



Students talk in the Academic Learning Commons before the start of their political science class. Photo by Kaitlyn Fulmore

Students eager to return to the classroom

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

JUNIOR PUBLIC RELATIONS MAJOR Francesca Tilden called her dad right after her first in-person class this semester to tell him the good news.

"I feel like a real student again," Tilden said.

Tilden is taking four classes this semester, two of which have an in-person component. She said she tried her best to sign up for exclusively in-person classes.

The university has three different modalities for courses this semester: hybrid, in person and online. Hybrid classes have both an online and in-person component. Undergraduate courses at Monroe Park campus this semester are 26.8% in person, 43.8% hybrid and 29.4% online, according to VCU spokesperson Michael Porter.

Class size was not a determining factor in deciding whether or not classes would be in person, and professors and department heads worked together to develop modalities, Porter stated in an email.

The university's Public Health Response Team has the power to make a recommendation for classes to return online, according to Porter, who is also a member of the team. Any recommendations would be based on COVID-19 cases on campus, in Richmond and hospital availability in the Richmond area.

Tilden said living with three of her friends has also helped her school work. She lived alone last year and found it difficult to focus on school. Now, she said it's easier to get into a routine while being surrounded by other students.

Tilden lived near campus last year, but rarely came to campus for school work because of COVID-19. She said she enjoys visiting the library for school work.

"Now that we're back on campus, I'm able to separate my comfy space from school," Tilden said.

Adjunct Professor of Art Foundations Jon Rajkovich is teaching two classes this semester. Both are hybrid classes with a Zoom lecture and in-person studio component.

Rajkovich said he prefers Zoom lectures to in-person lectures because it helps promote equality between students. He is also a fan of the breakout room feature, which allows him to put students in small groups.

Despite added advantages to Zoom lectures, Rajkovich said he prefers teaching studios in person.

"As far as working in a studio on artwork, it really benefits students to be able to learn from each other," Rajkovich said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer specific guidance for institutes of higher education with fully vaccinated populations and those that are mixed with both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

The CDC recommends that institutions push for members of the community to get the COVID-19 vaccine by offering it. Those who are unvaccinated are still recommended to wear masks indoors, continue to physically distance indoors and outdoors and undergo testing when exposed to COVID-19.

People who are fully vaccinated do not need to wear masks indoors unless advised by local guidance, according to the CDC — though those with weakened immune systems should continue to wear a mask.

Everyone is required to wear a mask in university buildings regardless of vaccination status, according to VCU's OneTogether webpage.

VCU required students to get a COVID-19 vaccination prior to the start of the semester. Students who don't report their vaccination will have a hold placed on their account. A hold based on missing COVID-19 vaccination documentation would prevent students from registering for classes, but would not stop students from accessing their transcripts, receiving a diploma or receiving grading, according to VCU's records and registration website.

Despite the reimplemented mask mandate, Rajkovich remains hopeful about the fall semester.

"It feels like normal again, even though we're following the safety protocols and wearing masks and all that," Rajkovich said.



Virginia, nation prepare for vaccine booster shots

“

It reminds me of safety briefings on airplanes, where you are always told to put your own oxygen mask on first before helping others, so that you don't get yourself hurt while trying to help people.”

Knox Butler, freshman computer engineering major

See *Boosters* on page 3

Illustration by Seulgi Smith

Stories of the week

NATIONAL: Hurricane Ida traveled through Louisiana, causing power outages and low water supply.

INTERNATIONAL: The last U.S. troops left Afghanistan on Tuesday, according to Pentagon officials.



VCU plans to open a campus grocery store on Grace Street in the coming months. Photo by Alessandro Latour

VCU grocery store ‘Ram City Market’ to open late fall, early spring

EMMA CARLSON
Contributing Writer

THE BUILDING THAT FORMERLY housed the campus Walmart will be the site of a new VCU grocery store, with hopes of opening in late fall or early spring, according to VCU Business Services spokesperson Anna Obermiller.

The grocery store will be called Ram City Market, as was voted on in a student survey.

“When Walmart closed, it created a void for students’ grocery needs,” Obermiller stated in an email. “We wanted to fill that void and create a convenient grocery store on campus where students can pick up essentials as well as fresh produce, to-go meals and more.”

Ram City Market plans to have allergen-friendly options, however Obermiller could not list all the specific allergies that will be accommodated. Gluten-free and vegan options from food producer Good Uncle will be available. Students can use swipes, dining dollars and cash or credit to purchase groceries.

The building, located on 912 W. Grace St., previously housed a mini Walmart store on the first floor of the 4,100 square-foot space. Located next to Panda Express, students across campus pass by the upcoming grocery store’s location every day.

Freshman art major Echo Hoboy lives on campus in Johnson Hall. Although describing Johnson as having “good bones,” Hoboy expressed frustration in the lack of a community kitchen or even a microwave, unless brought by the residents.

Hoboy has VCU Dine’s new premium dining plan, which allows unlimited entry swipes into Market 810 and Avo Kitchen and 12 swipe exchanges every 24 hours, according to VCU Dine. They expressed excitement for Ram City Market, especially for its convenient location.

“I would definitely buy produce there,” Hoboy said. “You have to walk so far to get to Kroger, even to the bus stop.”

“

During freshman and sophomore year, having places to walk to for groceries that’s not thirty minutes away would have been pretty nice.”

Amy Truong,
junior business major

Richmond’s rapid transportation line, the GRTC Pulse, runs through Broad Street, with stops near Whole Foods, Aldi and Lidl, according to Greater Richmond Transit Company Pulse routes. There are no accessible Pulse stops to the Lombardy Kroger, so students would have to walk or take alternate bus routes. GRTC route 50 runs every 30 minutes with stops in front of residence hall

Broad and Belvidere and across from the Lombardy Kroger parking lot.

Richmond City has more accessible convenience stores than grocery stores, from numerous 7/11 locations on or around campus, to local options such as Cary St. Mini Mart and Lombardy Market.

Factors such as difficult access to grocery stores and an overabundant number of convenience stores compared to a small number of distant grocery stores, along with high poverty rates, contribute to food insecurity across the Richmond area, creating a “food desert.”

Richmond City is considered a food desert by the United States Department of Agriculture. The term refers to inequalities in accessible, affordable food options that can contribute to differences in diet and health, especially in low-income and non-white areas, according to John Jones, an urban food planning professor at VCU.

“In urban areas, which are the focus of my work, food is often found in abundance everywhere,” Jones stated in an email. “The problem is that most of the available food is often nutritionally poor and/or high in some combination of sugar, fat and salt.”

Amy Truong is a business major at VCU. Although now a junior and no longer on a dining plan, she still expressed interest in Ram City Market.

“It will be so close,” Truong said. “During freshman and sophomore year, having places to walk to for groceries that’s not thirty minutes away would have been pretty nice.”

Truong lives off campus now and uses her car when grocery shopping. She prefers Aldi to other stores for its lower prices. Truong also saw value in the new grocery store being affiliated with VCU, as convenience stores on or near campus made her feel unsafe at times.

“Gas stations are overpriced, and especially being a girl, they can be dangerous,” Truong said. “I feel like an actual VCU building will make people feel safer.”

CORRECTION

Last week’s issue of The CT incorrectly described a study conducted by Hayley Cleary. There is only one adolescent actor, with an adult portraying the police officer. The officer is not placed in virtual reality.

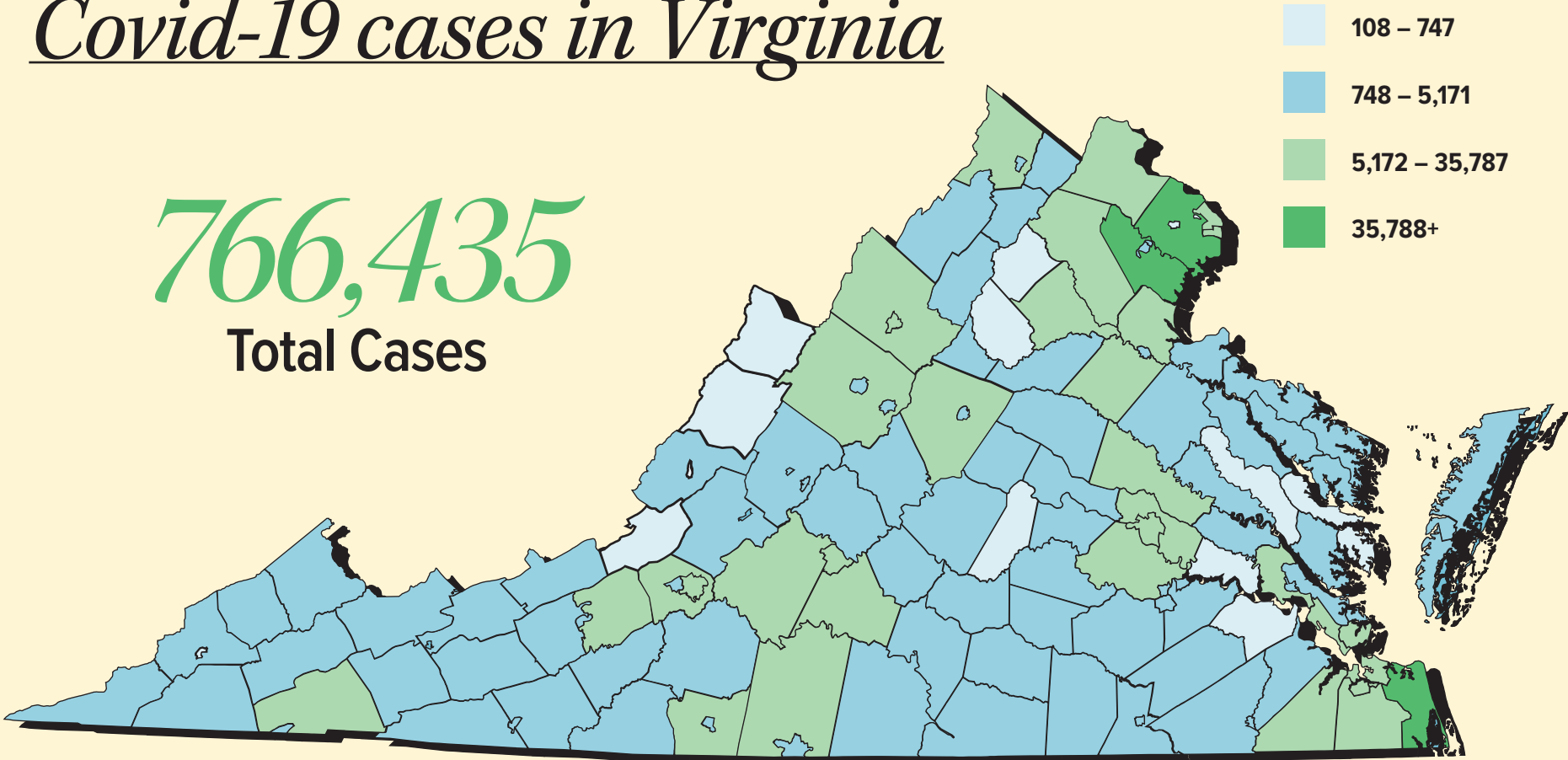
A.J. Hostetler’s job title was incorrectly noted. Hostetler is the Vice President of the VCU Office of Research and Innovation.

Michael Portillo’s major was incorrectly noted. He is an economics and statistics major.

The full version of the stories are available online at commonwealthtimes.org.

Covid-19 cases in Virginia

766,435
Total Cases



Source: Virginia Department of Health
Infographic by Jayce Nguyen

Virginia, nation prepare for vaccine booster shots

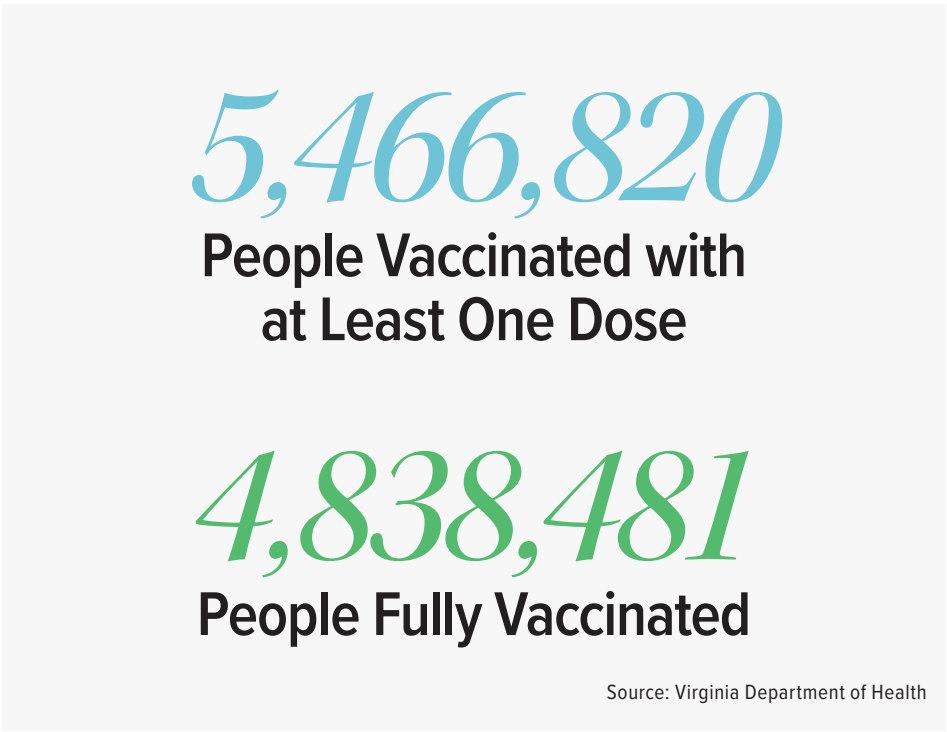
EMMA CARLSON
Contributing Writer

THE DELTA VARIANT OF COVID-19 continues to dominate new cases nationally and locally. With Virginia cases continuing to rise, experts weigh in on distributing booster doses for vaccinated individuals. The increase of cases of the delta variant caused VCU to reimplement its indoor mask mandate before the start of the fall semester.

VCU Health spokesperson Laura Rossacher stated that the university is continuing to monitor guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on booster shots for the general public. VCU Health will develop a plan to administer booster shots to the general public, once more information is released, Rossacher stated in an email.

“We will continue to urge everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated against COVID-19, as it is our best course of action to curb the pandemic,” Rossacher stated. “With emerging evidence showing that booster shots are warranted to maximize vaccine-induced protection and prolong its durability, we support CDC guidelines to offer them, starting with immunocompromised people.”

A CDC press release from Aug. 18 announced plans to begin administering booster shots the week of Sept. 20 to all Americans who received a mRNA vaccine. A booster dose is recommended eight months after full vaccination, or two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines. Boosters would start with the earliest vaccine recipients such as health care workers, senior citizens and those in assisted living homes. Johnson & Johnson vaccine recipients are not yet eligible for booster doses.



Source: Virginia Department of Health

“The available data make very clear that protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection begins to decrease over time following the initial doses of vaccination,” the CDC announcement stated. “In association with the dominance of the Delta variant, we are starting to see evidence of reduced protection against mild and moderate disease.”

Spokesperson Cat Long from the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts said the primary goal is distributing vaccines to those who have yet to receive one.

“The best way to curb the pandemic is for all of us to reach herd immunity and then maintain a high level of immunity through boosters,” Long stated in an email. “We are concerned that despite having enough supply, we have a significant number of unvaccinated individuals in our community.”

A booster vaccine is no different from the original vaccine, according to the CDC. Waning immunity, or decreased protection from COVID-19 over time, raises concern for a needed third dose and effective herd immunity.

Herd immunity is achieved when a sufficient percentage of a population is immune to the virus and person to person spread becomes unlikely. The exact percentage of vaccinated individuals needed to achieve herd immunity is unknown, but a CDC report from April 2020 suggests 70%.

As of Aug. 24, the seven-day moving average of new COVID-19 cases is hovering around 2,700 per day in Virginia, according to the Virginia Department of Health. This number has continued to rise since June, which had cases average around 200 per day.

The primary cause of this surge is the delta variant, according to the VDH. The delta variant is 40-60% more transmissible than the alpha variant, one of the original variants of COVID-19. Evolving data suggests the delta variant can cause more serious illness, and vaccination may be less effective against this variant, according to the VDH.

Preliminary evidence on COVID-19 antibodies shows a reduction in immunity over time, exacerbated by the delta variant, according to a CDC brief from July 27. This could result in breakthrough infections among the vaccinated population.

Computer engineering freshman Knox Butler said because all of his classes have an in-person aspect, he felt that booster shots would be a “prudent measure” in fighting COVID-19, due to the contagiousness of the delta variant.

Butler received the Moderna vaccine in May. He took no issue with the U.S. distributing COVID-19 vaccines to other countries, as they have already committed 600 million vaccines globally for donation, according to the CDC.

“It reminds me of safety briefings on airplanes, where you are always told to put your own oxygen mask on first before helping others, so that you don’t get yourself hurt while trying to help people,” Butler said.

Western countries have the most access to COVID-19 vaccines, according to the World Health Organization. Western Asia and most of Africa have the lowest percentages of vaccinated individuals; Nigeria has administered 1.92 vaccines per 100 people and Afghanistan has 3.09 per 100 people, while the United States administered 109.12 vaccines per 100 people, according to the WHO.

Members of the VCU community can visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for the latest information on COVID-19 and booster vaccines.



A student walks into Shafer Court Dining Center. The dining center is home to Market 810, Shake Smart and Einstein Bros. Bagels. Photo by Alessandro Latour

UNIVERSITY INTRODUCES VARIETY TO MEAL PLAN WITH THREE NEW LOCATIONS

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

Although senior theater performance major Kellie Bolden doesn't have a meal plan this year, she vividly remembers her freshman year diet: Raising Cane's, Panda Express and Bleecker St. Now, freshmen have more options available with the addition of two new student dining locations.

The two new locations, Steak 'n Shake and Za'atar, are set to open in "late fall," according to VCUDine spokesperson Anna Obermiller. Steak 'n Shake offers diner-style food, such as burgers, fries and milkshakes, and Za'atar focuses on halal-certified Greek food. Both menus can be found at vcu.campusdish.com.

Although Bolden said she's never been to a Steak 'n Shake restaurant, she often drives by one in Richmond.

"It was always thumping when I would pass, so I think if they keep up to the standard of normal Steak 'n Shake, it'll be good," Bolden said. "I think it'll be a hit."

Senior theater performance major Calvin Graves expressed excitement over Za'atar opening, and said he is a fan of Greek food. He said the location reminds him of restaurants close to campus, such as Roots Natural Kitchen, a made-to-order salad bar close to campus.

"If they take swipes, people will go there instead of Roots," Graves said.

Both locations will offer swipe exchanges during all hours of operation, however the

items available for swipe exchange are still being decided, according to Obermiller.

Steak 'n Shake is set to replace the campus Taco Bell and Za'atar is set to replace Freshii, a soup, salad, wrap and burrito restaurant — both located in the University Student Commons. Bolden said she thinks Za'atar will be an effective replacement for Freshii.

"As long as it's like a refreshing thing, I think it'll do well enough for it to stay," Bolden said. "Because there are a lot of heavy fast food places around here."

Although Bolden is not on the meal plan, she intends to take advantage of the new dining locations.

The university's new engineering building also received a culinary upgrade. VCU recently opened a satellite Au Bon Pain location in the new building, known as Au Bon Pain Café: Ram Bytes. Students can swipe for a variety of entrees with a side and a drink, but some entrees require two swipes. The Grace Street location has a larger variety of entrees including vegetarian salads, grilled cheese sandwiches and breakfast sandwiches.

All students living in Brandt, Johnson, Rhoads, Gladding Residence Center III, the Honors College and Gladding Residence Center are required to purchase one of three meal plans: a premium swipe plan with unlimited swipes into Market 810 and Avo Kitchen, a 250-swipe plan or a 200-swipe plan, according to VCU's 2021-2022 dining brochure.

The premium swipe plan was added to the university's budget this semester and costs \$2,910. Students with this plan have unlimited swipes into Market 810 and Avo Kitchen, 12 swipe exchanges per day, 20 guest swipes to use on family or friends and \$225 dining dollars.

Both the 250-swipe plan and 200-swipe plan come with \$225 dining dollars to spend during the semester. The 250-swipe plan costs \$2,570 and the 200-swipe plan costs \$2,331.

Individual swipes were averaged at \$10.05 each in the 2020-2021 dining brochure. This year's information was not included in the 2021-2022 brochure.

When requested, VCUDine did not provide the information regarding the value of one swipe for this school year, as of Tuesday.

VCUDine also hosts a variety of special events for students throughout the year, including Midnight Breakfast, Basketball Watch Parties and Guest Restaurants inside of Market 810, according to the dining brochure.

Students can purchase meal plans online through VCUDine for the fall semester until Dec. 22.



Laurel & Grace Place houses three university restaurants: Bento Sushi, Raising Cane's and Twisted Taco. Photo by Alessandro Latour

Stat of the week
Men's soccer was ranked No. 12 in the United Soccer Coaches Poll on Tuesday.

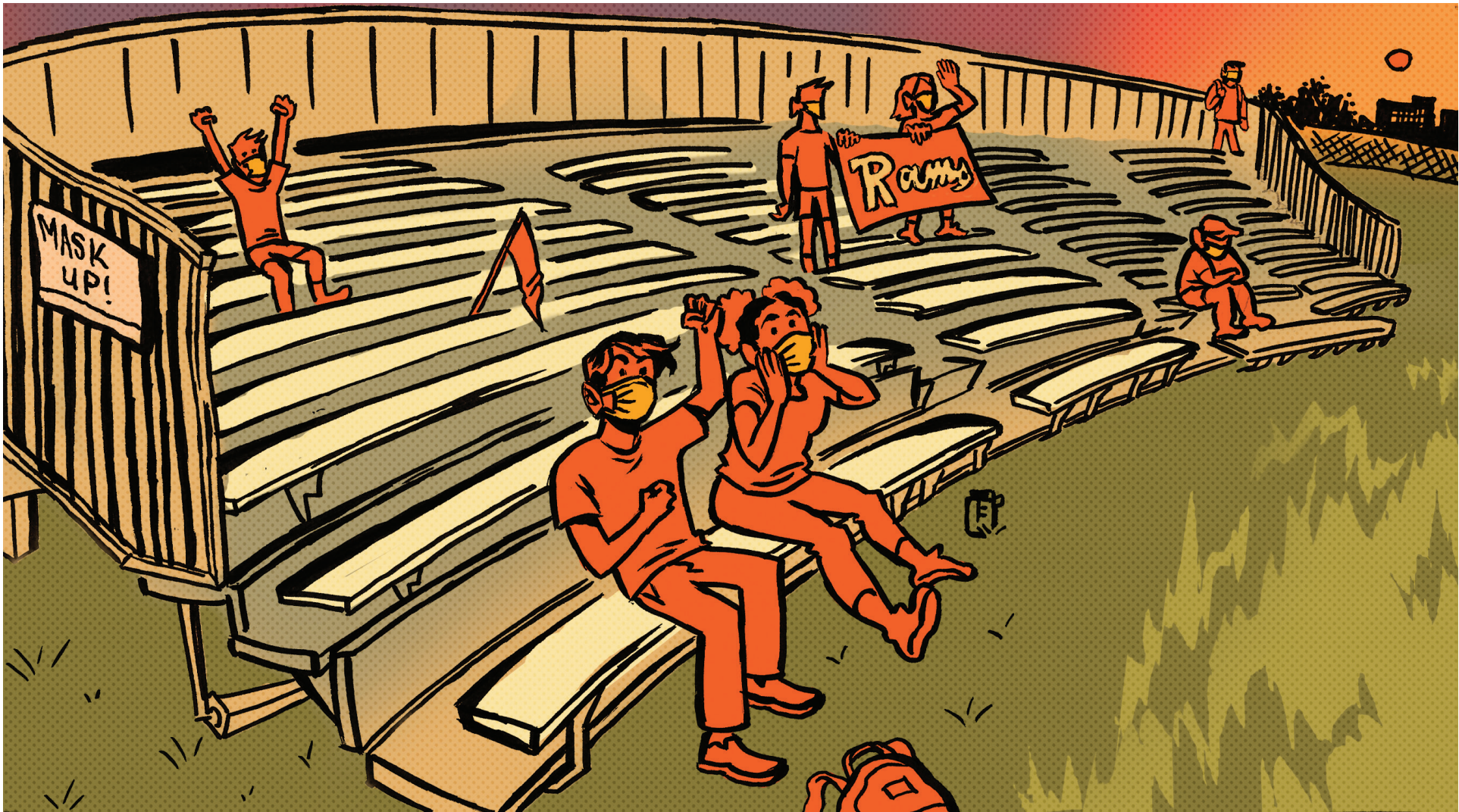


Illustration by Lauren Johnson

ATHLETICS RETURNS WITH HIGH VACCINATION RATES, NEW COVID-19 PROTOCOL

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

AS VACCINATION RATES INCREASE ON campus this semester, they're rising even higher within the VCU Athletic department.

The department's vaccination rate is higher than the university-wide statistic with 100% of tier-one staff and 96% of student-athletes being vaccinated, VCU Athletics spokesperson Chris Kowalczyk confirmed on Tuesday.

The university-wide confirmed vaccination rate of students is 92.8% and 87.3% of staff, according to VCU's vaccination dashboard as of Friday.

"I think with our increased vaccination rate, that should provide a lot of protection for our student-athletes," said Jeff Collins, VCU's assistant athletic director for sports medicine. "I think that gives us a better chance of saying we're going to be able to reduce the number of positive cases and therefore not have to be quite as concerned about canceling activities due to COVID."

A new protocol installed within VCU Athletics allows for teams to continue practicing and playing games should a positive test appear. That athlete would be isolated from the rest of the team and the others wouldn't have to be tested if they're vaccinated.

"Having a student-athlete test positive would not necessarily preclude the whole team from participating in an activity or shutting down the team for a period; it would just depend on if that student-athlete was positive, who they've been in contact with," Collins said.

If a student-athlete tests positive, they will be isolated for 10 days, according to Collins. He added that when the athlete exits isolation, they will be evaluated by the team physician before a "gradual return to activity."

The return to competition will take at least seven days in a ramp up period to get the athlete back to full team activity.

Weekly testing will only be mandatory for unvaccinated athletes, regardless if their season is in session or not. If the unvaccinated athlete is in season, the test has to occur within 72 hours of traveling to their first contest of the week.

Even though COVID-19 protocols have loosened testing requirements for vaccinated athletes, field hockey coach Stacey Bean said her team still has to be vigilant and aware of the risks of contracting the virus.

"It's a reality in the world right now," Bean said. "So, we just really have to stay mature in our approach to that."

There are minimal restrictions for competitions on campus, with masks being the only requirement for fans in attendance.

The department is also following all state and local guidelines for COVID-19, and it's possible policies could adjust if Richmond or the state changes its recommendations.

"Safety measures are being held at the highest level again, fans even have to wear masks," said volleyball head coach Jody Rogers. "It's a little better than what it used to be, but we have to be safe still."

Virginia doesn't currently have a mask mandate surrounding indoor or outdoor events, but the Department of Health "strongly encourages" people to wash hands regularly, social distance if not vaccinated and to get tested for COVID-19 if someone is experiencing virus symptoms.

VCU Athletic Director Ed McLaughlin wrote in an April 19 letter to fans that the Stuart C. Siegel Center was going to return to full capacity for this upcoming fall season.

"We have proven throughout the last six months that we can host home games in a safe manner with complete risk mitigation," McLaughlin stated. "We will continue to provide the safest facilities and experiences for our student-athletes, staff and fans."

Last year, VCU Athletics had a cluster of more than 40 positive tests of athletes

that weren't in season, which forced the university to designate three floors of the Honors College building for additional isolation space.

The men's basketball team had multiple positive tests at the March NCAA Tournament in Indianapolis, forcing the team to return home, deeming their first-round game against Oregon as a no-contest.

This year, VCU Athletics had its first events affected by the virus before classes could begin for the fall semester. The department has "indefinitely postponed" its Student-Athlete Donor Dinner and the inaugural Ram Fest "out of an abundance of caution" due to the delta variant, according to an announcement released on Aug. 20.

Ram Fest was set to take place on Aug. 26 in the parking lot at The Diamond, with games and programming for all ages. The event was going to have carnival-style games, a beer garden and a celebrity dunk tank, which was slated to host men's basketball coach Mike Rhoades and

women's basketball coach Beth O'Boyle, among others.

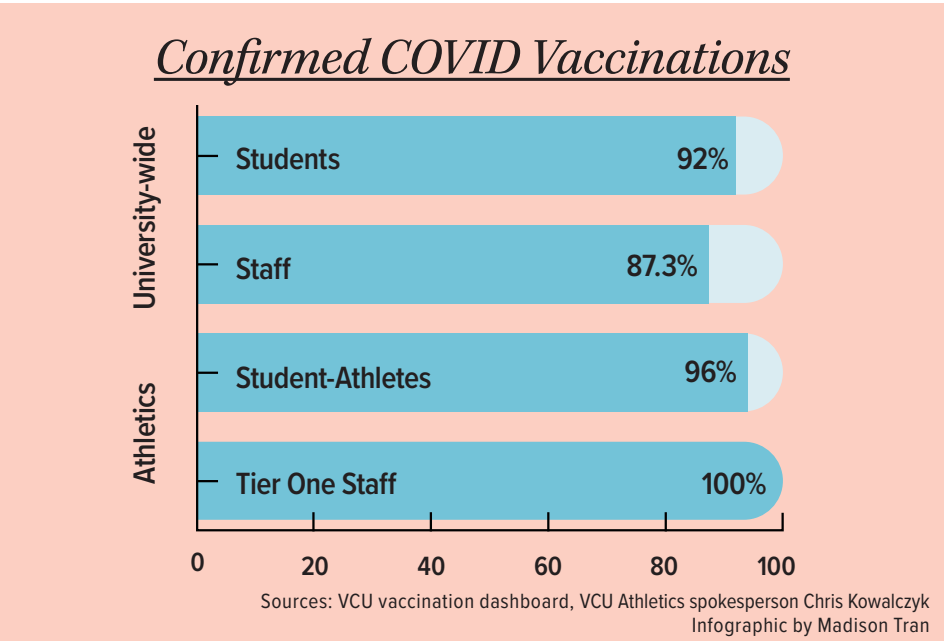
The two events were going to feature close interaction between student-athletes and the public.

"VCU Athletics made the decision based solely upon the mitigation of potential risks to student-athletes and staff," according to the department's announcement.

Last season, volleyball competed while wearing masks in all competitions. Rogers said her team doesn't have to wear masks while playing this season, but when the team's not actively playing, masks are worn.

"It's still out there, there's different things going on, we have to make it a top priority because if we do get shut down, it's very unfortunate mentally," Rogers said. "We want to keep our bubble as contained as we can, so we're gonna try to wear our masks as much as possible."

Katilyn Fulmore contributed to this report.



Guilbert’s path to coaching developed from early relationship

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

WHEN MEGAN GUILBERT ARRIVED AT A FIELD hockey camp at Providence the summer before her freshman year of college, she was just expecting the usual drills and technique workouts. Little did Guilbert know that her future boss — VCU field hockey head coach Stacey Bean — would be coaching her.

The young field hockey goalkeeper didn’t think much of the relationship she created with Bean at the time, but years later it ended up manifesting into a job. This offseason, Guilbert joined the VCU staff to coach in goalkeeping and defensive strategies, among other day-to-day responsibilities.

“I never thought about it like that, but it just shows you that it matters, like how you treat people and who you are as a person and how you portray yourself every day,” Guilbert said.



Assistant coach Megan Guilbert stands on the sidelines during field hockey’s season-opening loss to American on Aug. 27. Photo by Jay Stonefield

The connection between Bean and Guilbert is rooted deeper than the camps that they attended, but it’s a part of a long-standing relationship with Providence’s head coach.

Bean said she always has a “short list” of possible assistant coaches to hire in the event one of her current assistants decides to move on from VCU. In this case, former assistant coach Kathi Weidman left the position to move closer to home, opening the position on the staff. This prompted Bean to turn to an old friend.

Diane Madl, Guilbert’s coach at Providence, has been friends with Bean for more than 30 years, according to the Rams’ coach. When the opening popped up, Bean knew who to turn to on her “short list.”

When Guilbert played at Providence, Weidman was an assistant coach on staff with the Friars.

“I know that both Kathi and Bert [Guilbert] have come from a system and a program in Providence that has the same value system as we do and I want to have here at VCU,” Bean said. “So you know that right there, that’s a no brainer [to hire Guilbert].”

At Providence, Guilbert was a stand-out goalkeeper, being named an All-Big East Second Team selection during her senior year.

“She knows the goalkeeping position very well and she knows the defensive principals really well,” Bean said. “She’s a little bit of a younger coach, but her hockey IQ is still very much at a level that we needed to be for those two purposes, right, with goalies in the defensive part.”

While working with goalkeepers, Guilbert can speak from experience to help the Rams’ goaltenders learn.

“I know the position and the habits that you can fall into that will eventually hurt you,” Guilbert said. “I can actually relate to how it feels because I’ve been there.”

Guilbert’s starting goalkeeper, senior Sasha Elliott, impressed in the team’s first

game, logging 12 saves. In the team’s season opener, the No. 23 Rams fell to American 2-1 in overtime on Friday afternoon at Cary Street Field.

This is the first time Guilbert has worked with a college team she didn’t play for. With that comes learning an entire new roster, not only on the field but also off the field.

“This is the first time I’ve been immersed in a completely different environment with people that I didn’t play with,” Guilbert said. “A lot of the girls I’ve coached for a while were some of my teammates at one point in time at Providence.”

Guilbert was a graduate assistant at Providence after her playing career concluded. After that, she most recently made a stop at Monmouth as an academic support graduate assistant for student-athletes for almost a year.

She said while working on the other side of college sports in advising, it reminded her why the student-athletes are playing — to get an education.

“It’s so much bigger than just the sport, like it’s about them as people not as players, and like with field hockey, where they’re going to go when they’re done,” Guilbert said. “How is college field hockey going to help them prepare for the rest of their lives?”

Getting to Know Megan Guilbert

Years coaching:
1

Last stop:
Monmouth University -
Academic Advising
Graduate Assistant

Playing career:
Providence College, 2014-2017:
48 games played, 43 starts

‘This is like year zero’: Cross-country looks to bounce back under new coach

MIA BUSWELL
Contributing Writer

When the VCU cross-country team toes the line in its season-opening meet this Saturday, it’ll be the first time wearing a black and gold uniform for almost half the team.

The team didn’t compete last fall as its season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since they last ran through the grass and trails on the courses, the team has had a large turnover, adding 10 freshmen between the men’s and the women’s teams.

This season, the new bunch of faces have to learn collegiate racing on the fly.

“I think our biggest hurdle is how quickly our new and young talent kind of adjust to collegiate running,” Director of Cross-Country Wesley Stephens said. “It’s not necessarily a talent discrepancy. It’s just how they are going to react when [they] line up and everyone on the line is just as good as you, because this is Division I cross-country and Division I track and field.”

Stephens was a graduate assistant with VCU’s cross-country and track and field programs during the 2018 season before making a stop at Alcorn State for three years. He’s replacing Nicole Cook as the director of the men’s and women’s cross-country teams.

Despite the excitement heading into this weekend’s race, returning athletes are still left with the disappointment of losing a season of their college cross-country careers.

“It was definitely disappointing to have [last year’s] season cancelled, but I know that it was made with good intentions and with everyone’s safety in mind,” said junior cross-country athlete Kasandra Aulenbach.

In March 2020, the NCAA granted all athletes that competed during the COVID-19 pandemic an extra year of eligibility.

During the year off, the team still found ways to train and get better.

“[While training by myself], I would get away from the numbers, and work more off of how my body felt rather than the mileage I wanted to do per week or how fast I wanted to [run],” senior cross-country athlete Evan Leach said.

Stephens, who most recently served as an assistant cross-country and track coach at Alcorn State for three seasons, said the team’s work during the offseason showed when they arrived back on campus.

“The team came in probably in the best shape that any VCU cross-country team has been in in a while,” Stephens said. “I think our biggest kind of challenge is balancing volume and the intensity that we work at — so finding that sweet spot of when we work hard and when we’re still working out and we kind of just take it easy.”

Stephens said he hopes this season is a fresh start for the program.

“The hope for the season is that we are just going to get better,” Stephens said. “This is like year zero.”

Leach added that the team is inspired to run well under

the new coach and believes the past track season’s momentum will carry into the cross-country season.

“There has been a lot leading up to this, and there has been a lot of disappointment and frustration [over] the last three years,” Leach said. “I think there is a lot of momentum from the spring and winter [seasons]. I think the team is really rallied around what we are trying to do this year and the progress we are making, so I am really excited to see the first meet this weekend.”

The women’s track and field team won its third outdoor Atlantic 10 title in 2021 and Stephens wants to carry that success into the cross-country program. Neither the men’s or women’s team has won the A-10 crown in cross-country or had an individual win the title.

“We are going to be striving to ultimately win a conference championship in men’s and women’s cross-country,” Stephens said. “We have a real opportunity to be much better than we have been in years past.”

The team hopes it can set a new standard for future cross-country runners at VCU.

“I think we are going to place a lot better than we ever have at the conference meet at the end of the season,” Leach said. “Just aside from that, laying down the framework and the culture for what the next four, five, ten years down the line will look like for VCU cross-country.”

Cross-country will kick off its season at the Spider Alumni Open on Saturday in Mechanicsville, Virginia.

Noah Peterson.
Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics



GAME RESULTS

AUGUST 26

WOMEN’S SOCCER - VS. WAKE FOREST
LOST 2-0

MEN’S SOCCER - AT NO.7 WAKE FOREST
WON 2-0

AUGUST 27

VOLLEYBALL - VS. ILLINOIS STATE
WON 3-1
JMU Invitational

NO. 23 FIELD HOCKEY - VS. AMERICAN
LOST 2-1 (OT)

AUGUST 28

VOLLEYBALL - AT JAMES MADISON
WON 3-0
JMU Invitational

AUGUST 29

WOMEN’S SOCCER - AT LIBERTY
WON 2-1

VOLLEYBALL - VS. HIGH POINT
LOST 3-1
JMU Invitational

MEN’S SOCCER - AT NO. 4 UNC
TIE 1-1

UPCOMING GAMES

SEPTEMBER 2

VOLLEYBALL - VS. TULANE
11 a.m.
Four Point Tallahassee Seminole Volleyball Invitational

WOMEN’S SOCCER - AT ODU
7 p.m.

VOLLEYBALL - VS. SAMFORD
4 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 3

VOLLEYBALL - AT FLORIDA STATE
6:30 p.m.
Four Point Tallahassee Seminole Volleyball Invitational

SEPTEMBER 4

CROSS COUNTRY - SPIDER ALUMNI OPEN
9:15 a.m.

MEN’S SOCCER - AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL
7 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 5

FIELD HOCKEY - AT VILLANOVA
12 p.m.

WOMEN’S SOCCER - AT EAST CAROLINA
1 p.m.

On this day

In 1939, Germany sent troops to invade Poland, sparking World War II.



Five violins are displayed at the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia's portion of the "Violins of Hope" exhibit. Two other sections of the same exhibit are on display at the Holocaust Museum and Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Photo by Megan Lee

'Violins of Hope RVA' honors Holocaust survivors, highlights connections to Virginia

SAHARA SRIRAMAN
Spectrum Editor

BEAUTIFUL, POLISHED WOODEN violins sit delicately on their stands, surrounded by panes of glass, each telling a painful and personal story of the horrors experienced during the Holocaust.

"Violins of Hope RVA," an exhibit featuring violins that endured the Holocaust, utilizes these instruments to tell the stories of those who survived it. Donated by survivors of the Holocaust and restored in Israel, the violins can be seen at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia and the Virginia Museum of History and Culture from Aug. 4 to Oct. 24.

Martina James Nalley, the project manager of Violins of Hope RVA, was approached by the Virginia Holocaust Museum to head the exhibit over two years ago. The project wanted to create a citywide partnership by including other museums in the exhibit to convey how the Holocaust affected different communities.

"It's an exhibit that tells the impact of music and arts at a time of war and, I think, destruction and devastation. Violins and music, in general, provided hope to these individuals who were in the concentration camps," James Nalley said.

She said the exhibit is also meant to educate people on the Holocaust, through the telling of the stories of people involved and the continued impact it has.

This exhibit tells the stories of those in Richmond and across the state, James Nalley said. Their proximity of the stories forces people who view them to think about the impact of the Holocaust even decades later.

"You really walk away with a greater sense of understanding, but you also walk away from each of these exhibits with a different understanding because they're all told from a different perspective," James Nalley said.

She said the Black History Museum focuses on how music played a major part in social justice movements while a lot of the violins at the Holocaust Museum are connected specifically to survivors.

James Nalley said one of the violins at the Holocaust Museum is the Auschwitz

violin, which was played in the Auschwitz concentration camp and was used by the Nazis to trick people entering the camp into believing that the camp was a safe place when they arrived.

The VMHC and the Virginia Holocaust Museum are displaying seven violins each while the Black History Museum has five, totaling 19 violins in total. There are 58 restored violins in total — those that will not be displayed in the museums will be played at the three concerts featuring the Richmond Symphony on Sept. 9, 10 and 12.

“

The whole hope was to bring this to as many people as possible, and Richmond has responded.”

Samuel Asher, executive director at the Virginia Holocaust Museum

"It shows you what quality craftsmanship that these violins have that they've lasted this long," James Nalley said.

William Rasmussen, the senior museum collections curator at the VMHC, said the museum wanted to participate in the project to illustrate the importance of the Holocaust and how it affected Virginia's history.

"This struck us, initially, as a different way to approach a very ugly story and turn it into a beautiful story," Rasmussen said.

He said there are four stories that connect the Holocaust and Virginia in their exhibit highlights. The first was about the Quanza, a Portuguese cargo ship used by hundreds of Jewish people to escape Europe and come to the United States and Mexico. About 80 of the survivors got off the ship in Norfolk, Virginia.

The second story looks at Hyde Farm-land, which Rasmussen said was established by the Thalheimer family in Nottoway

County as an agricultural school, bringing in about 30 Jewish agriculture students from Germany.

Rasmussen said the third encompasses the impact of the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which prohibited interracial marriage and defined "white" as someone completely Caucasian. Rasmussen said it strengthened the supremacy movements in Germany and America, making it difficult for Jewish people to immigrate to America.

He said the last story looks at the story of Holocaust survivor and longtime Richmond resident, Alan Zimm. He died last year at the age of 99.

Rasmussen encourages people to visit the exhibits to give these stories the attention they deserve by simply experiencing them through the violins, which he said were a large part of Jewish culture.

"[Violins] can carry deep emotion as well as rhythm and happiness, so it's a versatile instrument," Rasmussen said.

Samuel Asher, the executive director at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, said that he wanted to bring the exhibit to Richmond because he knew the monumental effect it would have on the residents. The other two museums wanted to be part of the exhibit to ensure it would reach more people.

"We all agreed we could have a much broader audience and we could each tell different stories," Asher said.

Asher said that over 70 of his family members were killed during the Holocaust, giving this project a larger impact for him and allowing him to honor their life through art while acknowledging the horrors they faced.

Asher said the Richmond community has shown immense support for this exhibit. The first two concerts

have sold out and the number of people viewing the exhibits has increased since they opened.

"The whole hope was to bring this to as many people as possible, and Richmond has responded," Asher said.

Since there will be concerts in other parts of the state, including the Tidewater area, Asher said this project's effect is not limited to the Richmond area.

"It's very important that in times like we have now, when there's a lot of discord in our country, that we try and pull together," Asher said. "If we can come together and we can stand up against racism and intolerance and antisemitism, that's what we need to do to help our country and help our community."



The Moshe Weinstein Violin, above, is on display at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Photo by Lily Doshi

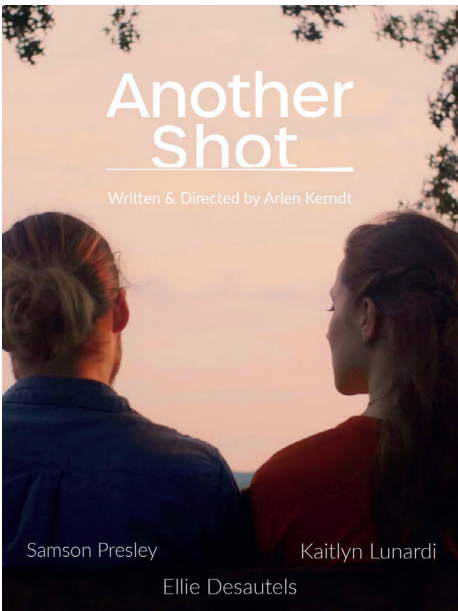
‘ANOTHER SHOT’:

New short film explores the transgender experience

HADIA MOOSVI
Contributing Writer

Four years ago, VCU alumnus Arlen Kerndt didn’t expect his name to be on a big screen. Now, Kerndt’s short film is premiering soon at the Richmond International Film Festival.

“It’s so affirming to get that kind of affirmation from a festival that runs in the city that gave this film the life that it has,” Kerndt said. “Playing it on a big screen is a completely different ballgame.”



The film poster for “Another Shot.” Photo courtesy of Kahlil Shepard

“Another Shot” follows the story of a transgender man named Logan, played by transgender actor Samson Presley, and his ex-girlfriend Mara. The film shows the beginnings of Logan’s gender transition as he slowly loses Mara during the process. They both reunite years later to see if their relationship can be rekindled under new circumstances.

“It’s a film that I wanted to make to just humanize trans people and the way that trans people live and connect in the world,” Kerndt said.

Kerndt said the film falls under the romantic-comedy genre, and he involved comedic elements to show a lighthearted side of the transgender experience that he didn’t find in many other films and stories.

“Humor isn’t the first thing that comes to mind when you think of LGBTQ stories because they’re very fraught with trauma and complications,” Kerndt said. “Seeing this and talking to some other people I was like, ‘I want to write something funny. I want to find humor and the experience of trans existence in a way that hopefully helps people have a laugh.’”

Kaitlyn Lunardi, who plays the role of Mara in the film, said the comedic relief in the film allowed for moments of joy and humanity.

“Instead of just being this really arduous process of figuring out identity and figuring out everything to do with transitioning, there was actually room to laugh, to breathe, to feel like you’re still alive,” Lunardi said.



“Another Shot,” directed by VCU alumnus Arlen Kerndt, centers around the transgender experience. The film is premiering at the Richmond International Film Festival on Sept. 8. Photo courtesy of Kahlil Shepard

Kerndt said he began to write the film during the summer of 2018. It took two years to complete the entire film.

Though the process took time, Kerndt said his experiences in the VCU Advanced Media Production Technology Program allowed him to execute his ideas, workshop the script and cultivate a team to help produce the film.

Julian Pozzi, VCU professor of screenwriting and cinema production, said Kerndt was a student in his spring semester screenwriting course. He helped Kerndt throughout the filming and scripting process before he became executive producer of the film.

Around midterm season of the screenwriting course, Pozzi said he allows his students to choose one script in the screenwriting class to eventually produce together.

“I ended up being lucky enough to get my story chosen, and it was really affirming to have such a tight-knit community and to just ultimately feel fully supported about this story,” Kerndt said.

Kerndt said while this is his first student film and his first contribution to transgender media, something he hopes to continue

to add to in the future. He also hopes to use his influence as a director to spark conversations about transgender stories.

“There’s such low representation in media of trans actors,” Kerndt said. “You have to be willing to do that work to find the trans actors and nonbinary actors who are gonna play the role and give the performance that you want.”

During the filming process, Kerndt said he and his team were backed by many Richmond companies that offered their space for filming, including Tang & Biscuit, which was used for the film’s cafe scene and Thirsty’s Bar & Grill, which Kerndt noted as a LGBTQ+ community bar.

“So many levels of this film were supported by the Richmond community,” Kerndt said. “I can’t look at this film and just not think about the two years that I spent in Richmond.”

The film is being shown at the Byrd Theatre on Sept. 8 at 9:05 p.m. Tickets for the film can be found on the Richmond International Film Festival website, rvafilmfestival.com.

VCU alumna finds success with international Irish dancing company

ZAHRA NDIRANGU
Contributing Writer

Morgan Bullock began dancing at the age of three, but recalls being immediately enamored with the style of Irish dance after watching a recital at her dance school at the age of 10.

“From then on I just knew I wanted to do it,” the VCU alumna said. “The next time there was enrollment for dance classes, I enrolled.”

Eleven years later, Bullock has spent over half her life dedicated to the sport.

“She has always had a natural gift for Irish dance,” said Mary Michael, Bullock’s former dance mate at the Baffa Academy of Irish Dance. “She is someone who while she worked hard, she didn’t have to work as hard because she was just graceful and gifted and a wonderful dancer.”

Now, the VCU alumna is one of the newest members of the notable Irish dance show Riverdance, joining them on their U.K. tour from Aug. 27 to Dec. 14.

“It means the world to me because I think it’s pretty much every Irish dancer’s dream to be a part of Riverdance,” Bullock said. “At one point it seemed so unattainable, so now that I’m here doing it it’s just so surreal.”

“I’m not surprised that Riverdance offered her this opportunity,” said former dance instructor Amy Habel of Crossroads Irish Dance Academy. “She is just a fabulous performer and not a lot of people have that natural gift.”

Bullock gained internet fame in 2020 after posting a video of her dancing to Megan Thee Stallion and Beyonce’s song “Savage (Remix)” on TikTok. The video gained over 1.3 million views and catapulted Bullock’s career, garnering support from Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar and the Riverdance Irish dance troupe.

“

Richmond is always and will always be home to me. I’ve always been met with so much love and support for what I do and people think it’s really cool and I love that.”

Morgan Bullock, VCU alumna

“It was completely unexpected,” Bullock said. “I never posted it with the intention of millions of people seeing it, it was kind of just me having fun.”

Despite gaining popularity through international Irish dancing, her roots lie in the Richmond area, where she received most of her dance instruction in her early years through college.

“She was such a dedicated dancer,” Habel said. “She worked very hard. She was

one of those who always asked questions, which is always important. But she gave 100% in anything that she did and she was one that never let anything stand in her way either.”

Within the Richmond area, Bullock has trained with Crossroads Irish Dance Academy and now trains with the Baffa Academy of Irish Dance in Midlothian, Virginia, in addition to pursuing her master’s degree in elementary education at VCU.

“Irish dancing in Richmond was a really good way to start her career,” Michael said. “The Richmond community in general is just very enriching and accepting of different cultures and different arts.”

Bullock credits the Richmond community as a place of immense growth for her, both in her dance life and personal life.

“Richmond is always and will always be home to me,” Bullock said. “I’ve always been met with so much love and support for what I do and people think it’s really cool and I love that.”

Bullock said that she does not take her status as a symbol of Black representation within Irish dancing lightly. She is aware of the impact she has as one of the few Black Irish dancers in a traditionally white art form.

However, accompanying her status as a Black Irish dancer, Bullock has been accused of cultural appropriation. Bullock said she works to combat this hate with education, emphasizing the difference between stealing from a culture without acknowledging its origins and appreciating it.



Morgan Bullock. Photo courtesy of Morgan Bullock

“I really immerse myself in the culture and I think that is very evident in my knowledge of the dance and Irish culture,” Bullock said.

For Bullock, dancing with the Riverdance Irish dance troupe is a personal dream that has now come to fruition.



From left: “If Bells Could Talk” by Radcliffe Bailey, “Rise of the Delta” by Whitfield Lovell and “King of Arms” by Rashaad Newsome. These art pieces are included at “The Dirty South” exhibit, which is on display at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts until Sept. 6. Photo by Travis Fullerton

‘THE DIRTY SOUTH’

honoring and understanding the Black experience

PARKER BARNES
Contributing Writer

THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF the American South, experienced between the walls of an art museum, make up “The Dirty South” exhibit, told through the lens of the Black experience in America.

The exhibit, which is on display at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, includes a diverse modality of art, including paintings, videos, sculptures, photography, artifacts, stages and even a room made of vinyl and other materials, resembling a church.

The exhibit opened at the VMFA on May 22. The exhibit is entering its last week at the museum — the last day it will be available to view is Sept. 6.

Valerie Cassel Oliver, curator of the exhibit, said that it has garnered immense support from the Richmond community since it first opened.

“You hope that project that you present will be impactful — but to really feel that impact in a more immediate sense, it’s really quite humbling,” Oliver said.

The art in the exhibit explores the relationship between the Black experience and the American South, including the beliefs, history and culture that define the region.

“It’s a very honest exhibit of the Black experience, particularly in the South,” said exhibit attendee Sherrar Gardner of her first impression of “The Dirty South.”

“Soundsuit” by Nick Cave, right, is included in “The Dirty South” exhibit, which is on display at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Photo by Travis Fullerton



A section in the exhibit, titled “Landscape,” explores how nature, such as the plants and geographical features in the South, create a background that frames life in the region.

“

The thing that stands out to me the most is that it feels very honoring and celebratory, without making a spectacle out of Black suffering.”

Charles Lewis, exhibit attendee

The “Sinners and Saints” section of the exhibit represents the importance of religion and heritage in the region, further illustrated through multimodal art pieces throughout this section.

“Sinners and Saints” makes use of the immersive quality of art through a stage display, a literal “wall of sound” created by a stack of speakers.

“The thing that stands out to me the most is that it [the exhibit] feels very honoring and celebratory, without making a spectacle out of Black suffering,” said Charles Lewis, an exhibit attendee.

“Black Corporality,” another section of the exhibit, is specifically about the complexity of the Black body, and its role in carrying on traditions and culture.

This section introduces hip-hop and its relationship to other genres of music, as well as its place within Black culture.

According to Oliver, a relationship between visual and sonic art is prevalent in this exhibit and is reflected in the artists themselves,

which he said helps expand on the Black experience.

“What I hear from people is just that they feel a sense of openness, vulnerability, awareness,” Oliver said.

These same raw feelings are evident throughout and can be seen in the variety of artist backgrounds, ranging from trained professionals to casual artists.

“I wanted a range of visual art expression, not just contemporary, not just academically trained artists, but people who are closer to the ground,” Oliver said.

“The Dirty South” will only be on display at the VMFA until Sept. 6 before it is displayed in other museums around the country.

“It’s bittersweet, but it isn’t meant to last forever,” Oliver said.



“Xquisite Liquorsoul” by Nari Ward. Photo by Travis Fullerton

EDITOR'S LIST OF FILMS TO WATCH

“At Eternity’s Gate” (2018)

This biographical drama looks at the last years of Vincent Van Gogh’s life in southern France between 1888 and 1890. This film examines the art he experimented with during this time along with the mental illnesses he struggled with.

Available on Netflix | 78% Rotten Tomatoes

“Lady Bird” (2017)

This classic coming-of-age movie, starring Saoirse Ronan, is filled with humor and drama as it follows high school senior, Christine McPherson, as she figures out what she wants her future to look like while simultaneously living out her last months in her hometown in Sacramento, California. This film was nominated for five Academy Awards in 2018, including Best Picture.

Available on Netflix | 99% Rotten Tomatoes

“Marriage Story” (2019)

A stage director, played by Adam Driver, and his wife, played by Scarlett Johansson decide to split, following ongoing marital problems. However, the split turns the two against one another as they both hire legal representation and fight for custody of their son. This film shows the messy and often hostile process of modern divorces.

Available on Netflix | 94% Rotten Tomatoes

“The Social Network” (2010)

This biographical film about Harvard student and later CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg shows how he created and expanded the social media site, as well as the problems he faced while doing so. The film tells the story of the early stages of the website through a series of flashbacks while lawsuit hearings over ownership of the idea are happening in present time.

Available on Netflix | 96% Rotten Tomatoes

“The Kindergarten Teacher” (2018)

A kindergarten teacher, played by Maggie Gyllenhaal, becomes obsessed with helping one of her students reach his full potential after she hears him recite a poem he wrote. As she and the student form a relationship, the teacher goes to shocking lengths to cultivate his prodigious talent.

Available on Netflix | 90% Rotten Tomatoes

“The Woman in the Window” (2021)

This psychological thriller starring Amy Adams follows the life of an agoraphobic woman, previously a child psychologist, who stays isolated in her house after a tragedy that makes her afraid to leave the safety of her home. After she witnesses a shocking act of violence in the neighbor’s house across the street, she struggles with aligning her memories with the facts.

Available on Netflix | 26% Rotten Tomatoes

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

CT Opinions

Quote of the week

"The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and the persecuted of all nations and religions."

— GEORGE WASHINGTON

REFUGEES ARE NOT HERE ON VACATION; *they are fighting for their lives*

TAGWA SHAMMET
Opinions Editor

TAKE A GLANCE AT OUR LOVELY NATION: the United States. Formerly occupied by American Indians, the nation shifted greatly in regards to demographics once white colonizers made their way to the land.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue and killed off this land's natives. Columbus himself was an immigrant. Our founding fathers were immigrants. Our first president was an immigrant.

The United States is a nation of immigrants that is riddled with xenophobia.

Can you see how twisted and backwards that is? I mean, if a country is composed of immigrants, it can't possibly hate other immigrants.

Xenophobia is defined as a fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or anything related to such. The term is infamously paired with discrimination against immigrants.

You see, this nation does not belong to the white man. But I can understand how that concept is harder to grasp, seeing how white men have consistently killed off other immigrants throughout this nation's history.

On Aug. 15, the Taliban — an ultraconservative and violent group of Islamic extremists — took control of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital city. The seizure comes mere days after President Joe Biden began the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The Taliban, who were previously ousted from

control of Afghanistan by the United States, have regained power and begun their inhumane terrorism again.

Since the fall of Kabul, the United States has evacuated over 82,000 people. Holding a combination of American civilians, troops and Afghan nationals who have helped the United States, this airlift was the largest evacuation in American history, according to the Associated Press.

As Americans return home to their loved ones, Afghan natives will now find themselves in uncharted territory. The United States is granting entrance to Afghans who have obtained some form of special visa, or have at least applied for it and have yet to hear back. Upon their arrival, they will be housed in military bases in states across the nation such as: Virginia, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Texas.

As they face the turmoil of a new nation, a new language and a new life, they will also have to deal with the brutal realities of being an immigrant in the United States.

Living in a post-9/11 world, Muslim immigrants have faced an unbelievable amount of xenophobia and Islamophobia. I was born in the United States. I speak the language, I know the culture, I am American. But, I am also a Sudanese national. I also speak their language, I know their culture, I am Sudanese.

I have dealt with a large amount of Islamophobia and xenophobia. I have been accused of extremism, double checked at

TSA lines and flat out been called a terrorist. But, there's no difference nationality-wise between white boy Billie from down the street and myself. We both hold that blue passport.

So, I can only imagine the hatred and disrespect Afghans will endure upon their arrival. As they immigrate to the country of immigrants, they will be hated for nothing more than their nationality.

It still baffles me to think that one can truly bully a refugee simply because they are fleeing their homeland. It almost seems tedious to explain the realities of a refugee. They are not coming to the United States to try their first overly inflated burger from McDonald's or to gamble their life's savings away in Las Vegas. They are fleeing persecution, violence, death; they are trying to save their lives.

As they do so, they need support and kindness — not anger and even more violence. From Japanese internment camps during World War II, to the mass deportation of Mexican civilians; from the white-washing of Italian immigrants, to the never-ending Islamophobia, the United States has had its fair share of xenophobia.



Illustration by Anna Yang

What people aren't getting is that if it were up to these refugees, they would return to their home, to their culture, to their family in a heartbeat if there was promise of a safe life. Unfortunately, there's not.

Refugees are fighting for their lives. As we sit in the comfort of our nation's stability, it is near impossible to know the pain that these innocent people are enduring. However, it takes nothing from us to treat them with kindness and respect. It's the least we can do.

ISHAAN NANDWANI
Contributing Writer

On Aug. 15, the world watched as the Taliban took control of Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul and its government, declaring an end to the Afghanistan War that had waged on for years, and the dawn of a new era of leadership in the country.

The outcome, of course, is one that has been feared and dreaded by those around the world for years. The fall of the Afghan government marks the beginning of a regime of terror and persecution of basic human rights.

When I think of what this means for women and minorities, I'm horrified. Innocent Afghan civilians have already suffered so much at the hands of this war, and now start a new life under an autocratic rule.

The turning point of the Afghan government's recent fall was President Joe Biden's decision to formally withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan earlier this month. This decision was indisputably what led to the Taliban's conquest of the government, but the true seeds of destruction were sown long before: a consequence of years of U.S. intervention that have done more harm than good.

U.S. troops have been stationed in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years. After



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

the devastating 9/11 attacks that ravaged the fabric of our nation, President George W. Bush retaliated against al-Qaida — the terrorist group responsible for the attacks — by launching airstrikes in their home base of Afghanistan, attempting to eliminate the Taliban forces that had taken root.

This unwavering need to wash out the Taliban resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent Afghan people. The concept of collateral damage is sickening. To justify the killing of these innocent people in the name of squashing terrorism is extremely backward. These poor people went from being victims of the Taliban to victims of the American government as well.

Despite the U.S.' initial victory against the Taliban, their forces remained in Afghanistan, increasing as the years went by. Afghan natives had to begin resigning themselves to

these foreigners on their land. As Americans, we pride ourselves in our governance. A government for the people, by the people. Yet, the Afghan people were not given the same courtesy as American troops littered their nation.

What the U.S. didn't realize was that as their military remained deployed in Afghanistan, support of the Taliban grew. Like I said before, Afghan people became victims of two forces. It comes as no surprise that some of them found a lesser evil in people who resembled them.

With the Afghan population split between supporting either the United States or the Taliban, those who did not choose the Taliban met danger this past month. Many of the nation's people feel unsafe with American departure, especially those who supported our government. Afghan interpreters who assisted the American government with

translations became enemies of the Taliban.

Sohail Pardis served as an interpreter for the American government. After receiving a multitude of death threats from the Taliban, he was beheaded by them and branded a traitor to his people. This could be the fate of many Afghan civilians left behind.

As troops continue to withdraw from Afghanistan, President Biden has defended his choice in a press conference, stating, "Afghanistan political leaders gave up and fled

the country. The Afghan military collapsed, sometimes without trying to fight."

This assertion is simply too shallow. The Afghan government did not simply "give up" or surrender. To say that they did discounts the endless hours of toil, sacrifice and service that their troops engaged in before finally relenting.

The U.S. created the storm in Afghanistan that led to the Taliban takeover of the government. And in the Afghan people's moment of greatest need, the United States made a decision that left these innocent people defenseless against the same terror America created.

You see, the United States never sought to clean up their mess. Afghanistan has never known — and perhaps never will know — peace. And the United States has to take a part of the blame.

Sweet Deal by Lauren Johnson



You too! by Craig Blacksmith



Connections by Nick Siviter



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Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Nichols Lewis

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Sorrowful tune

136

Free-for-all

137

Red Sea land

9

Egyptian site of a historic 1799 discovery

10

NFL passing stat

11

Nueve y uno

12

Bat prefix

13

Spicy food truck items

14

Had some

13-Down

15

Purplish veggie

16

TV weather promo about a storm threat?

17

Biblical twin

18

Entertainment center sites

20

Actor Morales

23

Iraq War weapon: Abbr.

28

Vinyl revival items: Abbr.

31

Low USMC rank

32

MLB Hall of Famer

34

Family guys

36

Bar on a truck

38

Chef's creation

40

Cavern

42

phenomenon

43

[Bo-ring!]

44

Absorbent fabric

45

Many an MIT grad

46

Lawless role

47

Coup d'___

48

Routing word

49

Respected figure

50

Concerto finale, perhaps

51

Depend

55

Poetic contraction

58

Hot spot service

59

ER demand

61

Research

63

university with a Boston campus

66

Agronomist's concern

67

School near Windsor

69

Org. created by the 1933 Banking Act

70

Sense

72

Shades

73

Early number?

74

Buzzed

75

Familiar greeting

76

Fall mall hiree

77

Ship-to-ship greetings

78

Quarters for a spell caster?

81

Actor Schreiber

82

"I'm buying!"

83

Moistens

86

Country whose name ends in the same three letters as its capital

88

Debtor's note

89

Gull relative

92

Lynn's father

93

worked in one

95

Primate genus

99

Pain pill target

101

Ignore

102

Provider of shade

103

Harder to get

104

Corn unit

106

Fast flight

111

U.K. military award

112

Goal of an accord

113

Flanged fastener

115

Fashion initials

116

___ face

117

Peace goddess

118

"The Gondoliers" bride

119

Playwright Simon

121

Sierra's "other"

122

Carpenter's wedge

124

"Auld Lang ___"

127

Cork's home

129

Maya ___, Vietnam Veterans Memorial designer

130

ISP option

131

French king

136

Just right

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BEGONE by Mark McClain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11	12		13	14	15	16	17	18	
19								20						21						
22							23							24						
25					26					27		28			29					
30			31	32		33				34		35		36						
			37			38			39		40		41				42	43		
44	45	46					47	48	49			50		51						
52						53				54		55		56						
57			58	59		60			61		62		63			64				
65					66		67				68			69	70					
			71			72	73				74	75								
76	77	78						79						80			81	82	83	
84					85		86		87		88	89		90						
91			92	93		94		95		96						97				
98					99		100		101					102	103	104				
105						106		107					108							
		109							110		111	112	113		114			115	116	117
118	119				120		121	122		123			124				125			
126				127			128		129						130	131				
132							133						134							
135							136						137							

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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

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

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