



Freshman guard Ace Baldwin attempts a layup against Richmond on Feb. 17. Photo by Megan Lee

Baldwin’s family, father pass down constant motivation

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

ACE BALDWIN RUSHED OFF THE court in tears after St. Frances Academy lost to Baltimore Polytechnic Institute by one point in January of 2019. It was one of the rare moments his mother, Nina Baldwin, had seen her son show emotion on the court.

His father, Adrian Baldwin Sr., had been diagnosed with leukemia that day, so he missed the game and was at the hospital. The older Baldwin rarely missed a game.

“He actually wanted to win because he knew how my husband wanted us to win so bad, and my husband wasn’t there,” Nina Baldwin said. “We just got hit with ‘he has leukemia,’ and him not really knowing what leukemia is.”

In July 2019, Adrian Baldwin Sr. died from leukemia. The loss made Ace Baldwin second-guess playing basketball again without his father in the stands.

“It was a really hard decision on if I really wanted to play, but I just used that as motivation,” Ace Baldwin said. “If I stopped, it would have just let everybody down. I just played and used that as motivation.”

“It was a really hard decision on if I really wanted to play, but I just used that as motivation.”

Ace Baldwin,
freshman guard

For Ace Baldwin, his father was more than just a parent. On the court, he described him

as a coach. Off the court, he was someone Ace Baldwin could talk to about anything.

Nina Baldwin equated their relationship as being good buddies more so than a parental relationship.

“He was my best friend, that’s what he was like to me,” Ace Baldwin said. “I looked at him like ‘that’s my everything,’ for real.”

Nina Baldwin said Ace Baldwin’s senior year in 2019 was a difficult one. It was the first time he played basketball since his father died.

“It was so challenging. Ace was just like on an off button,” Nina Baldwin said. “The only time that he actually would show a little more of a happy emotion was when it was time to play basketball.”

“Basketball, that’s what makes me happy”

See ACE BALDWIN on page 4

VCU implements changes to popular student dining locations



Shafer Dining Court, located next to the compass, houses Market 810, Shake Smart and Einstein Bros. Bagels. Photo by Kaitlyn Fulmore

SAHARA SRIRAMAN
Contributing Writer

VCU has made major modifications to dining locations on campus as of Feb. 15, including closures and hour changes, in order to adapt to changing circumstances from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

VCUDine hosted a student roundtable on Feb. 4 in order to get students’ opinions on specific dining plan changes. After the event, VCU sent a survey to students with dining plans asking them to select their top dining locations.

“Based on the responses, we modified our hours and locations to better accommodate their needs,” said VCU Business Services spokesperson Anna Obermiller in an email.

Only about 600 people responded to the survey out of roughly 3,050 students who have a university dining plan, Obermiller said. Student dining locations that are still open were based on the results of the student survey and the student population.

Some of the altered dining hours and locations, according to VCU Dining Services, include:

- Bleecker St. will open inside Market 810 on March 1
- Market 810 is open Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., and on the weekends from 10:30 a.m. until 6 p.m.
- Chili’s is open every day at 2 p.m. for take-out and pick-up
- AVO Kitchen is open every day from 1-7 p.m.
- Starbucks at Cabell Library closes at 4 p.m. every day
- Au Bon Pain is closed on weekends
- Pizza Hut is closed
- Laurel & Grace Place is under construction

All open dining locations on campus accept student swipes.

Bleecker St. was previously located in the School of Business’ Snead Hall, but since classes switch to a virtual modality, the university decided to make it available seven days a week in a more central location.

See DINING PLAN on page 3

Williams, Baldwin lead men’s basketball over Saint Louis



Freshman guard Ace Baldwin attempts a layup against Saint Louis on Feb. 23. Photo by Enza Marcy.

“I thought Ace — this was his best game in a VCU uniform. Just quarterbacking his team and being an extension of the coaching staff.”

Mike Rhoades, basketball coach

See story on page 4

Virginia rolls out centralized vaccine registration system

ANYA SCZERZENIE
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ANNA CHEN
Contributing Writer

THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH introduced a new, centralized vaccine registration system on its website last week.

Previously, Virginians who wanted to get vaccinated could sign up on the website of their own health districts. The new, statewide system uses a common link for everyone across the commonwealth who wants to get vaccinated.

The opening of the vaccination website was marked by technical issues. In a press briefing on Friday, Director of Richmond and Henrico Health Departments Dr. Danny Avula said the issues should be fixed now.

“There were a couple of issues that led to people not being able to find themselves in the system,” Avula said during the briefing.

According to a Virginia Department of Health press release, those who have already registered through their health district’s website will be automatically migrated to the new system, and their registration will not be affected.

For Virginians who do not want to register online, a hotline was released along with the new website, according to the press release. The hotline number is 1-877-829-4682 or 1-800-VAX-INVA. The hotline is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.

Fairfax County, Virginia, the commonwealth’s largest county by population, chose not to be a part of the centralized

system. Board of Supervisors chairman Jeffrey McKay said the county had already invested many resources into its own system, which has worked well so far. Residents of Fairfax County still have to sign up for vaccination on the Fairfax County Health Department website.

“At this point, I am glad we can maintain our system that residents are familiar with to cut down on confusion,” McKay stated in a release. “We will continue to have conversations with the state about registration as the vaccine process rolls out.”

According to VDH, 13.3% of the commonwealth’s population has been vaccinated with at least one dose as of Feb. 23. Phase 1b of vaccination, which prioritizes people 65 and older and those with underlying health conditions, is ongoing.

“Demand for the COVID-19 vaccine currently far outstrips supply, and it is expected to take several months to reach all who want to be vaccinated,” according to the release.

Issues like duplicate entries and case-sensitivity requirements for email addresses led to some of the entries being deleted. Avula encouraged people whose entries were deleted to preregister again on the website.

“When we find yours from an earlier timestamp, we’ll then merge those records so that you won’t lose your place in line,” Avula said.

Dr. Alison Huffstetler, assistant professor in the department of family medicine said in an email that COVID-19 causes a wide range of illness.

“Individuals over the age of 65 with uncontrolled medical problems like diabetes often have severe cases resulting

in hospitalization,” Huffstetler said in an email. “These individuals are also more likely to die due to COVID.”

Although VCU Health is working with state and local health departments to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine per VDH guidelines, the university is prioritizing vaccinations to those who are 75 and older. Following this group, the vaccine will then continue to be offered to front-line medical workers who are in direct contact with patients who have tested positive for COVID-19.

VCU Health is practicing a “zero waste” policy for the COVID-19 vaccines. This means if a dose is about to expire because of a missed appointment, that vaccine will be offered to another eligible patient because of the short shelf lives of the vaccine upon being defrosted.

The vaccines are packed and delivered in dry ice to maintain a subzero temperature. The Pfizer vaccine must be stored at -112 degrees Fahrenheit with a shelf life of up to six months.

There is a nationwide shortage of vaccines over the past several weeks, according to a VCU Health release.

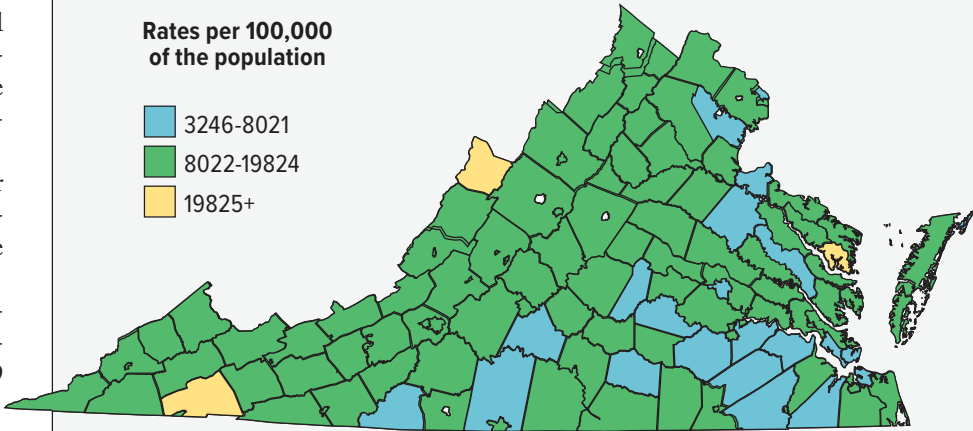
VCU Health is not receiving deliveries of the first vaccine dose but is still receiving shipments of the second vaccine dose. Anyone who has already received their first dose through VCU Health is recommended to get their second dose.

As soon as VCU Health starts receiving the first vaccine dose again, it will resume vaccinating eligible patients following VDH guidelines, according to VCU Health.

Vaccine doses administered in Virginia

Rates per 100,000 of the population

- 3246-8021
- 8022-19824
- 19825+



Infographic by Gabrielle Wood
Source: Virginia Department of Health

Local organizations serve homeless Richmonders facing cold weather

SAGAL AHMED
Contributing Writer

During Richmond’s recent ice storms, a local medic collective traveled around the city providing resources for its most vulnerable residents.

“We have done what the city has not been able to do,” said River City Medic Collective representative Vanessa Bolin. “My question is why is that? We as just individuals have done these things.”

River City Medic Collective is a Richmond organization that has been actively helping those who are homeless. The group includes doctors, paramedics, EMTs and nurses. All members must have some sort of medical training, Bolin said.

The organization has spent \$11,000 of donations from the Richmond community to provide food and aid to get through the cold weather, Bolin said. More than half of the money went to placing homeless people into hotel rooms.

A team from the River City Medic Collective looked for those who were showing signs of hypothermia during the ice storms over the past two weeks. The team connected those people to the Richmond Community Outreach Initiative, a group that distributes resources and aid to those who are homeless.

The organization also pays for medications that are needed and connects those

who need medical attention to doctors through an appointment or a phone consultation, Bolin said.

“We check people’s blood pressure, listen to their lungs, dress any wounds and just talk to them,” Bolin said.

The organization connects those who are homeless with mental health and addiction treatment resources if they are willing, Bolin said. They have been able to help those who use nebulizers — a treatment for asthma that requires electricity hookups — find businesses that allow people to use their power outlets.

The group covered the cost for the Richmond Indigenous Society to provide multiple families with wood during power outages caused by the storm.

The River City Medic Collective is different from government-affiliated social programs because it is a “grassroots organization,” Bolin said. The group seeks to connect people with charitable services, such as the Blessing Warriors RVA, Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, Food Not Bombs, Richmond Community Outreach Initiative and Community Roots Garden.

“It’s not lip service because I’ve heard this city say they have a homeless team,” Bolin said. “We have not once seen them.”

Bolin said the group has done what the city hasn’t been able to do with millions of dollars as the group has made phone calls to the mayor’s office, Homeward and the

Safety Net Shelter to advocate for those who are homeless in Richmond.

“The city has got to do better. It has epically failed the most vulnerable population in this city,” Bolin said.

Homeward is another group working to help the homeless in Richmond. It is an operational support organization for the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care, a group of programs, agencies and partners that is mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The organization has expanded operational hours to stay open for 24 hours to help provide shelter for those who are homeless during the cold weather, Homeward’s Director of Development Faith Kallman said.

Homeward oversees all HUD allocations, which include federal and state allocations that originate from the department’s funds, which are then allocated based on the community.

Homeward is currently working with its partners on operating the safety net shelter, which has taken the place of the cold weather shelter that Richmond had run before. The cold weather shelter previously

provided shelter at Annie Giles Community Resource Center. The cold weather shelter was closed to open the safety net shelter, according to an article from the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Homeward plans to address an end to homelessness through four areas: rapid rehousing, emergency shelter, coordinated entry and permanent supportive housing.

“The goal is to get people into permanent housing,” Kallman said. “So, the emergency shelters are really about trying to get people into a system and seeking support around them to get them into permanent housing.”



Students walk around Monroe Park Campus on a snowy day in Richmond. Photo by Enza Marcy

‘There is no context’: General Assembly votes to remove Byrd statue

ZACHARY KLOSKO
Capital News Service

The Virginia General Assembly has voted to remove the statue of former U.S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd Sr. from Capitol Square, the area around the Virginia State Capitol.

House Bill 2208, introduced by Del. Jay Jones, D-Norfolk, instructs the Department of General Services to place the statue in storage until the General Assembly chooses its final location. The bill passed the House in late January on a 63-34 vote, while the Senate approved the measure Tuesday on a 36-3 vote.

Byrd served as state governor from 1926 to 1930 and U.S. senator from 1933 to 1965. His massive resistance campaign pushed for Southern states to reject the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, cutting off state funding and closing schools that tried to integrate.

Jones called the statue a reminder of the institutional racism in Virginia during the bill’s first committee hearings. Sen. Jennifer McClellan, D-Richmond, echoed Jones’ sentiments during the bill’s final reading on the Senate floor.

“When I was an intern working for the first African American governor and walked past that statue every day, I knew I was his worst nightmare,” McClellan said. “I feel it every time I walk past it.”

McClellan spoke of the pain African Americans have endured in Virginia due to Byrd’s disenfranchisement of Black

voters and the dehumanization that Byrd cast on them.

“There is no context that could be placed on a statue on Capitol Square, the ultimate public park with public art, that could erase the pain that Harry Byrd and his legacy invokes for African American Virginians,” McClellan said.

Sen. Jill Vogel, R-Warrenton, gave a speech on the Senate floor portraying Byrd as a humble, industrious man who worked in the apple business, saved a local newspaper and improved Virginia’s highway infrastructure. Vogel described Byrd’s “massive resistance” campaign against school integration in the 1950s as a stain on an otherwise remarkable career.

“That is a great stain on his career and a great embarrassment,” Vogel said. “But he was a man of a certain time in a certain era.”

Vogel asked the senators to “look at the whole man and consider that we are each a sum of all our parts, the good and the bad.”

Sen. Richard Saslaw, D-Springfield, pushed back on Vogel’s request, saying probably 100,000 students if not more were kept out of school for years due to Byrd’s push for segregation.

“I just don’t see how we can overlook the fact that all of these children ... were kept out of school for four years,” Saslaw said. “I think that we should not be honoring people to that degree in Capitol Square.”

Del. Wendell Walker, R-Lynchburg, introduced a bill last year to remove Byrd’s statue. Walker later pushed for his bill to be removed.

Walker voted against HB 2208 during its final reading in the House on Jan. 27.

The push to remove statues of Confederate leaders accel-

erated after protests began following the death of George Floyd last May. Floyd died in the custody of a Minneapolis police officer who has been charged with second-degree murder.

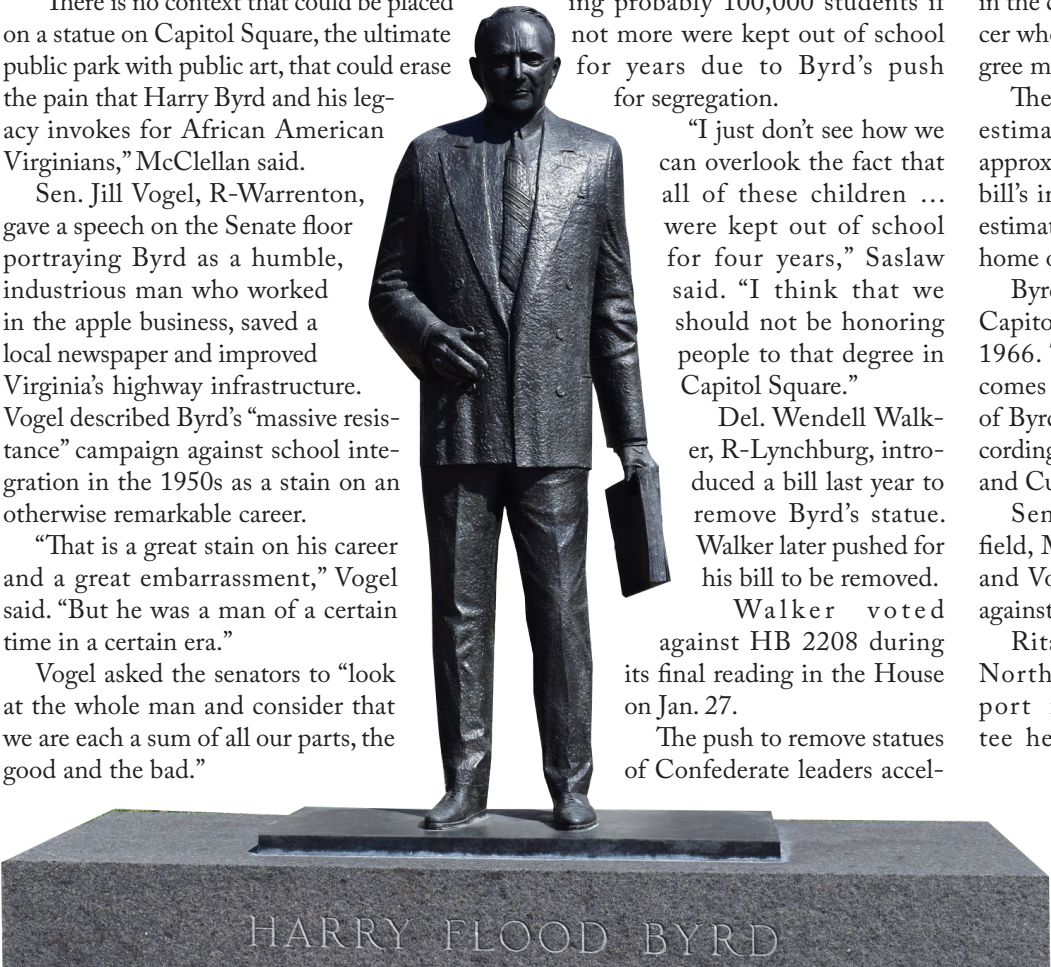
The Department of General Services estimated the statue’s removal will cost approximately \$250,000, according to the bill’s impact statement. Storage costs are estimated at \$7,000 per year until the final home of the statue is determined.

Byrd’s statue was erected in Richmond’s Capitol Square in 1976 after his death in 1966. The bipartisan vote to remove it comes on the eve of the 65th anniversary of Byrd’s massive resistance campaign, according to the Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

Sens. Amanda Chase, R-Chesterfield, Mark Obenshain, R-Harrisonburg, and Vogel were the only senators to vote against the bill.

Rita Davis, council to Gov. Ralph Northam, spoke of Northam’s support for the bill during committee hearings. Northam is expected to sign the bill.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.



Harry Flood Byrd served as Virginia’s governor from 1926 to 1930 and as a U.S. senator from 1933 to 1965. Photo courtesy of Capital News Service

DINING PLAN

VCU implements changes to popular student dining locations

Continued from front page

The university has allocated more resources for dining locations that students ranked higher, including Market 810, Obermiller said. Below are the top dining locations for the spring semester.

- Market 810 averages 400 transactions per day
- AVO Kitchen averages 321 transactions
- Au Bon Pain averages 183 transactions
- Panda Express averages 478 transactions
- Cabell Library Starbucks averages 438 transactions

“We knew Bleecker St. would be a big hit with our students and have since ex-

pressed excitement about its reopening,” Obermiller said.

She said students also pushed for Market 810 to be open on weekends.

Obermiller said since these modifications have only been implemented for a couple of weeks, the university is still monitoring the dining locations’ success through student feedback.

Freshman fashion merchandise student Dixie Delcid said she’s living on campus in Gladding Residence Center and is required to use a dining plan. Delcid said it’s discouraging that VCU is choosing to make changes at a time when many students are inconvenienced.

“It’s a little disappointing that there aren’t as many options that we have,” Delcid said.

Delcid said she tends to eat at places on campus like AVO Kitchen and Chick-fil-A but not at Market 810 or Panda Express

because they’re at a farther distance from her dorm.

Delcid said many on-campus restaurants have changed their hours, making them less accessible for some students.

“We’re still paying regular tuition to be here, but we’re lacking actual resources,” Delcid said.

Sophomore environmental studies and political science major Amrutha Obbineni said she doesn’t like the new dining changes. After mentoring four freshman students through the Emerging Leaders Program, she’s seen how difficult it is for them to find places to eat on campus.

Obbineni said as a freshman last year, she was required to have a meal plan. She said at the end of each semester, a lot of swipes were left over. This year, she didn’t purchase a meal plan and has been able to cook her own food.

Students living in Brandt, Johnson and Rhoads halls, as well as GRC and Gladding Residence Center III, are required to have dining plans, according to VCUDine. The default dining plan is 200 swipes and 300 dining dollars for students in those dorms.

Obbineni said she doesn’t appreciate how the university is charging the same amount for meal plans this year, given the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of multiple locations on campus.

“Especially for people with dietary restrictions,” Obbineni said. “It’s crazy that they don’t have as many options this year.”



From left, freshmen Chelsea Crawford, Sophie Bower and Abby McConnell talk outside Shafer Dining Court. Photo by Kaitlyn Fulmore

VCU dining plan updates

NEW HOURS

MARKET 810

- **Mon-Fri:** 9 a.m.-8 p.m.
- **Sat-Sun:** 10:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

CHILF'S

- Open every day at 2 p.m. for take-out and pick-up

AVO KITCHEN

- Open every day from 1-7 p.m.

STARBUCKS

- Will close at 4 p.m. every day

CLOSED

AU BON PAIN

- Closed Sat-Sun

PIZZA HUT

- Permanently closed

OTHER

LAUREL & GRACE PLACE

- Under construction

BLEEKER ST.

- Will open inside Market 810

Information compiled by Sahara Sriraman
Infographic by Gabrielle Wood

CORRECTIONS

A story in last week’s issue incorrectly indicated that Lorna Pickney was the first editor-in-chief of The Vine. Craig Belcher was the publication’s first editor-in-chief.

A story incorrectly quoted Laura Rossacher saying VCU “wanted to help Tucker.” The university stated it “wanted to honor Mr. Tucker.”

A photo caption incorrectly identified Chip Jones as a former VCU professor.

An article in last week’s issue indicated restoration efforts at the Evergreen Cemetery began in 2019. Enrichmond began restoring the site in 2017, according to its website.

The CT strives for accuracy. If you believe we have made an error, please contact Andrew Ringle at ringlea@commonwealthtimes.org.



Freshman guard Ace Baldwin attempts a layup against Saint Louis on Feb. 23. Photo by Enza Marcy.

Williams, Baldwin lead men's basketball over Saint Louis

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

AS HE WAS DRIVING TO THE BASKETBALL Development Center on Tuesday, coach Mike Rhoades felt his team was going to “figure it out” against Saint Louis later that night, he said. His gut feeling was confirmed as men’s basketball won the match 67-65.

The team was short of the normal selection of guards heading into the contest at the Stuart C. Siegel Center, losing leading scorer sophomore Bones Hyland to a foot sprain and junior KeShawn Curry for personal reasons, for the night.

They also were coming off a loss to George Mason on Saturday that ended their six-game winning streak.

“I was really excited today going through the day seeing how our guys are going to play,” Rhoades said. “I just felt really good and excited to watch these guys step up and try to beat Saint Louis.”

The team played all four of its freshmen in the game. Guard Ace Baldwin played all 40 minutes, and forward Jamir Watkins earned his first career start. Forward Michael Brown-Jones and guard Josh Banks each played 18 or more minutes.

“I thought Ace — this was his best game in a VCU uniform,” Rhoades said. “Just quarterbacking his team and being an extension of the coaching staff.”

Baldwin finished with 15 points and seven assists.

Junior forward Vince Williams said the win was earned partly by the younger players matching the level of an older team.

“Our young guys really played up to their ability,” Williams said.

The Rams jumped on an early 6-0 run to give the black and gold a 5-point lead. Sophomore forward Hason Ward and senior forward Levi Stockard did most of the damage inside, combining for 4 points on back-to-back baskets in the paint.

Saint Louis only made one of its first five shots from the field to start; a 3-pointer. The Billikens turned the ball over three times in the first four minutes.

The Billikens answered the Ram run with a 6-0 run of their own to take a

single-point lead. Watkins halted the run with a 3-pointer from the left wing.

VCU held Saint Louis without a point for two minutes midway through the first half and took advantage of it. The black and gold’s 5-0 run was powered by a Williams 3-pointer.

The Rams’ defense stood tall to close the first half, holding the Billikens without a point for just under the final three minutes. In the final five minutes of the period, Saint Louis only managed four field goal attempts, making two.

The black and gold started the second half similar to the first, going on a 6-0 run. Watkins made three free throws, and Williams knocked down a 3-pointer from the left wing.

Saint Louis responded to the VCU run with a 13-0 burst to take a 5-point lead. The Rams were held scoreless for three and a half minutes during the point outburst. Williams ended the run with a 3-pointer from the left wing.

“He was very confident today when he was shooting the ball,” Rhoades said of Williams. “Even when he missed, it looked really good.”

Williams finished the night with a team-high 16 points, including four 3-pointers.

For most of the second half, the teams exchanged baskets; when it seemed like either team had something going, the other was able to limit the damage and level the game.

“We didn’t learn anything, we just stayed together,” Williams said of the team’s performance. “If we stay together, honestly, nobody can compete with us.”

Ward blocked Saint Louis’ Jordan Goodwin’s 3-point attempt with under 30 seconds to play. The ball found its way to Baldwin, who drove to basket and was fouled with less than five seconds to go. Baldwin made both free throws to take the lead

“I’m not going to lie,” Baldwin said, “I feel as though those moments are really regular and I’m really built for this moment.”

The Rams close the regular season at Davidson on Saturday at 2 p.m. The game will be televised on ESPN.

ACE BALDWIN

Baldwin draws inspiration from family

Continued from front page

During his high school career, nothing could keep Ace Baldwin off the court — not even a cast for a sprained wrist.

He asked his mom if he could cut it off to play in a big game. She said no. Then, he asked his father, and he approved. So, he cut it off and played.

“It was his word over hers, so I just ended up cutting my cast off and I ended up playing,” Ace Baldwin said. “I felt as though I wasn’t injured — I was hurt. ... If you’re injured, you can’t play. If you’re hurt, you can play.”

Ace Baldwin was a standout point guard at St. Frances, amassing more than 1,000 points during his career and earning a retired jersey. At the time of his father’s death, basketball is what kept his spirits up.

“Basketball, that’s what makes me happy,” Ace Baldwin said. “When it first happened, I didn’t really want to do it. My players were just like my brothers. They just wanted me to stay around and keep me laughing because they knew the situation.”

That didn’t change when Ace Baldwin arrived in Richmond. He “started to come out of a dark place” when he joined the Rams and reunited with sophomore guard Bones Hyland, Nina Baldwin said.

Nina Baldwin said the support Hyland and the VCU coaching staff give to her son can’t fill the void of his father, but it’s helped.

“He was missing part of his heart, which was his father,” Nina Baldwin said. “So when he got there, they showed him the love that he felt that he was getting from his dad every day.”

Ace Baldwin has been a mainstay this season in the starting lineup as a freshman. He’s averaged 28.4 minutes and 4.5 assists for the black and gold this season.

Coach Mike Rhoades said Ace Baldwin’s impact has been felt throughout the season.

“When you’re a college point guard and you play college basketball, the No. 1 thing is winning,” Rhoades said. “For a freshman and the way he’s played this year, we wouldn’t be where we are at if it wasn’t for him.”

The Rams strung together a six-game winning streak in January and February.

Ace Baldwin hasn’t scored more than 12 points in a game this season and has had two games without a point. That doesn’t matter to him — winning does, he said.

“To me, I don’t really care about points,” Ace Baldwin said. “I really just care about winning. That’s my main goal, I hate losing.”

When Ace Baldwin looks up into the Stuart C. Siegel Center stands and finds his family, it’s a proud moment, he said. Seeing them support him at games gives him more motivation to play.

“I know he would have come to college and still watch me play,” Ace Baldwin said of his father. “It was hard. I just had to fight through it and just get where I’m at now.”



Ace Baldwin attempts a layup against Richmond on Feb. 17. Photo by Megan Lee

Ace Baldwin Season Averages

| | | | |
|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| Minutes: | Points: | Assists: | Steals: |
| 28.4 | 6.6 | 4.5 | 2.2 |

Infographic by Ni Sang
Information compiled by Noah Fleischman

Take No. 2: Lacrosse seniors return with extra eligibility for final season

YANNI KOUIROUKIDIS
Contributing Writer

Isabella Evans-Riester remembers getting the news a year ago that her senior season with VCU's women's lacrosse team was going to be cut short due to COVID-19. The graduate student didn't know what the future held.

"As a senior, you get to your last few games, and you're trying to prepare yourself for the end," Evans-Riester, who plays the attack position, said. "It was like, 'what do I do now?'"

Since a majority of last season was canceled due to COVID-19, the NCAA granted all athletes another year of eligibility this season. Athletes that were seniors last year were able to return for a final year. Underclassmen this year will have the opportunity to add another year of eligibility at the ends of their collegiate careers as well.

This season, four seniors — redshirt midfielder Keriann McTavish, graduate student defender Victoria McCarl, graduate student goalie Gillian Belfiore and Evans-Riester — are taking advantage of getting a second chance to return for a final season.

Before the abrupt halt to the season last year, the team had won three of the seven games played, not losing any games by more than five goals. While at first the standstill had seemed like an extended spring break to the lacrosse players, the team was left with no answers.

"When the NBA season canceled, that's when it felt real," McTavish said. "I just remember being so sad that we didn't have any control of how our season ended."



Redshirt-senior attacker Keriann McTavish runs with the ball against Longwood on Feb. 17. Photo Jay Stonefield

The team made the best of the canceled season last year, as McCarl said they held Zoom meetings as a team on their originally scheduled game days.

"Every single game day at game time we would meet up on a Zoom with our team and check in all around," McCarl said. "Just having that gratitude and having each other's backs I think has really kept us checked in."

Going into her fifth year as the head coach of VCU women's lacrosse, Jen O'Brien was just as shocked and hurt as her players when they heard the news.

"My immediate reaction went to these seniors who had put in so much time,"

O'Brien said. "I needed more time with them. It was definitely emotional."

Since becoming head coach O'Brien has built a program that ended UMass's 61-game conference winning streak in 2018, which has served as a major recruiting point for her.

"We told kids we want them to come here and want to be the first team to beat UMass," O'Brien said. "That kick-started a whole different recruiting and type of kid we were able to get to."

With this group of seniors from last year returning, the team dynamic has remained the same, according to McCarl.

"This is a really special group of girls that we have right now," McCarl said. "The

people we have are so special and are so tuned in. We are all ready and gearing towards the same goal."

Now, that goal leads back to the one thing that all athletes desire — victory.

"Our goal was always to win an A-10 championship," Belfiore said. "That wasn't accomplished last year so having one more opportunity at that is everything I could've wanted."

The team has had a strong start to their season with two victories. The team has had a strong start to their season with two victories — knocking off Old Dominion in their season opener 11-7 on Feb. 12 and following up with a 20-8 win over Longwood in the home opener on Feb. 17.

Belfiore was named A-10 Defensive Player of the Week after her 10-save performance against ODU.

"Lacrosse is something to take your mind off of everything else that's going on in the world," Evans-Riester said. "During our game, I told coach Jen that I felt like COVID wasn't happening but after the 60 minutes it was a snap back to reality."

The Rams take on Radford this Wednesday at Cary Street Field at 4 p.m. The game will be televised on ESPN+.

Field hockey seeks chance for improvement amid atypical schedule

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Senior forward Emily Van Hijfte was waiting for game day for more than a year, training with her teammates. After more than 450 days on Feb. 14, the wait was finally over, and field hockey beat Old Dominion 3-2.

"It was just super exciting to get back on the field," Van Hijfte said. "It makes all of the practices and stuff worth it because that is what we're here for — to play games and compete for VCU."

The team last played on Nov. 3, 2019, beating Maine 2-1. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the season, which is normally played in the fall, to move to the spring.

The first game back was a strong start for field hockey, head coach Stacey Bean said.

"I think that was an important measuring stick, not so much for me, but for the team," Bean said. "They could kind of get a grasp of it and start to address some things."

The black and gold beat Old Dominion in Norfolk, Virginia, after falling behind by one goal in the first 27 minutes. VCU answered with back-to-back goals from Van Hijfte and freshman back Ashlyn Hughes. Senior midfielder Maite Sturm scored the game-winning goal in the 69th minute.

"It was rough in the start, especially," Van Hijfte said. "We were struggling a little bit with finding each other on the field."

The Rams' next game is almost a month after the season opener — they will host Richmond on March 13 to open Atlantic 10 conference play.

"It wasn't by design, but we're looking at it as a positive for us," Bean said.

"Working through some things and address some things that we definitely need to fix up and some things that we can build upon that we did very well."

The team was supposed to play American as well as William and Mary in both home and away matchups, but all four games were canceled prior to the season, creating the nearly monthlong gap between gameplay.

The black and gold's matchups against American were canceled due to the Patriot League not allowing their teams to play nonconference games this season. William and Mary canceled its games with the Rams after the university didn't allow some of its teams to play nonconference games due to "budgetary" challenges, Bean said.

"You gotta roll with it. It's the world we're living in right now," Bean said. "Our kids are taking it pretty much as a positive, and we're happy that we're able to get this game in so early so we do have that time to reassess and build and move on from there."

The roster includes a young bunch this season with only three seniors. Van Hijfte said the break allows for the team to improve certain skills without the pressure of another game looming around the corner.

"It's good for us to kind of re-evaluate what we need to work on," Van Hijfte said. "It gives us enough time to really go over those things in practice. Our coach likes to do small, small drills that then you end up seeing in the big play."

Bean said the Old Dominion game provided an opportunity for the team to study their game film footage in order to work on their skills. She also said the game was the first time the team was able to



Junior goalkeeper Sasha Elliott waits for a shot in a game during the 2019 season. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics



Senior forward Emily Van Hijfte battles for the ball during the 2019 season. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics

work on spacing between players, both on offense and defense.

When the Rams return to the field for A-10 play, they will play the same three opponents — Richmond, Saint Louis and Davidson — twice, once home and once away. It's not a normal schedule, but Bean said it will serve as an opportunity for improvement.

"If you win the first game, then awesome, and you can still get better," Bean said. "Then, it's what can you improve on, what can get better."

The Rams will host Richmond on March 13 at Cary Street Field at 1 p.m.

GAME RESULTS

FEB. 19

MEN’S SOCCER @ VIRGINIA TECH
CANCELED (COVID-19)

VOLLEYBALL vs. DAYTON
POSTPONED (COVID-19)

FEB. 20

WOMEN’S TENNIS vs. DAVIDSON
WON 7-0

BASEBALL @ UNCW
LOST 5-4
Tyler Locklear: 1-4, HR, RBI

WOMEN’S SOCCER vs. EAST CAROLINA
WON 3-1
Anna Bagley: scored first goal of season

MEN’S BASKETBALL vs. GEORGE MASON
LOST 79-76 (OT)
Bones Hyland: 17 points

WOMEN’S BASKETBALL vs. ST. JOSEPH’S
WON 64-49
Taya Robinson: 16 points

FEB. 21

GOLF @ SAVANNAH HARBOR
7TH OF 15 TEAMS
Sachin Kumar: T-3 (-2)

MEN’S TENNIS vs. LONGWOOD
WON 7-0
FIRST MATCH OF DOUBLE HEADER

WOMEN’S TENNIS vs. WILLIAM AND MARY
WON 7-0

BASEBALL @ UNCW
LOST 4-1
Tyler Locklear: 1-3, triple

MEN’S TENNIS vs. LONGWOOD
WON 7-0
SECOND MATCH OF DOUBLE HEADER

BASEBALL @ UNCW
LOST 9-5
Devan Barnett: 2-4, 3 RBI

FEB. 23

VOLLEYBALL @ ELON
WON 3-1
Paula Neciporuka: 14 kills

MEN’S BASKETBALL vs. SAINT LOUIS
WON, 67-65
Vince Williams: 16 points

Bloom gains confidence with new team

JOE DODSON
Staff Writer

Before redshirt-sophomore forward Chloe Bloom ever considered moving to the U.S. from Australia to pursue her dreams of playing college basketball, she was a competitive netball player.

Growing up in Wedderburn, Australia, Bloom was encouraged by her parents to play netball as a way to stay active. The sport consists of two teams trying to get a ball into a hoop. In netball, there is no dribbling or backboard, and players must stay in designated zones.

“My father is a really sporty guy,” Bloom said. “They both really encouraged me to play sports all throughout my life.”

Bloom started playing basketball as a way to stay in shape during offseasons, but she decided to focus more on the sport when she was 13, she said. From the first day she started prioritizing basketball, Bloom was committed to earning a college scholarship.

Bloom quickly took to her new sport and ended her secondary school career regarded as a four-star recruit by Prospect Nation and the No. 19 best player at her position in the 2019 class by ESPN.

Bloom realized her dream of playing college basketball in the U.S. was a reality when she accepted an offer from the University of Oklahoma. She separated from her family for the first time when she left Australia for Norman, Oklahoma.



Redshirt-sophomore Chloe Bloom looks to pass the ball during the 2020-21 season. Photo by Megan Lee

“The transition was a lot for me. I had never really been away from my family before,” Bloom said. “Then I went to live in a whole different country to my family — and we’re very close.”

Bloom redshirted after joining the Sooners in January of 2019. In her redshirt-freshman season, she scored a total of two points and grabbed five rebounds. Bloom said she struggled at first to adjust to the different playing style in the U.S.

“Basketball in Australia is a lot more transition play, and it’s very fast,” Bloom said. “The girls in the states, they’re a lot more physical and athletic.”

After being one of the top international prospects in her class, Bloom had to adjust to a new role on the bench.

“It was a lot to digest when I went to Oklahoma,” Bloom said. “I went from the go-to player on my high school teams to being someone that needs to be on the bench and needs to encourage people that are playing a lot more than me.”

After only making four appearances, Bloom decided she needed to transfer in order to develop on the court.

“I wanted to do more and play more,” Bloom said. “I felt like my pathway to success wasn’t really at the Sooners.”

Bloom returned to Australia at the end of last season and reconnected with her personal development coach from her secondary school years, Nathan Lovett. Lovett works with developing Australian basketball prospects and helps connect them to American colleges.

Lovett is one of O’Boyle’s recruitment contacts, so when Bloom entered the transfer portal he contacted O’Boyle. O’Boyle said when she first watched Bloom’s tape, she was impressed with her ability to set strong screens.

“She is that physical player that is going to do all the little things and the tough things,” O’Boyle said.

Bloom said she felt a connection with O’Boyle that led her to transfer to VCU. The COVID-19 pandemic made the transfer process difficult, as Bloom could only do virtual visits.

“I didn’t really know what I was coming into,” Bloom said. “I couldn’t really have a connection with the team.”

Bloom credits her international teammates like senior guards Tera Reed, Olga Petrova and center Sofya Pashigoreva for helping her transition to VCU.

“They’re there to help me get through my homesickness,” Bloom said. “They were able to connect with me that way.”

Fellow transfer and redshirt-sophomore forward Samantha Robinson says Bloom



Redshirt-sophomore Chloe Bloom attempts a layup against Richmond on Jan. 24. Photo by Megan Lee

fit into the team well because of her humor and support on the sideline. O’Boyle says the team has loved having her energy from the bench.

“She’s really supportive,” O’Boyle said. “You look at any of our film when she’s on the bench and she’s the first one jumping up.”

On the court, Robinson said Bloom’s strength, ability to finish at the rim and her mid-range shooting skills shine.

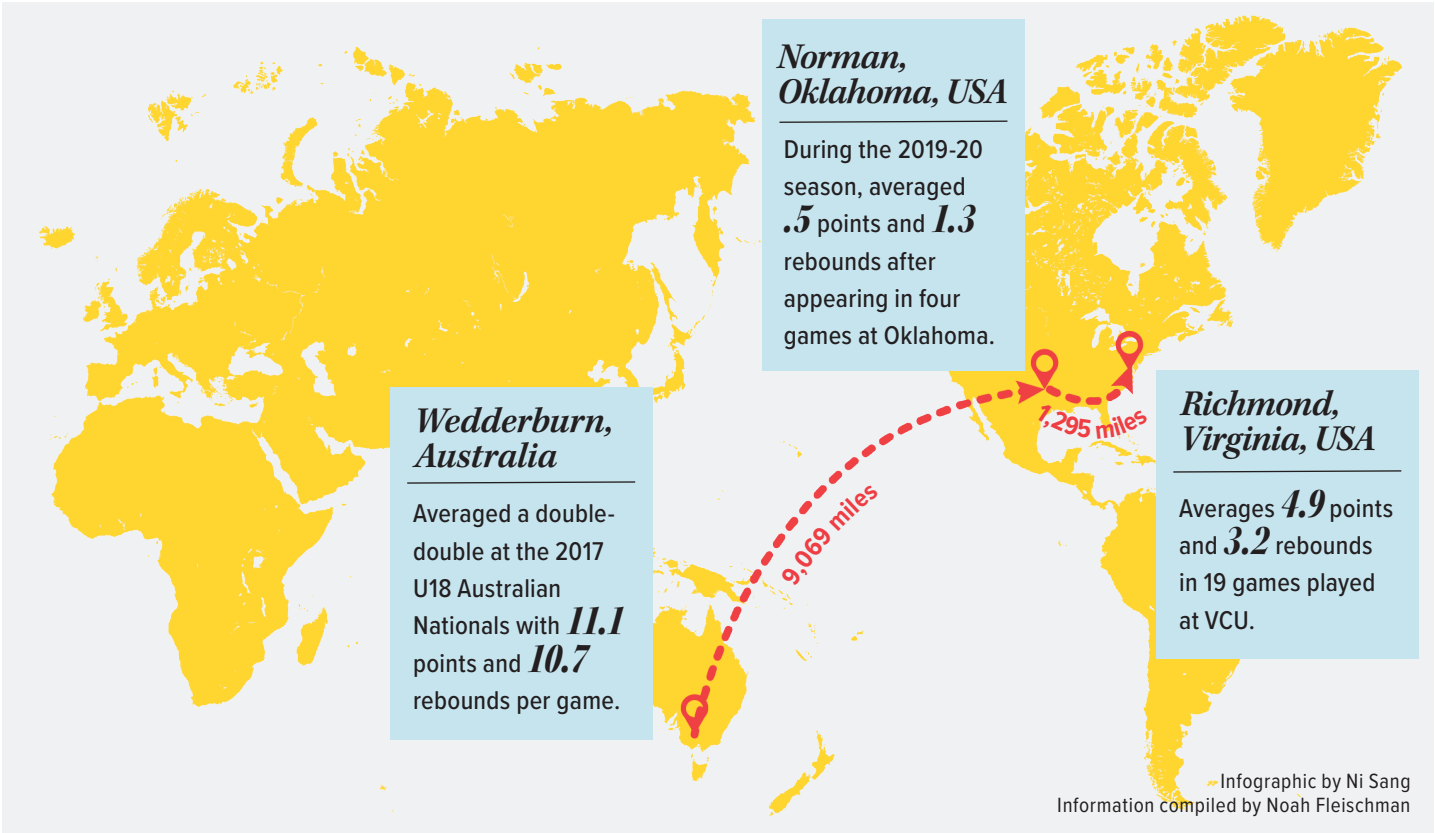
“She’s really strong,” Robinson said. “She is one of the stronger post players in the A-10.”

She is averaging a career-best 4.9 points and 3.1 rebounds in 15 minutes. Bloom has scored in double digits three times this season, including a 13-point performance against George Washington on Feb. 1 where she went 6-of-7 from the floor.

Bloom’s playing time has steadily grown throughout the season. After leaving Australia more than two years ago, the athlete said she is finally getting her confidence back on the court.

“I feel like I fit right in,” Bloom said. “I love everything about the team and what we’re about.”

The Rams are scheduled to play at UMass on Friday at noon. The game will broadcast on ESPN+.



CT Spectrum

BLACK HISTORY MONTH PROFILE:

Theatre professor provokes social change through original plays

EBONIQUE LITTLE
Spectrum Editor

WHEN TAWNIA PETTIFORD-WATES played the Christmas angel in a church production at five years old, her family knew she was a natural performer.

Pettiford-Wates, a VCUarts theatre professor and actress known for roles like Dr. Louise Shelvy in the 1990 mystery-drama television series “Twin Peaks,” said she’s always been interested in performing.

“I’ve always liked the arts as a child,” Pettiford-Wates said. “I was very into pretending and dressing up.”

Pettiford-Wates, who holds a doctorate in dramatic arts and philosophy, said she wanted to sharpen her craft in the sixth grade after seeing “Purlie,” a Broadway musical about a preacher working to emancipate cotton pickers in Georgia during the Jim Crow era. Seeing the all-Black cast was a pivotal moment in her development as an actress, she said.

“In that moment, I just said that I want to do that,” Pettiford-Wates said. “That’s when I got smitten. And my mom and dad said, ‘If you want to do it, then you need to study.’”

Studying Black playwrights and performers with a focus on Black subject matter led to Pettiford-Wates founding the Conciliation Project in 2001. The nonprofit social justice organization is dedicated to the process of racial conciliation, according to its website.

“

We thank Dr. T so much for her strides and her commitments to stay strong and speak out for us.”

Obadiah Parker,
senior theatre student

Pettiford-Wates leads the production of original plays and workshops to promote open dialogue about race and oppression in America.

“You need to recognize there are things that I was not taught intentionally that I need to know about,” Pettiford-Wates said.

The idea for the Conciliation Project sprouted from a class project she assigned her theatre students in 2001 at Seattle Central College, where she was head of the drama department.

The students analyzed “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” an anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe published in 1852. Afterward, they created an original play based on the novel called “Uncle Tom: Deconstructed” that provided a platform

for audience engagement after the show.

“When we did the play, it immediately ignited conversation around race,” Pettiford-Wates said.

During the epilogue, the characters took off their costume makeup and began speaking to the audience as themselves. The dialogue that followed was transformative, Pettiford-Wates said.

After gaining community support, Pettiford-Wates said she couldn’t simply end the class project.

“You can’t just do this piece that caused all of this controversy and conversation, and then just shut it down,” Pettiford-Wates said.

The theatre company grew a following in Seattle, and students created a new show every year for the Conciliation Project. Pettiford-Wates started teaching at VCU in 2004, and about 10 students transferred from Seattle Central College the next year to follow their professor and continue the theatre’s mission.

The Conciliation Project has about 50 to 60 current members, Pettiford-Wates said.

The project partners with various organizations to create original plays aligning with the mission of social justice. Housing



Pettiford-Wates poses for a portrait in the basement of the Theatre Lab, the organization the Conciliation Project recently partnered with to create more plays related to social justice. Photo by Wessam Hazaymeh

On this day

In 1835, “Siwinowe Kesibwi,” known as The Shawnee Sun, was released as the first U.S. newspaper printed entirely in a Native American language.



Tawnia Pettiford-Wates, VCUarts theatre professor, founded a theatre company called the Conciliation Project in 2001 to facilitate conversations around race. Photo by Wessam Hazaymeh

discrimination was the focus of one play called “Unequal Access: a Journey Towards Home,” which was created for Housing Opportunities Made Equal, a Richmond nonprofit that seeks to dismantle housing discrimination and divisive housing practices.

The Conciliation Project will soon merge with the Theatre Lab, a Richmond theatre group that specializes in “unexpected and evocative” productions, to broaden its reach. The new venture will be called the Conciliation Lab.

“It was inspired by our double pandemic — of health and race,” Pettiford-Wates said. “We realized that together, we could be a lot stronger.”

Debora Crabbe, a VCUarts theatre alumna and former student of Pettiford-Wates, joined the Conciliation Project in 2011 when she landed a role in “Stolen Land: Border Crossings,” a play that calls attention to the anti-immigration fervor experienced by Latin Americans.

“The intersection of social justice and theatre — it’s one of those where you are able to speak the truth about what is going on and the injustices,” Crabbe said.

Crabbe will serve as a co-chair of the Conciliation Lab’s art and activism board. She will oversee the planning and execution of educational workshops, performances and series, such as facilitating conversation about popular films.

“It just makes it feel that much more personal to me when I am a part of the process,” Crabbe said. “I’m getting to bring people’s realities and their stories to life.”

Centering these stories around the experiences of people of color in America has always been the essence of the

Conciliation Project, Pettiford-Wates said. She said she doesn’t remember seeing positive Black representation on television when she was a young girl.

The TV industry has shifted to appreciate more diverse figures, but it has yet to fully embrace substantial inclusion efforts, Pettiford-Wates said.

“I call that cosmetic. It’s kind of like taking the statues down on Monument Avenue,” Pettiford-Wates said. “You know, it looks different. But is it really different? Like, has anything systemically or institutionally changed?”

Many Black theatre students shared these concerns last summer, and some felt their talents were underappreciated by the university department.

“We felt like we were kind of given seconds or not as acknowledged as we want to be,” said Obadiah Parker, senior theatre student and member of the Black Theatre Association. “As far as the stories that were put on stage, as far as how some of the Black artists were treated — it was just an unfair environment.”

Pettiford-Wates is an adviser of the Black Theatre Association. Its students, who affectionately refer to Pettiford-Wates as “Dr. T,” said they enjoy her lessons about Black playwrights and actors.

“As a theatre major I’m often introduced to European writers or European stories,” Parker said. “You know, you don’t hear about Black stories, and that’s what she tries to emphasize.”

Pettiford-Wates’ role has made the theatre department a more inclusive environment, Parker said.

“We thank Dr. T so much for her strides and her commitments to stay strong and speak out for us,” Parker said.



The Hope Wall, located near the intersection of Grove and Shields avenues, displays posters that reflect the message of hope. Photo by Jon Mirador

GRACE MCOMBER
Contributing Writer

NINE COLORFUL POSTERS DECORATING a short red wall at Grove and Shields avenues depict images ranging from vibrant and easy-to-read text to abstract works with intricate messages. Despite the diverse array of artwork, they all follow one central theme — hope.

John Malinoski, a retired VCUarts graphic design professor and organizer of the Hope Wall, conceptualized the project last summer with two other organizers, Ashley Kistler, former director of the Anderson Gallery, and fellow retired VCUarts graphic design professor Rob Carter.

The group’s mission is to bring a sense of hope to anyone who sees the wall, especially during the political and social unrest in the U.S. and the COVID-19 pandemic, Malinoski said.

“I think it just came about because of mutual interests and resources that we could easily share,” Malinoski said. “We all had this overwhelming interest in hope during these times.”

The trio now reaches out to other artists from around the world to create posters for the wall, which is owned by Kistler. According to Malinoski, the organizers have seen exponential growth in submissions for the wall since the first installment went up this past summer.

“Early on, when the wall wasn’t quite as widespread, we got posters in, and they went up quite quickly,” Malinoski said. “Right now, if we got a poster today, it might not be up until April.”

The wall is now on its eighth round of posters and has featured work from more than 50 artists. The organizers swap out the nine posters every three weeks, Malinoski said. To paste the posters to the wall, Malinoski uses a homemade adhesive made of wheat, flour and sugar boiled in water.

“It’s special in the sense that it’s so simple,” Malinoski said. “And it’s a method that’s been used for many, many years.”

Reactions to the Hope Wall have been overwhelmingly positive, Malinoski said.

“It allows people to be civic in a time of lockdowns, so they can go out for a walk and see the wall,” Malinoski said. “And every three weeks, they can visit this wall and see something new. I think that’s really important.”

Erik Brandt, Malinoski’s former student and chair of the design department at the Minneapolis College of Art Design, has

Artistic posters about hope reimagine Richmond street wall



This poster by Netherlandian artist Jerry-Lee Bosmans states, “The sun will rise again and so will you.” It is one of nine posters currently on the wall. Photo by Jon Mirador

participated twice in the project. Initially, Brandt’s approach to the project was a darker take on the theme of hope, expressing his

thoughts on the 2020 presidential election. “At that point, it was pre-election,” Brandt said. “So, my response to the concept

of hope was hopeless.” Brandt’s first contribution to the wall, titled “Hope Less,” features a heavily altered photograph of former President Donald Trump, who is depicted with green skin, yellow hair and a bright orange tie. A purple hue colors Trump’s eyes, and purple fangs of a screeching primate are superimposed over his mouth, yelling into a microphone. The poster was part of the debut installment of the wall.

The title of the piece is written across the center of the disturbing image, with the last two letters resembling Nazi imagery. Brandt said the typography is meant to signify the severe nature of the former president and his followers’ actions and behavior.

Brandt, who grew up in northern Germany, found using the imagery difficult to include but necessary to convey his message that Trump’s ideology is similar to that of previous fascist political movements.

“It’s a commentary on both the person and the so-called movement, which I think is generous and wrong,” the artist said. “Because it is essentially something we know for many years. Fascism and evil — pure and simple.”

In stark contrast with “Hope Less,” Brandt’s most recent poster, “Hope Full,” has a more positive message. The poster, exhibited during the sixth edition of the wall, features winglike black shapes that flare out and a single green shape that sits in the upper left corner. Below the abstract image, lowercase black text reads, “hope has no shape and it can fill any heart.”

“I think, as simple as the sentiment is, that’s what a lot of people have been feeling or yearning for,” Brandt said. “Even if it’s been hard to experience those emotions because of the pandemic and our continued isolation, there’s a continued hope for the future.”

For both Brandt and Malinoski, the Hope Wall is an extension of the use of posters as a means of expression. Historically, posters have been a cheap and effective way to communicate a number of topics, from simple advertisements to protest movements.

“They are projections of culture — it is where the symphony will play, it is where this event will happen, it is where this gathering of people will be,” Brandt said. “The poster is something for the human scale. It’s for pedestrians walking in the city and being together in that way. It’s something that we would love to see more of in our world.”



Illustration by Marisa Stratton

MAKING BLACK HISTORY:

Modern musicians use song as platform for change

ANNIE PHAN
Contributing Writer

As social activism spans from demonstrations and sit-ins to online petitions, Black musicians are turning to lyrics and recording studios to bring awareness to social and racial injustices.

Drawing inspiration from observations and personal experiences, here are five songs by Black artists that touch on the social and political issues affecting Black communities.

“BLUE LIGHTS” BY JORJA SMITH (2016)

English R&B artist Jorja Smith released her debut single “Blue Lights” on SoundCloud in 2016, and the singer’s following increased after the song was featured on rapper Drake’s “OVO Sound” radio show. Smith collaborated with Drake in 2017 on “Get It Together” before releasing her debut album, “Lost & Found,” in 2018 to critical acclaim. The album includes “Blue Lights,” which discusses police brutality against the Black community.

The song’s title refers to flashing lights on police cars and explores the anxiety-triggering emotions Black individuals face during police encounters. Throughout the song, Smith serenely sings in the chorus, “There’s no need to run/ If you’ve done nothing wrong/ Blue lights should just pass you by.”

However, there is a drastic change in tone in the bridge toward the end of the song, signaling the problematic history between Black communities and law enforcement. Smith sings, “Better run when you hear the sirens coming/ When you hear the sirens coming/ The blue lights are coming for you.”

“PENG BLACK GIRLS” BY ENNY AND AMIA BRAVE (2020)

To capture the strength of the Black women in her life, Nigerian English rapper ENNY

collaborated with fellow English artist Amia Brave to compose an anthem to uplift Black women by promoting self-acceptance and encouraging them to rise above societal pressures.

The soulful duet between the rapper and singer breaks down negative stereotypes surrounding Black women and explores the multidimensional issues Black women face such as colorism, body shaming and lack of accurate representation in the media.

ENNY introduces the song’s message with, “Thick lips, got hips some of us don’t/ Big nose contour, some of us won’t/ Never wanna put us in the media, bro.”

“Peng Black Girls” refers to the physical diversity of the Black female community and speaks on how mainstream beauty standards glorify Black physical features, such as full lips and lifted butts, but do not embrace dark complexions.

“BRACKETS” BY J. COLE (2018)

J. Cole has gained recognition as a rapper who often speaks on the injustices that young Black Americans face while growing up in the U.S. In “Brackets,” Cole criticizes one-sided American education and the lack of funding for predominantly Black schools.

Cole raps, “And the curriculum be tricking them, them dollars I spend/ Got us learning about the heroes with the whitest of skin/ One thing about the men that’s controlling the pen/ That write history, they always seem to white-out they sins.”

The theme of control and the symbol of writing reflected throughout the song speak to the glorification of U.S. history and ignorance toward the harsh treatment of people of color through the education system.

“BECKY” BY AMINÉ (2020)

This Ethiopian American rapper explores the nuances of being in an interracial relationship with a white woman in his song, “Becky.” Having to explain his unique

experiences as a Black man to his significant other, Aminé expresses his frustration from having to deal with societal judgement surrounding interracial relationships.

In the chorus, Aminé echoes, “I’m fed up with the looks that we get in restaurants/ And no, it’s not a law, but you know we ain’t the same/ I’m fed up with a world that I know I can’t change.”

Although laws have been passed to allow interracial relationships, Aminé speaks on how society shuns his relationship and how judgement affects their ability to grow as a couple. Wishing he could be with his significant other without facing discrimination, Aminé’s frustration with societal pressures exhausts him.

“XXX” BY KENDRICK LAMAR, FEATURING U2 (2017)

Kendrick Lamar has become a household name with his strong messages conveyed through eloquent lyrics. In 2018, the Compton-born rapper became the first Pulitzer Prize for Music recipient outside of the classical or jazz music genres. Capturing the complexity of Black life, Lamar released his fourth album, “Damn,” in 2017. One song in particular, “XXX,” features Irish rock band U2 and touches on gun violence and disproportional mass incarceration rates in Black communities.

In the second verse, Lamar raps, “You overnight the big rifles, then tell Fox to be scared of us/ Gang members or terrorists, et cetera, et cetera/ America’s reflections of me, that’s what a mirror does.”

The song criticizes the hypocrisy of American politicians and media portraying Black people as violent, while citing the U.S. government’s role in drug and gang violence in vulnerable Black communities. Between the war on drugs and mass incarceration, this perception of Black Americans is skewed.

EDITOR'S LIST OF FILMS TO WATCH

“Black Box” (2020)

This sci-fi horror film takes the viewer on a roller coaster ride after Nolan Wright, played by Mamoudou Athie, gets into a car accident and loses his memory. He endures an experimental medical treatment on his quest to restore his memory loss, which leaves him questioning his true identity.

Available on Amazon Prime Video
72% Rotten Tomatoes

“Malcolm & Marie” (2021)

Starring Zendaya and John David Washington, this black-and-white film captures one tumultuous night in a Hollywood couple’s relationship. After returning from Malcolm’s movie premiere, tensions arise between him and Marie, pushing them both to their limits.

Available on Netflix
59% Rotten Tomatoes

“I, Tonya” (2018)

This sports film follows the rise of renowned figure skater Tonya Harding as well as the infamous scandal that led to her downfall. In 1994, her ex-husband conspired to injure her competitor Nancy Kerrigan, ultimately forcing her to withdraw from the Olympic competition. Despite Harding’s dramatic fall from grace, “I, Tonya” provides comedic relief.

Available on Hulu
90% Rotten Tomatoes

“Support the Girls” (2018)

Critics rave about Regina Hall’s performance as Lisa in this dramatic comedy, where she plays a bar and restaurant manager who struggles to run the business because of her heavy investment in her staff’s troubled lives.

Available on Hulu
91% Rotten Tomatoes

“RBG” (2018)

This documentary, which was initially screened at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, reflects on the life and career of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court. “RBG,” which was released before Ginsburg’s death in 2020, captures her time on the Supreme Court bench as well as significant cases that were pivotal in her professional development.

Available on Hulu
93% Rotten Tomatoes

“Disclosure” (2020)

Featuring candid interviews with Laverne Cox and other well-known transgender figures within pop culture, this documentary retraces the painful history of transgender representation in the media. The film questions prominent stereotypes held in regard to this community and highlights flaws that still exist in their media portrayal.

Available on Netflix
98% Rotten Tomatoes

“Happiest Season” (2020)

In this romantic comedy, Kristen Stewart, who plays Abby, gets invited by her girlfriend Harper to go to her family’s home for the first time. However, she soon discovers that Harper has yet to tell her family she is lesbian, and a disastrous Christmas dinner ensues.

Available on Hulu
82% Rotten Tomatoes

Have suggestions for our watchlist? Email spectrum@commonwealthtimes.org



Opinions

ISHAAN NANDWANI
Contributing Writer

I am the proud child of immigrant parents from the Indian state of Punjab. My mother was born and raised in Amritsar, the cultural and commercial center of Punjabi culture. Back home, my relatives work as educators, construction workers and farmers, with the latter serving as the backbone of our state's economy.

But while us college students go about our daily lives here in the U.S., the largest protest in world history is happening right now on the soil of my ancestors.

For those of you who aren't aware, the farmer protests of India are ongoing demonstrations that commenced in August, following the passing of three farm bills by the Indian parliament signed into law by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

These bills allow for the privatization of the sale of farmers' harvest, threatening the minimum support prices established by the government and the livelihoods of millions of farmers.

Expectedly, the passage of these bills caused an outcry that roared across Punjab and neighboring states. Given the emphasis on farming in India's economy, this decision is clearly one that hurts the people that the government claims to serve.

The protests, as a result of this decision, are reminiscent of those against police brutality last year in the United States. Punjabis and farmers have marched from Punjab to the Indian capital of New Delhi, reaching

an estimated crowd size of 250 million. Some were so dedicated, they carried rations for up to six months. These protesters have been met with tear gas and violence by the police force, yet their resolve and spirit remains strong.

As a Punjabi American far from home, these protests have been heartbreaking to witness. The opportunities I have in America are possible because of the generations that came before me, and it's difficult to feel removed from the fight happening in my motherland.

As I write this, millions of protesters are fighting for their lives; their income, families, and freedom of expression hang in the balance. However, I see little discussion and discourse over these events. Just because they're not happening here in the U.S. does not mean they are any less important.

The media has turned a blind eye to coverage of this critical period in Indian

history. Indeed, many of my Indian American friends, who have directly benefited from the sacrifice of Punjabi farmers, are unaware of the issues that are affecting these farmers.

In fact, the first notable moment that sparked conversation of the protests in the West was after Rihanna tweeted about them, citing a CNN article reporting on the internet shutdown in New Delhi as a means of silencing the spread of information to and from the farmers protesting.

Despite this seemingly simple gesture, Rihanna's tweet led to a massive reckoning across the world. Images of Rihanna are being burned by the counterprotesters in India, and millions of Americans are participating in dialogue surrounding the scale of the protests for the first time.

The ability of one celebrity to incite conversation over these protests across the nation speaks volumes to the lack of attention

they are receiving. Keep in mind, these are no ordinary demonstrations; the size of these protests have eclipsed that of any other protest in human history.

As college students, we are in positions of privilege with ample resources like access to information and the ability to demonstrate, as we've seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must do more. We can do more.

The best place to start is having conversations about these protests with your family and friends. Speak up on social media. Sign petitions. Donate through some

great organizations below. Call on the U.S. government to condemn the Indian government for their actions.

Sometimes, we feel removed from international issues like these protests, but they're closer to us than we realize. These protests are a reflection of structures of power taking advantage of the vulnerable. We can't let the oppressors win.

ORGANIZATIONS ACCEPTING DONATIONS TO SUPPORT FARMERS:

- Save Indian Farmers:
www.saveindianfarmers.org
- GoFundMe:
www.gofundme.com/f/help-farmers-and-their-families-in-punjab



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

COVID-19 heightened systemic racism in Latino communities

MONICA ALARCON-NAJARRO
Contributing Writer

The U.S. has failed to properly handle the COVID-19 pandemic, so it's no surprise that immigrant families — who have clocked in countless hours working labor-intensive jobs during a global health crisis — are the ones suffering endlessly from the economic downfall.

This country seems to always forget that immigrants are still part of the backbone keeping this country running. Not only do these families work inhumane jobs for dreadful hours during the week, but they also aren't able to afford health care or even maintain a source of income should they fall ill.

About 28.4 million foreign-born people worked in the U.S. labor force in 2019, making up about 17.4% of the total, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. These workers include “legally-admitted immigrants, refugees, temporary residents such as students and temporary workers, and undocumented immigrants.”

Remember the stimulus checks that were given out to Americans for financial support? According to the IRS, undocumented immigrant families weren't able to receive both stimulus checks due to their citizenship status and whether or not they had a Social Security number.

Miriam Delaney Heard, a senior attorney at the National Health Law Program in North Carolina who has represented people with appeals regarding Medicaid and oth-

er government policy benefits, says Latino communities who are undocumented have historically suffered through systemic racism in the U.S.

“Both undocumented immigrants and many lawfully residing immigrants are ineligible for Medicaid and other government benefits,” Heard stated in an article.

Since undocumented immigrants are ineligible to receive government assistance, such as Medicaid, many of them cannot afford to get medical attention as they have to pay out of pocket. If they were to get sick, many undocumented workers have no way of getting paid sick days without running the risk of losing valuable income or even their jobs.

Undocumented immigrant families have been the most impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic as bills passed in Congress regarding financial support exclude them from receiving any form of assistance, according to the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization.

“Immigrant families are being disproportionately affected by the economic turmoil brought on by the pandemic, but so far, the supports included in federal stimulus legislation — including the economic impact payments and expanded unemployment insurance benefits — are not available to all immigrant families,” stated a release from the Urban Institute.

Hispanics living with non-citizens, aged 18 to 64, made up about 69% of people who lost their jobs or incomes in March and April. This is the highest percentage



Illustration by Cecilia Ford

compared to Hispanics living with citizens, non-Hispanic white people and non-Hispanic Black people.

It is frustrating to see friends of mine — who have undocumented parents — struggle during this crucial time. Undocumented Latino families that have been unemployed due to COVID-19 can end up having no source of income when taking sick days, limiting their ability to provide for their family. The least these people could have been gifted with was a stimulus check.

After all, it did take Congress eight months to get a second stimulus check approved — which wasn't even enough for most people to catch up on rent or feed their families.

It feels as though Latino communities are being prioritized less and less as time goes by, and politicians are making families of lower to middle classes fend for themselves.

I'm losing hope as to when immigrant families will be considered when financial

help is brought up for Latino people in America during this pandemic.

There has to be a way for undocumented families to be able to seek financial assistance without the fear of being deported back to their countries, which in most cases are extremely unsafe.

My heart goes out to all the families who have lost their main source of income during this pandemic and have had no way of regaining their financial security due to the lack of help the U.S. has provided.

There are families out there who are barely making ends meet due to this pandemic, and it is one of the many problems that still need to be addressed. The U.S. government does not care about Latino residents, and they have proven that again and again.

There has to be a voice given to them as these dark times are affecting each and every one of us in different ways.



Comics

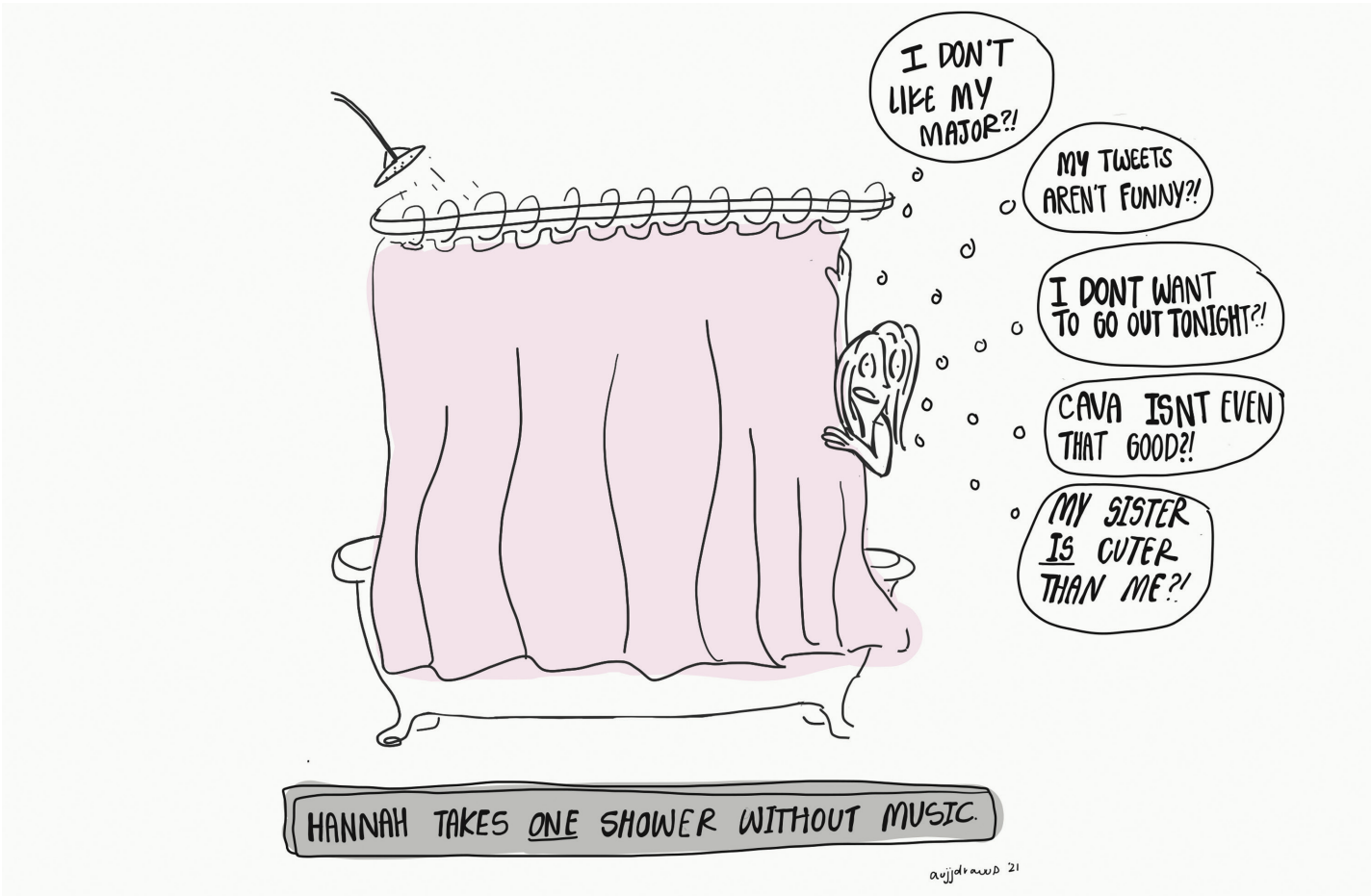
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CT

Puzzles

Los Angeles Times

Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Nichols Lewis

ACROSS

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Playground game with hoops

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122

"How obvious"

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Seeing Progress by Pam Amick Klawitter

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| 126 | | | | | | | | | | | | 127 | | | | | 128 | | | |

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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

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