacted friends that work in healthcare policy and those that belong to the LGBTQ community to make sure they’re communicating an accurate message.

Rachel Douglas, a VCU alum and close friend of the Barrys, was contacted when a projection pertained to the LGBTQ community. The result was a projection on Oct. 4 that said “families come in all colors and sizes.”

“When they were talking about what different families look like, they called me, because I have a queer family,” Douglas said. “And so they asked me questions that helped them determine what the message is gonna be.”

Douglas said her biggest fear is that her family won’t be recognized or honored if President Donald Trump is re-elected. She said she believes this fear inspired the Barrys to showcase different types of families.

“I think what’s so beautiful about this project is that it really showcases their gifts and what’s theirs to do in the world,” Douglas said. “They are creative, and they are really good at messaging, and I feel like that’s where this project is like all of their gifts coming together.”

Before this project, the Barrys placed large, yellow letters that spell “BLM” in

front of their house shortly after the death of George Floyd in June. Floyd’s death, which occurred while he was unarmed in Minneapolis police custody, sparked nationwide and global protests surrounding police brutality and racial injustice.

According to a Chesterfield County Zoning Ordinance, the letters are in violation of a zoning law, limiting signage to 14 square feet. The yellow Black Lives Matter initials cover around 74 square feet, Lauren said.

The Barrys were sent a warning letter on July 17, with a request to “reduce the total sign area” by Aug. 4. They are in the process of appealing to the Board of Zoning which, according to Tim, has been a positive process.

“So we’ll file that as long as we can, we’re not in a hurry to take anything down,” Tim said. “We’ll let the system kind of play itself out and see where it takes us.”

Tim said the projections and signage represent a natural passion for speaking out on important issues.

With two full-time jobs and two daughters at home, the Barrys said the projections are up for a couple hours at night — going up shortly before sunset and taken down around 10:30 p.m.

The project has been gaining local and statewide attention, sparking cross-country contact from old friends and those replicating the project with their own homes.

“I got contacted from a high school friend back in Chicago or my high school friend who’s in Denver now,” Tim said. “We’ve been hearing from people all over the place that are seeing this on our social media and other social media.”

They aim to have the project continue until Election Day, but in the meantime, they’re looking forward to working together on their passion project and addressing topics that “make people feel good.”

“It’s just an extension cord and a projector and a willingness to kind of put yourself out there,” Tim said.



From left: Family portrait of Lauren, Pearl, June and Tim Barry. Photo by Enza Marcy

Variety show provides free rein in ‘no shame’ environment

CLAIRE DARCY
Contributing Writer

In 2008, VCU student Tony Giamichael proposed to his longtime girlfriend Sarah Hildreth on the stage of the Richard Newdick Theater. On the same stage in 2019, a blindfolded student performed a taste test of three fast food burgers and attempted to guess the source of each.

“No one can go in and know exactly what’s going to happen,” said Crimson Piazza, a senior theater major with a concentration in stage production. “The weirdest things happen on that stage.”

Piazza is the production stage manager for No Shame Variety Show, a student-led group that organizes multimodal forms of entertainment led by an array of hosts.

Performance opportunities are open to all VCU students and can include an assortment of acts, including singing, poetry, dancing, hula hooping or stand-up comedy.

“There’s only three rules: no fire, don’t hurt yourself, the space, or others, and no nudity,” senior theater performance major Khadijah Franks said. “Other than that, people have free rein.”

The theater program operates under the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre with shows every other Friday night at 8 p.m. The first show of the semester was on Oct. 2 in the Shafer Street Playhouse.

“You get about eight minutes to go on stage and do whatever you want, judgement-free zone,” Franks said. “It’s not just plays, it’s not just music, it’s whatever anybody wants to do. If you want to sit on the stage in silence for eight minutes, just to do it, you get to do that.”

The variety show — named for students’ ability to perform in a safe, “no shame”



Senior Crimson Piazza and sophomore Luci Harris run tech at No Shame on Oct. 2.
Photo courtesy of Crimson Piazza

environment — was created in 2007 by then-graduate student Dan Dennis. In 2011, it was named one of the “Top 10 free things to do in Richmond” by The Commonwealth Times.

Hosted by senior theater majors Asjah Janece, Amari Samya, Trinitee Pearson and Franks — this is the group’s first season with an all-Black lineup of hosts.

This semester, the performances occur in a hybrid format — with some live in the theater and some pre-recorded video submissions. At each live performance, two members host virtually while two host in the theater.

There are no in-person audiences for No Shame this semester, so the group utilizes the streaming platform Streamyard to broadcast on their YouTube and Facebook pages.



The logo for VCU's No Shame Variety Show. Image courtesy of Crimson Piazza

The platform allows the crew to switch between the live and pre-recorded segments and to view comments from audience members in real time, which provides a more interactive feel to the show, according to Piazza.

Adjusting to the virtual format and the lack of physical audience still posed a

challenge for some live hosts and performers.

“You sort of just have to perform for the people that you know are watching instead of the people in the space,” Franks said. “You don’t get any of the energy that you’re throwing out back because there’s no one there to physically give it back.”

Junior Jamar Powers has participated in No Shame shows since his freshman year. Powers performs in drag as the character You’Neek in skits, music videos and sketch comedy pieces. He described this character as a “gorgeous and thoughtful woman with one too many screws loose.”

In the Oct. 2 show, the theater performance major presented “A You’Neek Baking Show,” a pre-recorded cooking parody video that incorporated a musical number.

“It was a weird experience because I was doing it by myself and my mother was helping me record it, but other than that it was fun,” Powers said.

As a safety precaution, masks must be worn at all times, including during a performance, and students must exit the building as soon as their act ends to prevent contact with others. The theater spaces are cleaned during the show’s virtual segments.

“Our biggest concern is everyone is safe, everyone is comfortable, and everyone knows that our biggest concern is them,” Piazza said. “Our second priority is a great show.”

The next No Shame show, dubbed “Spooky No Shame” for Halloween, is slated for Oct. 30. Along with student performances, the show will feature a costume contest that invites viewers to vote for their favorite student-submitted costume.



“Mareadas en la marea,” co-curated by Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Palmeiro, is dedicated to South American grassroots movements. Photo by Enza Marcy



“As Everybody” marks the first U.S. exhibition from Argentinian artist Fernanda Laguna. Photo by Enza Marcy

ICA exhibit showcases Argentinian artist’s decade

IMAN MEKONEN
Spectrum Editor

KOFI MFRAMA
Contributing Writer

Punctured paintings with cutouts of various shapes and sizes are a notable feature in the paintings of Argentinian artist Fernanda Laguna. She accents her work with cotton balls, seashells and other items with emotional connections.

Laguna, who gained prominence as a literary figure in South America, made her U.S. debut on Saturday at the Institute for Contemporary Art in “As Everybody.” The exhibit showcases the last 10 years of Laguna’s work.

“It all started in art school when I decided to be an artist — because I wanted to be a hippie,” Laguna said during a virtual event on Saturday. “I wanted to change, I came from a Catholic background and I wanted to become something else, and I wanted to do it through art.”

In paintings like “Not At All,” Laguna lets her humor and personality take flight through unconventional artistic choices.

The artist uses abstract shapes throughout the exhibit, as well as seashells, clothing and frames made of wicker, a common furniture material in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Fernanda Laguna’s “Lagrimas” (2019) is an acrylic and collage on canvas and wicker. Image courtesy of Galería Nora Fisch

“Things that we think of as high value and low value just get all mixed up together and you sort of lose sight of ... traditional views of value,” said Dominic Willsdon, curator and ICA director said. “Museums are,

in a way, devices for saying that something is more valuable than something else.”

Willsdon, who met Laguna for the first time in 2013, said it’s important to look at how artists are advancing social agendas and dealing with contemporary representation.

On the wall between some paintings, lines from Laguna’s poem, “Sad,” are written in cursive. ICA Lead Preparator Andy Clifford mimicked the cursive print that accompanied some of the paintings.

“My sweet child you come flying in towards the light,” one line reads. “I Fall on this country and I try to see you ... often.”

Due to COVID-19, Laguna was unable to visit the ICA to install the exhibit. Artists at the ICA used projections of Laguna’s drawings to add final touches, such as hand-drawn cartoon faces, bows and ribbons.

One room of the exhibit is dedicated to “living memorabilia” of South American grassroots organizations, including Ni Una Menos, a fourth-wave feminist movement that started in Argentina. Laguna has been a founding member of the movement since its formation in 2015 and said its work in sex-based hate crimes and other women’s rights issues is integral to her art.

“As activists, they chose to make a collection of the visual and material culture of the movement,” Willsdon said. “This is a sample of that collection of stuff that they’ve been putting together for a few years to tell the story of this movement.”

The installation is titled “Mareadas en la marea,” which translates to “high on the tide.” The selection was co-curated by Laguna and Cecilia Palmeiro, a Latin American studies and gender theory professor at New York University.

A long banner hangs on one of the walls, containing drawings of women and feminist chants such as “Machismo = Fachismo.” The rest of the room is scattered with posters, paintings of diverse groups of women and informational flyers for visitors.

Laguna said she enjoys using her creativity to explore the intersection between art and activism.

“I think that it is very important,” she said. “I believe that creativity is like moving hidden strings and can really achieve amazing changes or transformations.”

“As Everybody” will be on display at the Institute for Contemporary Art until Jan. 10.



This year’s RVA Fall Fashion Week ended Sunday with Evolve boutique’s “Beauty Has No Limits” fashion show at the James River Cellar Winery. Photo by Alessandro Latour

RVA Fashion Week brings inclusivity, mental health to multimodal events

GRACE MCOMBER
Contributing Writer

Only a few cameras flashed as models strutted down a makeshift runway wearing tuxedos, wedding dresses and glamorous evening gowns inside 707 Fine Clothing on East Broad Street.

This year’s Runway2Life fashion show was almost unrecognizable from past shows that usually fill hundreds of seats in Richmond’s Main Street Station.

The show marked one of many alterations in this year’s RVA Fall Fashion Week, which ended on Sunday. Since 2008, fashion insiders and fans have congregated biannually to Richmond to celebrate the vibrant fashion creatives based in the city.

“We’ve had to develop an entirely new program of events this fall,” RVAFW Director of Media Michael Hostetler said in an email. “We also had to rapidly learn new technology, such as livestreaming, all while giving our audiences a quality experience right from their home.”

This year presented a mixture of in-person and virtual events, including panel discussions on fashion education, runway shows and mental health. The virtual technology developed for this year’s event inspired organizers to explore new ways to engage with audiences in the future.

“We are implementing a ramped up social media program starting in 2021,” Hostetler said. “Along with growing our broadcasting capabilities to help visually amplify all the amazing talents that we have here in Richmond.”

The 12th annual Spring Fashion Week, originally planned for late April, was canceled due to COVID-19. This year’s fall edition of the show was extended to a full week to make up for the canceled events.

Due to social distancing guidelines, there was a limited presence from the media and general public during in-person events. This meant shifting away from the larger events of years past and implementing more sanitation protocols.

On Friday, RVAFW hosted a fashion show with Runway2Life, a nonprofit organization that raises awareness for mental health and suicide prevention. The theme of the virtual show was “In a Dark World, Be the Light,” which urged attendees to reach out to their loved ones or utilize the suicide prevention and mental health hotlines displayed throughout the show.

“Especially right now, with the pandemic, a lot of people are stuck at home and don’t have someone they can talk to,” said



Ashley Jefferson, owner of Very Ashley boutique, speaks at an Oct. 7 event. Photo by Alessandro Latour

Runway2Life co-founder Jackson Scott. “And that’s what we’re here for.”

Without the spotlights, loud runway music and audience engagement, the show lacked the same amount of glamour as past years. Despite this, the mission of the mental health and suicide prevention nonprofit remained.

“Things might not be the same as last year, but the purpose is still the same,” said Runway2Life founding director Alicia Amsler. “And that purpose is to save lives.”

With the dual modalities of the events, maintaining the integrity of the work presented in socially distanced and virtual shows has been a challenge to designers and store owners. This was a major consideration for Emma Manis, owner of Evolve, an online boutique that sells size-inclusive womenswear.

Manis and the boutique’s creative director Amanda Villafana, both VCUarts alumni, decided against showcasing their collection on a virtual platform.

“We’ve been working on this collection for almost a year now,” Manis said. “I couldn’t bring myself to debut a collection we’d spent so much time and money on a computer screen. We had to plan our show in three weeks because of that.”

Manis and Villafana said that despite the anxiety they’ve felt while managing a small business, they believed the pandemic has led to an increase in support for smaller brands and designers.

“Everybody has really started to think about what’s important to them,” Villafana said. “It’s such a difficult time for creatives, and I think people really want to support them.”



Model Tracy Akers wears Evolve on the runway during Sunday’s closing fashion show. Photo by Alessandro Latour

Ashley Jefferson, the owner of contemporary women’s boutique Very Ashley, echoed this optimism and excitement for the future of the fashion industry.

“The fashion industry is full of creatives who are ever evolving in their work and craft,” Jefferson said in an email. “I look forward to watching them and seeing what we, as a collective, come up with.”

Jefferson showcased formal gowns at the fashion week launch event on Monday and Cirque de Couture runway show on Sunday.

“I want people to at least get the chance to see the beauty of the gowns,” Jefferson said. “And maybe find a little hope in the fact that one day soon, we’ll be able to get all dressed up again.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

See something

SAT. 10/17
“A Silent Enemy” screening
In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, filmmaker Chandra Broadnax-Payne will screen her new documentary, “A Silent Enemy.” The film explores domestic violence in the African American community through the stories of survivors and their journeys toward healing. Seating will be socially distanced, and tickets can be purchased at asilentenemy.com.
1:30 - 3:30 p.m., U-Turn Sports Performance Academy, 2101 Maywill St., \$10

Firehouse Theatre showing of “Ann”
The life of Ann Richards, a key figure and politician in the pro-choice and women’s rights movement, will be portrayed in this one-woman show. Other in-person showtimes will be offered at reduced capacity. To register and purchase tickets, visit the Firehouse Theatre’s website. Guests will receive a link to stream the show after ticket confirmation.
7:30 - 9:30 p.m., firehousetheatre.org, \$30 suggested donation

Do something

THURS. 10/15
Qué Pasa Festival
Experience Latin culture on the last day of Hispanic Heritage Month as participants watch local chefs talk about and prepare their famous cuisine. The last installment of this free festival can be accessed through the festival’s website.
Daily videos launch at 10 a.m., quepasafestival.com

TUES. 10/20
Stand Up Paddle Boarding with OAP
Enjoy the waters as VCU Outdoor Adventure Program teaches participants how to balance on and maneuver a paddle board on the James River. All expertise levels are welcomed and gear is provided. Free, weekly sessions are held Tuesdays until Nov. 10. For meeting locations and registration, visit recsports.vcu.edu.
3 - 6 p.m. Location may vary.

Learn something

THURS. 10/15
“What They Don’t Tell You”
Decolonization, Indigenous history and the truths of Christopher Columbus will be the topics of a virtual session hosted by VCU’s Latin sorority Lambda Theta Alpha. The event will feature VCU alumna Vei-Cittalin Bobadilla as a guest speaker. Participants can find the Google Meet link for this free event on the sorority’s Instagram page.
7 p.m., [@ltazetaalpha](https://www.instagram.com/ltazetaalpha) on Instagram

SAT. 10/17
“A Black Union Spy in Richmond: Who Was Mary Jane Richards?”
This free virtual tour will explore the life and mysteries of Civil War figure Mary Jane Richards, a Richmond-born enslaved person who spied on Confederate soldiers. To attend this event, visit the National Park Service’s YouTube page at 10 a.m.
10 a.m., online event

Have suggestions for the events calendar? Contact spectrum@commonwealthtimes.org



Quote of the week
“Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns it all clean.”
— MAYA ANGELOU

VCU isn’t prioritizing student health during pandemic

MONICA ALARCON-NAJARRO
Contributing Writer

Like most American universities, VCU re-opened for the fall semester with thousands of cases still flooding through Virginia. The decision behind the university’s reopening was based solely on money, and as a result, no regard for safety was given.

Student tuition should have been allocated toward accurate COVID-19 tests and mental health resources for students.

VCU took the initiative to test every residential student two weeks prior to move-in using oropharyngeal swab tests, which may have led to false negatives. According to a report by the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Oxford, these swabs detected COVID-19 less frequently than nasopharyngeal swabs, which are administered through the nose.

According to the report, “oropharyngeal swabs detected the COVID-19 virus less frequently than nasopharyngeal swabs and should not be used in place of nasopharyngeal swabs, particularly from day 8+ of symptom onset.”

Asymptomatic students could receive prevalence testing via throat swab for free after filling out a survey, according to a university release. However, nasal swabs appear to be more accurate. If VCU prioritized its students’ safety, it would have provided better testing under professional supervision.

Students with COVID-19 symptoms are given a free test and referred to University Student Health Services. But testing is not guaranteed for those who are asymptomatic — even if they believe they were exposed to the virus.

With students back on campus and money coming in, VCU should’ve at least invested more into accurate testing and guaranteeing that all students have access.

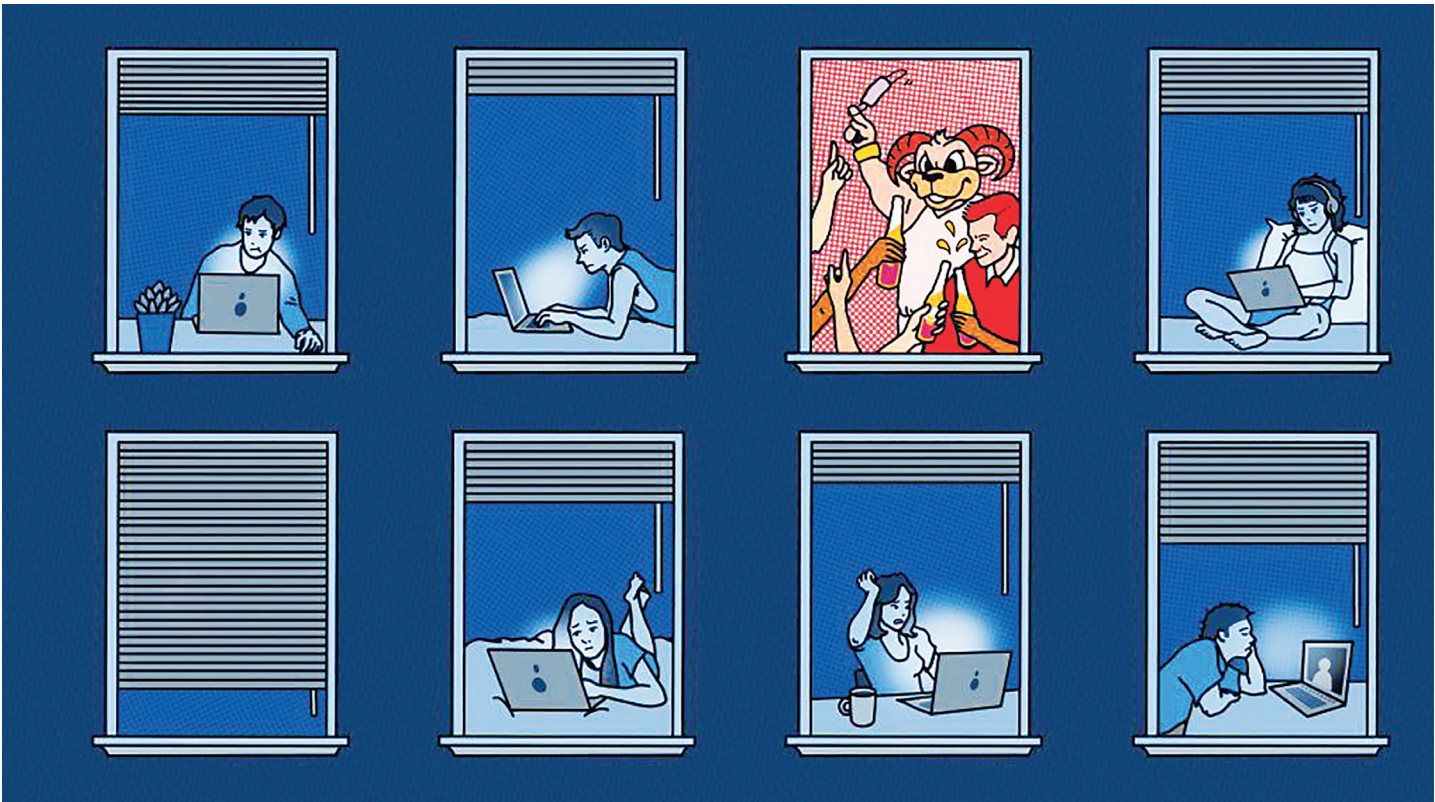


Illustration by Erin Jhi

VCU sends “mandatory” daily health surveys that ask if the student or faculty have had any COVID-19 symptoms, but the university only tracks if students respond to the question — not the response itself.

“Please note that your responses are not stored in this system or accessible to others,” the survey states. “We will only track whether or not you have responded.”

Although it is labeled as “mandatory,” I know many students who have not been filling it out and have not received repercussions if it isn’t completed.

Above all, VCU has barely touched upon the mental health aspect of what this pandemic has caused. The TelegRAM

occasionally features events that are focused on mental health, but only two — “Black Mental Health Matters: The Black Experience Unplugged” and “Mental Health During Periods of Uncertainty” — have been advertised since the semester started.

VCU should not only focus on the physical health of students but also provide extensive mental health resources. Mental health surveys could help the university gauge how students are doing and list professionals that students can contact.

It’s not as though VCU isn’t capable of following recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Earlier this month, the university decided to

cancel all study abroad programs until summer 2021. The decision was supported by CDC guidance. So, I know the university is more than capable of putting its students’ well-being first.

Our safety — as VCU students — depends on how VCU faces the pandemic.

So far, we seem to be unprioritized. VCU should provide more accurate tests throughout campus, take the daily health surveys seriously and invest more in mental health resources for students. Due to the inherently greedy nature of the institution, I am skeptical that VCU will protect my physical and mental health before it protects the money.

Tea Time with Tagwa
Islam is not a for-profit aesthetic

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

Tea timers, the practices of religion are sacred. They are meant to be private and held with the utmost respect. Yet, modern entertainment culture exploits religion — specifically Islam — for profit.

I can’t count the number of films and television series that take place in some Middle Eastern nation, all opening up with the Islamic prayer call looped over some scenic desert view.

Music producers utilize prayer calls, Quran verses, Hadith and other sacred Islamic recitations as ad libs and samples on their songs.

Most recently, Rihanna received extensive backlash for using a song that featured Hadith in her Savage X Fenty fashion show.

Hadith, a collection of traditions of the Islamic prophet Muhammed, is one of the Muslim community’s most valued texts. Second to the Quran, Hadith hold an abundance of knowledge and teachings. We live by the words of the Quran and Hadith.

Therefore, watching an artist whom I adore and admire act with such carelessness was disappointing. The pop star issued an apology and admitted it was a major oversight on her end.

While the apology was appreciated, Rihanna is not the first — nor the last — celebrity or big-name icon to exploit Islamic culture.

Muslims are consistently viewed as strict, unwavering extremists. We are constantly on the defense. When things like this happen, we find ourselves staying quiet in hopes that we won’t upset the rest of the world. We always have to redirect or suppress our anger because we already have two strikes against us on everything.

For a community that is viewed as violent and terroristic, people sure do love appropriating our religion and culture.

My problem isn’t solely with Rihanna, it falls on the Black community as well. As I went to Twitter to see the reaction of both my Mulism and my Black communities, I was in awe. Many Black people were insinuating that Muslims were overreacting.

Listen, I’m not saying what Rihanna did is the end of the world. Quite

frankly, I wasn’t angry at the situation. Disappointed? Sure. But I could have gotten over it quickly.

As a Black Muslim, I am piqued at the constant neglect the Black community has for the Muslim people. Religion and race are not mutually exclusive. I can be both Black and Muslim. And I am.

So, to say that my feelings or the feelings of my people are invalid triggers irritation and resentment.

The idea of marginalizing an already marginalized group of people has always baffled me. As a Black American, I have dealt with the unwavering trauma that being Black in America carries. Furthermore, as a Muslim American, I have also stomachached the disgusting and vile stereotypes thrown at Muslims.

My race and religion are out of my control. However, that does not mean I am not proud to be either and both. I would not trade my Islamic beliefs or my Black culture for anything in the world. All I yearn for is a simple sense of understanding from both communities.

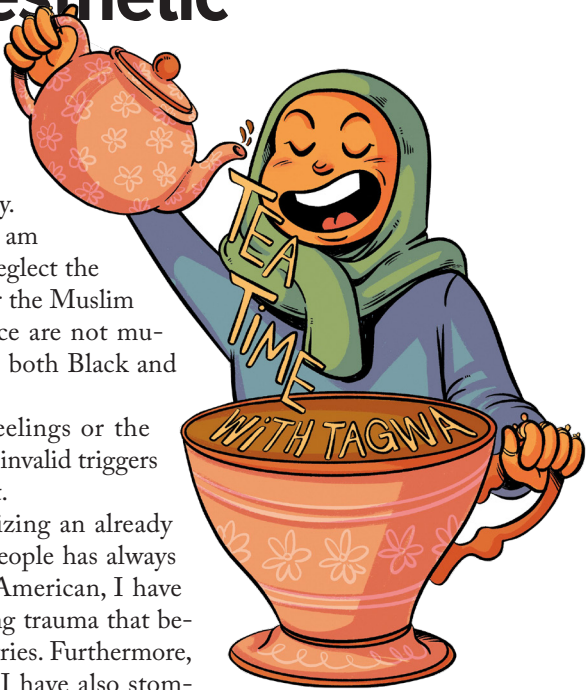


Illustration by Karly Andersen

Rihanna’s use of Hadith was not the exclusive problem. She did not fully comprehend the gravity and essence those words held. The biggest issue laid in the reaction of the Black American homebase as Muslim Americans voiced their indignation. And that’s the tea.

CT Comics

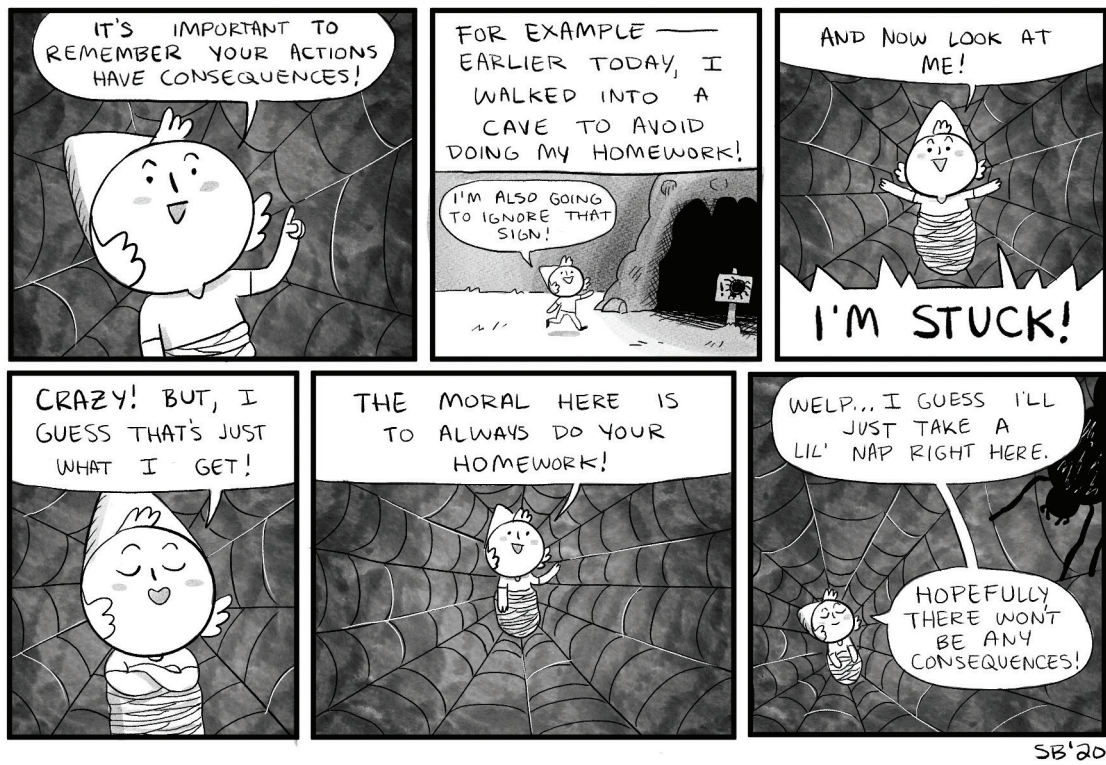
Virtual Background by Carleigh Ross



Soup Time by Ren Newport



Consequences by Sarah Brady



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CT

Puzzles

Los Angeles Times

Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Nichols Lewis

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They often offer free Wi-Fi

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Julie's "East of Eden" role

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YOUR AD HERE

Contact Dominique Lee @ leeds3@vcu.edu

Yes, But Is It Art? by John Lampkin

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Sudoku

By The Mephram Group

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

Complete the grid so each row, column, and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk

	2						6	9
					8	1		
				4	2			5
					7			
	6		9		4	3	2	
				6				
6				9	3			
		9	2		1	4		
5	1						9	

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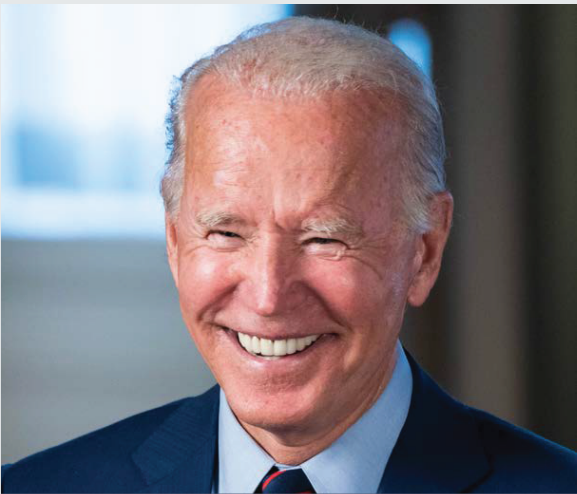
EARLY VOTING
YOU CAN VOTE EARLY IN-PERSON
FROM **SEPTEMBER 18 TO
OCTOBER 31.**
Early voting is a great way to cast
your ballot. **Go to [iwillvote.com/VA](https://www.iwillvote.com/VA)**
for early voting locations.



VOTE BY MAIL
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BALLOT **BY OCTOBER 23.**
Voting by mail is easy and
convenient. Request your ballot
today at **[iwillvote.com/VA](https://www.iwillvote.com/VA).**



ELECTION DAY
**ELECTION DAY IS TUESDAY,
NOVEMBER 3.**
POLLS ARE OPEN 6:00 AM
TO 7:00 PM.
Find your voting location and learn
about acceptable forms of ID by:
• visiting **[iwillvote.com/VA](https://www.iwillvote.com/VA)**
• calling **844-4VA-VOTE**
• texting **"voteVA"** to 24365



Joe Biden
FOR President



Mark Warner
FOR U.S. Senate



Donald McEachin
FOR Congress

- Working with public health experts to defeat COVID-19
- Expanding access to healthcare and lowering prescription drug costs
- Protecting Social Security and Medicare
- Rebuilding our economy and creating jobs here in Virginia