



The Commonwealth Times

‘FINDING COMMON GROUND’



Former President Barack Obama speaks at a campaign event on Saturday for gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe. The event took place outside VCU’s Cabell Library. Photo by Megan Lee

Former President Obama visits VCU ahead of November elections, campaigns for Virginia Democrats

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

FORMER PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA traveled to Richmond on Saturday to campaign for Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe. The rally was held at The Compass, located outside of the James Branch Cabell Library on VCU’s Monroe Park campus.

“I want you to get fired up inside and then go vote,” Obama said.

Obama was the last speaker in a large group of guests who expressed support for McAuliffe’s gubernatorial campaign, including Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, Gov. Ralph Northam, Sen. Tim Kaine and Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison.

Mark Herring, who is running for reelection as attorney general, and Del. Hala Ayala, candidate for lieutenant governor, are running on the Democratic ticket with McAuliffe. Both candidates spoke prior to McAuliffe and Obama’s appearance, which was accompanied by Obama expressing support for all campaigns.

“Terry [McAuliffe] has brought the same grit and determination to everything he’s done,” Obama said. “From public service, to business, to being a husband, to being a father of five amazing children — so the guy knows how to work hard.”

McAuliffe was 72nd governor of Virginia, from 2014 to 2018. He is running for a second term against Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin and Liberation party candidate Princess Blanding.

During the event, the crowd booed when Obama brought up Youngkin’s proposed policies.

“Don’t boo, vote!” Obama said. “Booing doesn’t do nothing. Booing might make you feel better, but it’s not going to get Terry elected.”

During his speech, Obama called the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol building, “the biggest threat to democracy” in his lifetime.

The event was organized by VCU Young Democrats, which “promotes American progress and the Democratic Party on campus, in Virginia, and across the country,” according to its Facebook page.

Senior political science major Mackenzie LaBar, is the president of VCU Young Democrats. LaBar said Obama has been an inspiration to him, partly because LaBar is biracial. LaBar referred to his dad as a “country boy” from New York and said his mother is from Clarendon, Jamaica.

“It always gave me like the extra shot of energy, that extra shot of motivation and steam,” LaBar said. “That I can be, you know, somebody who could possibly be as great as the president one day, and that’s been somebody who I’ve looked up to for a long time.”

LaBar said he reached out to other political organizations on campus, such as VCU Votes and VCU’s chapter of the NAACP, to ensure students were represented at the event on Saturday. LaBar estimated a total of between 60 and 100 students from those organizations were in attendance at the event, among a crowd of 2,000.

During his time at the event, LaBar said he was able to meet with some of the guests, including McAuliffe, Obama, Herring, Ayala and Stoney, to speak about the current state of the Democratic party in Virginia.

“With Terry McAuliffe, we talked a lot about how to get votership up, especially among students and people in the communities. We also talked about how Republicans are passing a lot of anti-Democratic rights legislation,” LaBar said.

At the event, McAuliffe took the stage before Obama to speak about his campaign and his previous achievements as governor of Virginia.

“I did it, folks, by finding common ground,” McAuliffe said. “I’ll work with anybody. It doesn’t matter to me what your party persuasion is.”

McAuliffe’s other opponent, Blanding, is the sister of VCU alumnus Marcus-David Peters, who was shot and killed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis on Interstate 95. She is a candidate from the Liberation party whose name will appear on the gubernatorial ballot alongside McAuliffe and Youngkin.

Sophomore film student Kam Branch said she did not attend the event but was present on campus near The Compass at that time. Branch is not planning on voting, but would choose to vote for Blanding if she did vote.

“I do not believe in Terry McAuliffe at all, and I don’t think that Obama’s endorsing him changes anything,” Branch said. “Terry McAuliffe has already been governor. He is also a white man

which means he inherently doesn’t care about Black issues.”

As the president of Young Democrats, LaBar said he believes every person eligible should vote in this election, because “there’s a lot at stake.” He said the decision to abstain from voting is “counterproductive.”

“I would say that in order to promote love and equality and making sure that we live in a society that’s inclusive and accepting,” LaBar said, “I don’t think we can make harsh judgments based on very surface level and superficial things like race.”



Gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe campaigned on VCU’s campus on Saturday with former President Barack Obama. Photo by Megan Lee



Stories of the week

NATIONAL: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approved Pfizer BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson booster shots.

INTERNATIONAL: A military coup unseated the Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his cabinet on Monday.

Q&A with VCU’s newly hired director of fraternity, sorority life

JOSEPHINE WALKER
Contributing Writer

JOSEPH WHEELESS, NEW DIRECTOR of Fraternity and Sorority Life, started in his new role at VCU on Oct. 11, after eight years at the College of William & Mary. Wheeless was formerly the assistant director of Student Leadership Development at the college and is currently finishing a doctoral program there.

Wheeless said his position was created in the spring, following the death of freshman Adam Oakes.

Oakes died at an off-campus residence on Feb. 27 at a pledge event for the Delta Chi fraternity. On May 25, his death was confirmed to be due to ethanol toxicity, a type of alcohol poisoning, by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Oakes’ family said their son was hazed and forced to drink a bottle of whiskey at the fraternity event.

The university launched an independent investigation after Oakes’ death through consulting firm Dyad Strategies on March 2, to conduct a comprehensive review of the university’s Greek life, according to a university statement. The creation of this role was suggested in the Dyad report’s findings.

Charles Klink, senior vice provost for student affairs, stated in a press release that Wheeless was chosen because of his policy development, relationship building and strategic direction experience.

Klink put together five working groups to research Dyad’s findings and determine the best way to implement them on campus, according to Wheeless. He also said each group is expected to publish its findings by Dec. 1.

In response to the death of Oakes, VCU announced on May 28 that Delta Chi was permanently expelled from campus as a student organization. The university has also paused recruitment for all Greek life organizations until February 2022.

VCU spokesperson Matt Lovisa stated in an email that the competitive search for the new position was conducted from June 2 to July 2, with two applicants being brought to campus for interviews.

Wheeless sat down with The Commonwealth Times to discuss his first week in office. He began at VCU eight months after Oakes’ death.

Some of Wheeless’ responses have been edited for clarity.

How was your first week?

Wheeless: My first week was great. I think with any new job, there’s always a transition and sometimes, you know, that can create some stress. But it’s been great.

What made you want to transfer from William & Mary to VCU?



Joe Wheeless assumed the newly created position of Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life on Nov. 11. He previously worked in student affairs at The College of William and Mary. Photo courtesy of Joe Wheeless

Wheeless: So I was at William & Mary for the last eight years, as an assistant director. So the structure there was a little different — I was doing very similar work but we didn’t have a standalone Fraternity and Sorority Life Office. And so, when the director position was posted I had a couple of people reach out to me, but also my boss pulled me aside and said, “I hope you’re applying for the job, because I think you’re ready to be a director on your own,” and I already have a huge friend group that I’ve established in Richmond already. So it was a natural, like — if I’m going to transition, easier to transition down the road. I’m also still in the Ph.D. program at William & Mary so I’ve still got probably a year or two left in that, so I didn’t want to do a national search and move across the country before I finished that. So, I was ready to move on, not because William & Mary is a bad institution or anything like that, but to move along in my career. Ready for the next steps, and looking around to see what that was; this checked a lot of those boxes.

What would you say are the most important aspects of Greek life?

Wheeless: So, in addition to complementing the college experience I think it also can help a student find a sense of belonging. And that’s an innate human nature, to want to belong. And fraternities and sororities are an avenue to that belongingness, whether it’s to a smaller group on campus, or just belonging to something that’s larger than yourself. If it’s VCU, or whether it’s the national organization. To be able to go beyond VCU and meet people that are in your organization or are at a different institution, but you went through the same rituals and

ceremonies and you have the same type of bonding, having never met before — it’s a pretty powerful experience. It’s like meeting another VCU alumni, right? You all know about the same things. You may have had different experiences in college, but you all know about generally the same stuff.

What findings in the Dyad Strategies report stood out to you?

Wheeless: I think the overall theme that I found with the report is that it seems like the right pieces and the potential for a strong fraternity or sorority community are already here, and support, which seemed to put those pieces in the right place. I wouldn’t have taken this job if I didn’t feel like the overall support from the university was there. Support can look like a lot of different things.

It’s not just staff and dollars. It’s what is the culture like? What is the overall community like? Are there alumni in various different roles? I think it speaks a lot to VCU that almost everyone in the working groups is affiliated with a fraternity or sorority. Not everyone, but a lot of people.

Is there anything in particular that you’re putting in place to help prevent any possible student deaths or illegal activities?

Wheeless: I mean, we’re definitely putting in prevention efforts in terms of looking at the, you know, trainings around hazing prevention and alcohol. Risk management, harm reduction, all that type of stuff. We also need to do the logistics things. And what can we already lean on from our national organizations and umbrella groups that are in place, so our chapters that do membership intake, have a lot more oversight for their intake process. And so making sure that those things are happening. And working with the Interfraternity and Pan-Hellenic councils to create a recruitment process that doesn’t take away from the academic experience, but also elevates the potential new member voice in terms of what they want out of an organization and helps them match up with the right organization.

If a student can make a more informed decision about the type of organization that they join, then that in and of itself is also a prevention strategy, right? So how are we articulating what the expectations are of the VCU community and the VCU fraternity and sorority community?

Even with anti-hazing strategies in place, some organizations, or segments of them will ignore the training. Do you have anything in place that can help root out that type of behavior?

Wheeless: So, I think the university has already implemented an anonymous hazing report form, which I’m familiar with because we have one at William & Mary. And so it’s making sure that everyone knows about that reporting form, and working with our Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Office to help make sure that the systems and structures around that reporting form and just student conduct are in place. Because accountability also is a prevention strategy, when people know that when a report’s made we’re going to do an investigation. An investigation tool is interim actions to kind of pause everything, just for that organization, until we have the outcomes of that. So, you know, making sure that students have the right information around reporting. We have the infrastructure in place to respond to those reports, it’s all a part of that prevention strategy.

Did you feel as though you added a special quality that can transform VCU’s Greek life image?

Wheeless: I mean, yeah, so I think I have the skills and the content knowledge that I can bring to the table. And that was made clear during the interview of, like, what type of person they were looking for. I’m also not one to come in and say VCU has to be just like William & Mary. I want to take what we have, and figure out what’s best for us, for VCU, incorporating the knowledge that I have, what’s standard practice in the fraternity-sorority industry, what access to resources we already have. VCU is a larger institution that has access to a lot more stuff. So how are we integrating what we already have into the fraternity-sorority community as opposed to reinventing the wheel? So yes, all of these other things I’m looking to bring together to hopefully strengthen the community.

CORRECTION

Last week, in a story about the VCUarts Jazz Fest, the Commonwealth Times stated that the Jazz Department hosted the event. It was the VCUarts Jazz program. The student demographics in Jazz Orchestra I and Jazz Orchestra II were also reported incorrectly in the story.

In the same story, Nick Dancey was said to be in Jazz Orchestra I. Dancey is in Jazz Orchestra II.

The full version of the story is available online at commonwealthtimes.org.

MULTIPLE RACES TO TAKE PLACE ON ELECTION DAY, NOV. 2

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

ELECTION DAY IS ON NOV. 2 AND STUDENTS have the day off of classes in order to have the opportunity to vote in the general election, according to a statement from Dean of Students Reuban Rodriguez.

There are four local elections taking place in the City of Richmond this November. These positions are up for grabs as students and Richmonders head to the polls: governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general and Virginia house positions.

GUBERNATORIAL RACE

Princess Blanding (I)

Terry McAuliffe (D)

Glenn Youngkin (R)

Terry McAuliffe is the Democratic candidate for governor. He previously served as governor of Virginia from 2014 to 2018. He held a rally outside VCU’s Cabell Library on Saturday with former President Barack Obama as a guest speaker.

During his speech, McAuliffe spoke of his commitment to creating bipartisan legislation. He is running on a platform of combating the COVID-19 pandemic and working on the economy in Virginia, according to his website.

“I want Virginia to be the first state in the United States of America to call an end to the COVID-19 pandemic,” McAuliffe said.

Glenn Youngkin is the Republican candidate for Virginia governor. He previously worked at The Carlyle Group, a private equity firm, according to his website. Youngkin is running on policies of cutting taxes, expanding funding for the police, banning critical race theory and investing in transportation infrastructure.

Lauren Windsor, executive producer of The Undercurrent, a self-described

as a “grassroots political web-show for investigative and field reporting,” videotaped Youngkin at an event in Loudoun County saying he is “staunchly, unabashedly pro-life.”

Princess Blanding is running as a member of the Liberation Party. She is the sister of VCU alumnus Marcus-David Peters, who was shot and killed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis in 2018. Blanding stated in an email she “will make certain state tuition is affordable.” Blanding also stated she would focus on the environment if elected to be Virginia governor.

“The future of this planet is all we have, and, as we are seeing in real time with the disintegration of the national climate agenda, the two parties are not taking the environment seriously,” Blanding stated.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR RACE

Hala Alaya (D)

Winsome Sears (R)

Hala Alaya is the Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor. Alaya’s website states that she is campaigning for “women’s right to choose,” and the funding of public transportation.

“Across Virginia, our aging infrastructure makes it harder for our citizens to prosper,” Alaya stated on her website. “We need to invest in our Commonwealth and address infrastructure needs in rural, suburban, and urban communities.”

Winsome Sears is the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor. Sears stated in an email she previously served as the vice president of the Virginia State Board of Education and previously served in the U.S. Marines. Her website states she wants to raise wages for teachers and law enforcement.

“I’m continuing to reach out to voters with my message and listening to their concerns,” Sears stated in an email. “I plan to continue to listen after election day because their concerns won’t magically go away on November 2.”

Both candidates are set to become the first woman of color lieutenant governor in Virginia, if elected.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RACE

Mark Herring (D)

Jason Miyares (R)

Mark Herring is currently attorney general and is running for reelection. During his time in the role, Herring won a case to legalize gay marriage in Virginia, and “defended” the Affordable Care Act, Herring said in a rally for McAuliffe at VCU on Saturday.

“My priority will always be protecting your rights and keeping you safe,” Herring said. “Alongside Terry McAuliffe and Ralph Northam, I have stood as a brick wall against Republican attacks on a woman’s reproductive freedom.”

Jason Miyares is the Republican candidate for attorney general. He is running on a campaign of tightening border security, requiring IDs at polling locations and increasing funding for the police, according to his website.

“We should be funding the police instead of defunding them, and give them the tools they need to succeed,” Miyares states on his website.

VIRGINIA'S 71ST DISTRICT HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE

Jeff Bourne (D)

Nancye Hunter (R)

Jeff Bourne, a Democrat, was originally elected as the 71st district of Virginia representative in 2016, according to Ballotpedia, and is running for reelection.

“As Delegate, I will continue to fight for policies that serve all Virginians,” Bourne said in an email. “I will continue to fight for affordable public higher education in Virginia and will work to improve our public schools so that students are well prepared for post-graduate life.”

Nancye Hunter is the Republican candidate for the 71st district. Campaign issues as outlined on her website include: business and economy, protecting Second Amendment rights and legalizing marijuana.

“I believe marijuana tax dollars should be used to benefit recovering drug addiction programs that have not received the funding that they need and deserve,” Hunter stated on her website.

VIRGINIA'S 69TH DISTRICT HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE

Betsey Carr (D)

Sheila Furey (R)

Betsey Carr is the incumbent Democratic candidate for the 69th district in Virginia. This district expands from south of the university’s campus to Southside Richmond. Some of her campaign points include raising minimum wage and working to address climate change, according to an email from Carr.

“As always, I am knocking on doors, which I do whether or not it’s an election, because it’s important to hear directly from constituents,” Carr stated. “I’m holding meetings, attending events and working to promote our ticket so Democrats can hold the majority in the House and continue the progress we’ve made.”

Sheila Furey is running as the Republican candidate for the 69th district and is a psychiatrist in the Richmond area, according to her website. Furey stated she supports the right for Virginians to own guns. Leading up to the election, Furey said in an interview that she is continuing to campaign as she has the last 10 months by “knocking on doors” and “going on the radio.”

“No government should interfere with a law abiding individual’s right to self defense. As a mother, wife, and champion for civilian protections,” Furey stated. “I will do all within my power to protect your 2nd Amendment Rights and self defense.”

KATRINA LEE
Contributing Writer

Status hearings for university students Alexander Bradley and Christian Rohrbach began this Tuesday, in connection to the hazing of freshman Adam Oakes at a Delta Chi fraternity event that resulted in Oakes’ death in February.

Bradley appeared in court first Tuesday. His attorney, William Dinkin, asked to set the next court date to December. Dinkin asked for this extension to be at least 45 days, in order to discuss the matter of the charges between the defense and prosecution. Both attorneys agreed to the terms of the next court date and did not discuss anything further.

Rohrbach appeared second to discuss his next court dates. Judge William R. Marchant and attorneys on both sides decided to have a seven-person misdemeanor jury over a two-day trial in the upcoming months. They decided on a two-day trial due to the death aspect of the crime. Rohrbach will be submitting for alcohol and drug testing leading up to his court day.

Rohrbach was previously charged with possession of marijuana in 2019, while Bradley has no priors leading up to the court hearing on Tuesday, according to the Richmond Circuit Court website.

After a seven-month investigation, 11 were indicted on Sept. 24 for hazing

JOHN MARSHALL COURTS BUILDING

2 of 11 charged in connection to Adam Oakes’ death appear in court Tuesday

The John Marshall Courts Building is located in downtown Richmond at 400 N. Ninth St. Those charged with hazing VCU freshman Adam Oakes are being tried there. Photo by Alessandro Latour

Oakes: Benjamin Corado, Quinn Kuby, Andrew White, Colin Tran, Robert Fritz, Jason Mulgrew, Enayat Sheikhzad, Riley McDaniel, Alessandro Medina-Villanueva, Bradley and Rohrbach. Six of the 11 — Corado, Kuby, White, Tran, Fritz and Bradley — were also charged with “purchase, giving alcohol to a minor,” according to Richmond Police Department spokesperson Tracy Walker.

Both these charges are class one misdemeanors and are punishable by up to a year of jail time and/or up to \$2,500 in fines, according to Virginia’s legislative information system.

VCU was unable to provide information about Bradley and Rohrbach’s years and disciplinary status at VCU and whether they were members of the Delta Chi chapter, due to student privacy laws, according to VCU spokesperson Michael Porter. VCU was not

able to get back to The Commonwealth Times in time for publication as of Oct. 26.

The next court hearings for Sheikhzad and White will take place on Nov. 1 at 9 a.m., according to the Virginia Judiciary online court system. Sheikhzad is a VCU alumnus and White is not currently enrolled at VCU, according to an email from VCU spokesperson Michael Porter on Sept. 28.

White was charged in 2019 for “failure to pay full time and attention” while driving in Loudoun County, according to the Virginia Judiciary online court system.

Mulgrew has a motion hearing set for Nov. 5. A motion is a pretrial ruling made by a judge, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

There will also be two upcoming discovery court hearings in November for Medina-Villanueva and Fritz. The discovery

hearing for Tran will take place on Dec. 1. Discovery court hearings are formal hearings to exchange information between the parties about the witnesses and evidence that will be presented at trial, according to the American Bar Association.

More than 50% of college students in organizations experience hazing, which includes practices of alcohol consumption, sleep deprivation, humiliation, isolation and more, according to a study conducted by the University of Dayton.

Since Oakes’ death, his family have been advocating for making hazing a felony in Virginia. Oakes’s cousin, Country White, started a petition to gain support for the cause. The petition currently has over 77,000 signatures, as of Oct. 26.

Currently, 13 states have made hazing resulting in injury or death a felony, including Texas, West Virginia, Florida, Utah and more. A felony charge for hazing can lead up to 5 years in prison and \$5,000 in fines according to the Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain law firm.

“Unfortunately, Adam’s death is not the first in the state of Virginia,” White stated in the petition. “There have been at least 9 deaths in Virginia due to hazing! How many more lives must we lose before action is taken?”

Contributing Writer Gabriela de Camargo Gonçalves contributed to this report.

Election Day approaches, VCU students can vote on campus

GABRIELA DE CAMARGO GONÇALVES
Contributing Writer

The November election is approaching, and the organization VCU Votes is encouraging students to make a voting plan, according to the organization’s website.

VCU Votes is a network of VCU students, faculty and staff that promotes voter engagement on campus, according to the organization’s website.

Honors College Senior Associate Dean and VCU Votes Co-Chair Jacqueline Smith-Mason said that VCU Votes primarily supports students on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram — all under the same handle of @vcuvotes — to push out general information about the election and events.

Smith-Mason said it is important for students to vote as they have a voice and need to exercise that voice.

“All of us have a role to play in the issues that face us locally, on a statewide level. It’s really important for students to be engaged and consider all the implications of public policy on them,” Smith-Mason said.

The deadline to submit a request for a ballot-by-mail online has passed on Oct. 22. Voters may request an absentee ballot in person until the Oct. 30 deadline. Early voting closes the Saturday before Election Day, on Oct. 30, the Virginia Department of Elections website stated. Ballots can still be returned by mail or dropped off at the Office of the General Registrar main office located at 2134 W. Laburnum Ave., according to the City of Richmond government website.

VCU Votes now focuses on aiding students on a voter plan. Smith-Mason said

having a voter plan encourages students to know where they are going to vote, when they are going to vote, if they will have a voting buddy and more.

For Smith-Mason, the main objective of VCU Votes is to promote democracy and especially inspire students to really consider issues they care about.

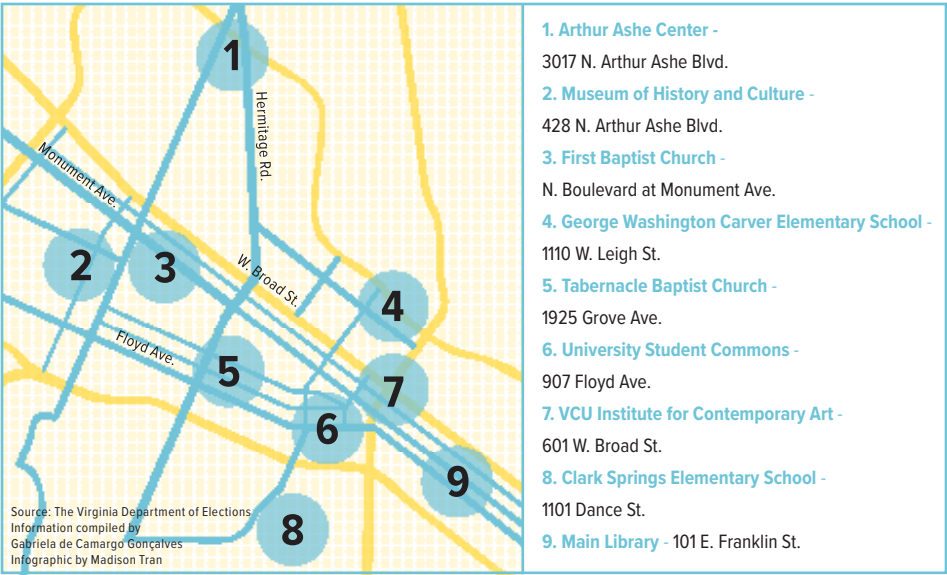
“My hope is that students have specific issues that they are concerned about, whether that is climate change, affordable health care, the environment and sustainability [and] issues around the protection of the rights of vote,” Smith-Mason said.

Polling places will be open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., according to the Virginia Department of Elections website. Polling locations are split by precincts. A precinct, or a voting district, is the smallest unit into which electoral districts are divided, and each one has a specific voting location, according to the United States Census Bureau.

VCU will be closed on Election Day to give students the opportunity to vote, stated Dean of Students Reuban Rodriguez in an announcement.

The University Student Commons, located at 907 Floyd Ave., is a polling location available on campus. Students on campus have to check their polling locations, as they change through the voting districts and vary per university housing. Students registered by the Gladding Residence Center dorm address may vote at the Clark Springs Elementary School, at 1101 Dance St., while students living in Brandt, Rhoads and Johnson Halls may vote at the University Student Commons, according to the City of Richmond government website.

The Virginia Department of Elections website states that polling places are defined



based on the address of where you got registered to vote, so even though students live on campus, not all are assigned to vote on campus, physically.

Other locations near campus include:

- Arthur Ashe Center - 3017 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd.
- First Baptist Church - N. Boulevard at Monument Ave. (N. Mulberry entrance)
- VCU Institute for Contemporary Art - 601 W. Broad St.
- Museum of History and Culture - 428 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd.
- Tabernacle Baptist Church - 1925 Grove Ave.
- George Washington Carver Elementary School - 1110 W. Leigh St.
- Main Library - 101 E. Franklin St.

The service-learning class VCU Votes Campaign, which works with VCU Votes to coordinate campus-wide voter engagement events, is not occurring this semester because the professor was not available, Smith-Mason said. The class will return next fall.

Fifth-year public relations major student Rebecca Elrod works as an intern for professor Judi Crenshaw, at the Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture. Elrod runs VCU Votes’ social media accounts.

“It’s really important that we maintain the voter, and that they can participate in not only the national elections, like the presidential ones, but in local elections and general elections wherever they end up,” Elrod said.

Elrod said she also works with VCU and local organizations, like The Anderson art gallery, to share any voter-related events. Elrod has been working with VCU Votes since the beginning of this fall semester. She said her job mainly consists of content creating for VCU Votes’ social media by making students aware of any necessary political action, and pushing events like tabling to get students registered to vote.

“It’s just really important to get people started out right when they can, and keep them engaged, because we are the new generation of voters and potential political candidates,” Elrod said.

JEREMY TOUSSAINT-BAPTISTE

SET
IT
OFF

OPENING FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29

Set *It Off* is a newly commissioned multi-site exhibition that intends to shake the room. Toussaint-Baptiste invites visitors to consider the implications of sound, visibility, and performance by deeply engaging with the two variations of a monumental, immersive, sonic sculpture installed at the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU and at 1708 Gallery.

Visit icavcu.org for your free ticket and more information.



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Stat of the week

On Oct. 25, men's tennis senior Charles Bertimon became the first Ram to qualify for the ITA Atlantic Super Regionals since the 2015-16 season.



Left: Redshirt-senior midfielder Lyndsey Gutzmer kicks the ball away from Saint Joseph's University on Oct. 24. Right: Redshirt-senior forward Samantha Jerabek dribbles the ball up the field during a match against Saint Joseph's University. Photos by Jay Stonefield

CONFERENCE DOMINATION:

Women's soccer moves past conference competition, sits atop the Atlantic 10 rankings

ARRICK WILSON
Contributing Writer

LAST SEASON, THE VCU WOMEN'S soccer program failed to qualify for the Atlantic 10 championship tournament, losing in a coin flip for the No. 4 seed tie-breaker in the conference tournament to Dayton. This ended the Rams' season with a record of seven wins, four losses and two ties.

Now this season, the Rams have dominated conference play while earning national rankings and winning the A-10 regular-season championship. The Rams also took home their first A-10 regular-season championship in history after defeating the Davidson Wildcats on Thursday, 2-1.

"I think this year, our team culture's really good, and everybody contributes, like people on the bench will cheer for us," said redshirt-senior forward Samantha Jerabek. "People, the subs, coming in that are really good too. So I think this year, it's going to be our year."

The Rams ended their regular season at home, falling to the Saint Joseph's Hawks on Sunday. The Rams lost 1-0, shorting their record-breaking nine-game winning streak. Saint Joseph's junior midfielder Ashley Orendac scored a goal in the 87th minute, breaking the deadlocked contest.

On that night, the ninth-straight win for the Rams tied the program record for the longest winning streak.

Currently, the Rams are ranked first in the A-10, with a record of 13 overall wins and three losses.

"I'm extremely pleased and proud of our performances to create each of those

nine wins, because they were all difficult. You know, none of them came easy to us," said head coach Lindsey Martin, who is now in her ninth season as coach of the women's soccer team.

“

We're really fortunate that [the A-10 tournament] will be at VCU. You know, if we were able to make our way through the quarter, semis and finals, ... I think that's going to be a fun experience for us and one that I hope we're able to create for ourselves."

Lindsey Martin, head coach of VCU women's soccer

Along with becoming regular-season champions, the Rams have earned the No. 1 seed in the A-10 postseason tournament this season, which begins on Oct. 30. Martin attributed this to the team having a "winner's mentality."

"I think for the girls to be able to find a way to win is a culture of winning and it becomes a mentality — and a winner's mentality. I think that that's an important

piece ... heading into this A-10 tournament of having that winner's mentality," Martin said.

Along with placing atop the A-10 rankings, the Rams are ranked 39th nationally by the NCAA women's soccer RPI, or rating percentage index.

Last year, Jerabek was named to the A-10 All-Conference First Team and has led the Rams in points with 17, ranking fourth in the conference. Jerabek also led the team in goals with six, ranking third in the A-10 conference.

Jerabek was also named A-10 Co-Offensive Player of the Week for games played Sept. 13-19. That week, on Sept. 19, Jerabek scored a game-winning double-overtime goal, securing the Rams' win against George Washington.

"I think for me, it's just like an award, and I just want to rack up some goals and assists, and just help out the team as much as I can," Jerabek said.

The Rams are led by Jerabek and other key redshirt seniors, including midfielder Emma Kershner, and goalkeeper Grace Young. Last season, all three players were either a part of the A-10 First Team or Second Team.

"I think that there's a lot of good young players on this team that did not see the minutes they ordinarily would have saw, just because of how experienced we were that a lot of those fifth years and true seniors just took all that time," Martin said when talking about the trio's heavy contributions to the Rams this season.

Young was a defensive anchor for the Rams early in the season. In the first 150

minutes of the season, Young did not allow a goal, and was also named A-10 Defensive Player of the Week for games played Sept. 20-26.

"I feel really proud of it," Young said when talking about her accomplishments from earlier in the season.

Young also attributed some accomplishments to the team's backline for defending well and making her job of defending the goal easier.

"I also like to thank my backline for being strong and solid. They don't let a lot of shots come through and it's kind of my job to clean up the last few that they do," Young said.

The Rams will have a rematch in the first round of the A-10 tournament versus their only A-10 loss to the Saint Joseph's Hawks, which broke the Rams' chances of furthering their breaking record of nine consecutive wins. The Rams will look for the chance to end the Hawks' season by defeating them in the first round. The Rams are also optimistic about postseason being played at Sports Backers Stadium in Richmond.

"We're really fortunate that [the A-10 tournament] will be at VCU. You know, if we were able to make our way through the quarter, semis and finals, ... I think that's going to be a fun experience for us and one that I hope we're able to create for ourselves," Martin said.

The Rams start their postseason in the first round of the A-10 tournament on Oct. 30 at 7 p.m. versus No. 8 Saint Joseph's, at the Sports Backers Stadium. The game will be televised on ESPN+. For ticket information, visit vcuathletics.com.



Sophomore forward Georgia Carr-Brown fights for possession in in the April 23 A-10 semifinal against the Richmond Spiders.
Photo by Jay Stonefield

International student-athletes returning home as borders reopen

LEAH POLK
Contributing Writer

FIELD HOCKEY STUDENT-ATHLETE
Janne Wetzel faced a difficult decision in March 2020 when many countries, including her hometown of Munich, Germany, began closing their borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I was on spring break in Mexico and everything went down,” the senior back said. “I went back to Richmond after, and everything happened really quickly. I had to decide whether I would go home, or [stay] in the states to be in the same time zone to finish my semester.”

Wetzel could not find any flights to Germany, and ultimately chose to stay with a teammate in Burlington, Canada.

Wetzel has been able to travel from Germany to the U.S. using her F-1 visa. An F-1 visa allows students to enter into the U.S. as a full-time student at an accredited college, university or other academic institution, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Wetzel said she went back to Germany after finishing the spring 2020 semester and when flights were available. At the time, Germany was only allowing citizens and essential workers into its borders, according to BBC News.

Wetzel said she will use her visa to go back home to Germany for winter break this year.

At the beginning of the pandemic, many VCU international student-athletes found difficulty getting into their home countries and finding flights due to COVID-19. VCU has 61 international student-athletes across all sports, according to Director of Athletic Communications Evan Nicely.

Unlike Wetzel, field hockey sophomore forward Georgia Carr-Brown has not seen her family for eight months. The Brisbane, Australia native said that she “hasn’t really left Richmond”

since February of this year. Carr-Brown said that eight months is the longest she has ever been away from home.

Carr-Brown has not been able to go home due to Australia’s closed border. On Oct. 1, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that in November, Australian borders would be reopened to fully vaccinated citizens and permanent residents, according to CNN.

“It’s kind of getting a bit exhausting,” Carr-Brown said. “I want to go see my family because I do miss them quite a bit now. But it’s not the end of the world, I still have great friends around me, I’m doing fine.”

VCU is home to many international student-athletes that hail from all over the world. Now as travel restrictions lift, and borders begin to open, the wait is almost over for international student-athletes, who will soon reunite with their families.

U.S. citizens are permitted to enter Germany with a negative PCR test; fully vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine, according to NBC News.

On Nov. 19 or earlier, when 70% of the Queensland, Australia population is vaccinated, no restrictions or quarantine will be required for domestic travel to Queensland, according to the Queensland government.

Both Wetzel and Carr-Brown have had their fair share of struggles amid the pandemic. But now, after months of separation, some athletes are finally able to leave the United States.

“Rules have been lifted,” Carr-Brown said. “We [Australia] actually are internationally traveling again starting at the end of November. I’m very excited because I did not think I was going home for another eight months.”

Australia and Germany are currently listed as Level 3 high-risk countries;

a full vaccination status is recommended before travelling, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The VCU Athletics department aids athletes with some expenses needed to return home, but not with main transportation costs; however, athletes are allowed to use money included in their cost-of-attendance scholarships for those costs, according to Nicely.

Cost-of-attendance scholarships provide athletes funds to help pay the full costs of attending college, such as travel and other expenses, according to the NCAA.

“The NCAA has allowed us a lot of flexibility to help with those costs,” Nicely said. “So, if they need a COVID[-19] test when they get back to their country, we’ll pay for it. Heaven forbid they get stuck at the border and need a hotel room for a night in order to get across. We’re able to help them with that as well.”

Wetzel said it has been stressful traveling between the U.S. and Germany during the pandemic.

“It’s very different in the states — winter break last year [in Germany] everything was in lockdown,” Wetzel said. “Whereas in the states way more things were open, like restaurants. I was able to do things. It’s always an adjustment coming back and forth.”



Senior back Janne Wetzel aids the Rams in their home win over Davidson on Oct. 9.
Photo by Megan Lee

GAME RESULTS

OCTOBER 20

VOLLEYBALL - VS. AMERICAN
WON 3-1

OCTOBER 21

WOMEN’S SOCCER - AT DAVIDSON
WON 2-1
Atlantic 10 Conference

OCTOBER 22

GOLF
8TH OF 15
Grandover Intercollegiate (Greensboro, N.C.)

FIELD HOCKEY - VS. WAKE FOREST
WON 3-2

VOLLEYBALL - VS. DAYTON
LOST 3-2
Atlantic 10 Conference

OCTOBER 23

MEN’S SOCCER - VS. FORDHAM
LOST 1-0
Atlantic 10 Conference

OCTOBER 24

FIELD HOCKEY - VS. BALL STATE
WON 4-0

WOMEN’S SOCCER - VS. SAINT JOSEPH’S
LOST 1-0
Atlantic 10 Conference

VOLLEYBALL - VS. DUQUESNE
WON 3-1
Atlantic 10 Conference

OCTOBER 25

MEN’S TENNIS
OVERALL 15-9
ITA Super Regionals (Norfolk, Va.)

WOMEN’S TENNIS
OVERALL 1-2
ITA Super Regionals (Charlottesville, Va.)

On this day

In 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. was released from Georgia State Prison after Robert F. Kennedy questioned his constitutional right to bail.



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

FIVE HORROR FLICKS THAT WILL KEEP YOU UP AT NIGHT THIS HALLOWEEN

SAHARA SRIRAMAN
Spectrum Editor

WITH HALLOWEEN COMING UP and the weather getting cooler, now is the perfect time to bundle up and binge some season-appropriate films. This upcoming Halloween weekend, there's nothing better to do to get in the spirit than watching scary movies.

Grab a friend, some candy corn and your scariest costume for an activity well-suited to get you in the Halloween spirit, while practicing COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Here are five terrifying horror film recommendations that are guaranteed to make you lock your door at night.

1 "THE CONJURING" (2013)

In the first and original film of the franchise, a family moves into a farmhouse in Rhode Island only to find out that there is a supernatural terror living in the house, instilling fear in the family. When they enlist the help of demonologists Ed and Lorraine Warren, they find that the deadly dark forces inside the house have targeted the family. They soon realize they will never be safe until they investigate the disturbing history of the house and get rid of the forces that threaten their lives.

This film is a classic for a scary night in, it includes everything from supernatural

suspense to chilling jump scares. Even if it's based on true events, this movie will make you glad you're just sitting behind a screen.

"The Conjuring" is available on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max and Vudu.

2 "THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT" (1999)

When three film students travel to Burkittsville, Maryland to collect footage of the rumored Blair Witch legend for a documentary, they mysteriously go missing without a trace. A year later, footage of them interviewing local townspeople and collecting evidence is found. As the footage continues, it gets increasingly chilling as the three begin to find more disturbing evidence.

One of the scariest movies of all time, much of the fear comes from not knowing who or what caused all the horrific events that take place. Full of terrifyingly unexplainable scenes told through the documentary footage, this unsettling film is sure to have you peering into the dark corners of your room.

"The Blair Witch Project" is available on Amazon Prime Video, Vudu and YouTube.

3 "SLEEPY HOLLOW" (1999)

The small town of Sleepy Hollow is haunted by the legend of The Headless

Horseman, who is rumored to have decapitated a number of people. New York City police constable Ichabod Crane, played by Johnny Depp, who is skeptical about the legend, is sent to investigate this mysterious series of crimes. However, after discovering hidden clues and witnessing the Horseman's crimes firsthand, it's up to Crane to find the truth and avenge the Horseman's victims.

Based upon Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," this gothic supernatural film features a star-studded cast which will leave you every bit as enthralled with the story as with the violence and gore on the screen. Featuring all the folk horror of the original tale, amplified for a modern audience, this movie is sure to turn stomachs and heads in equal measure.

"Sleepy Hollow" is available on Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, Starz and Apple TV.

4 "TRICK 'R TREAT" (2007)

"Trick 'r Treat" follows four different stories that all take place on the same Halloween night, including that of a high school principal that maintains a secret life as a serial killer and a cruel old man who is faced with a demonic trick-or-treater. As all four of these stories unfold, each one just as spooky as the previous, the Halloween night becomes even more terrifying and deadly.

This multifaceted film is centered around multiple stories, each one including its own elements of fear and horror. A fairly spooky, and oftentimes funny Halloween classic, "Trick 'r Treat" will remind all those who watch it not to break the rules of the holiday.

"Trick 'r Treat" is available on Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, Apple TV and HBO Max.

5 "A QUIET PLACE" (2018)

This classic sci-fi horror film follows a family of five as they try to survive in a world with monsters that have extremely keen hearing, making the smallest sounds deadly. Although the family has rules and precautions in place to ensure they never put themselves at risk, there's only so much they can do before they're discovered.

Although this film doesn't include a lot of gore, nor violence, it includes more than enough suspense and jump scares to keep you on the edge of your seat. "A Quiet Place" is extremely intense, and demands viewers' full, undivided attention so as to leave their hearts pounding.

"A Quiet Place" is available on Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, Apple TV and Vudu.



Left: Fashion designer Jessica Holt poses with Lil Nas X's group of background dancers at the 2021 VMA awards. Holt helped create some parts of the costumes worn by the artist and his dancers. Right: Jessica Holt's boss recommended her to assist with costumes for rapper Lil Nas X's VMAs performance when his stylist was looking for someone to help. Holt was backstage during the Sept. 12 event. Photos courtesy of Jessica Holt

Alumna makes creative strides in the fashion industry working with high-profile figures

HADIA MOOSVI
Contributing Writer

SINCE THE AGE OF 12, VCU ALUMNA Jessica Holt loved to experiment with sewing, clothes, accessories and colors. She now lives in New York City, where she's helped create pieces for the MTV Video Music Awards, New York Fashion Week, the Met Gala and American Vogue.

Holt studied fashion design at VCU and graduated in 2019. She moved to New York City in February, and is currently interning for fashion designer Christopher John Rogers, who has created pieces for Beyoncé, Vice President Kamala Harris and Miley Cyrus.

"It's been crazy how fast things have been happening here [New York City]," Holt said. "I think my biggest lesson that I've learned from all of this is that good work is rewarded with more work."



VCU alumna Jessica Holt helped bedazzle the costumes worn by artist Lil Nas X and his dancers for his performance at the VMAs in September. Photo courtesy of Jessica Holt

And that's basically how I've been getting each opportunity."

Jessica Holt stayed with her sister, Danielle Holt, for a month in Villanova, Pennsylvania. There, Jessica Holt found out about the Christopher John Rogers job opportunity, according to Danielle Holt.

"She got the notification about the opening, and she just went ham. She did everything to apply," said Danielle Holt. "I think within two or three days they had called her and told her like, 'You got the job,' so she just went to New York."

Jessica Holt said she got the opportunity to help with rapper Lil Nas X's VMAs performance costumes in September on behalf of the Christopher John Rogers brand.

"I was at [the Christopher John Rogers brand], and I was there late working on something. My boss, David, got a phone call," Jessica Holt said. "I hear him mentioning, 'Oh I know the perfect person.' So he gets off the phone and basically he said he was talking to Lil Nas X's stylist, and she needed somebody to help out with the costumes."

The weekend after receiving the phone call, Jessica Holt said she was helping bedazzle undergarments and shirts for Lil Nas X and his team of dancers.

Jessica Holt said she also got the opportunity to hand paint a glove for fashion editor Eva Chen's Met Gala outfit, and she embellished a wool slip dress worn by model Bella Hadid for the September cover of American Vogue, on behalf of the Christopher John Rogers brand.

"I did not know it was going on Bella Hadid. Honestly, I didn't even know it was on the cover until I was on the train and Christopher [John Rogers] posted it on his Instagram," Jessica Holt said. "I'm looking at my phone and I'm just screaming."

Jessica Holt also works as a product development assistant for a fashion consulting company, Lenese Calleea Apparel Consulting, and she recently wrapped up an internship with a fashion agency known as Harlem Fashion Row.

Jessica Holt said she helped with pieces in this year's New York Fashion Week alongside Harlem Fashion Row.

"That was my first time working a big show. It was super exciting," Jessica Holt said. "It was amazing just to be able to work on it from behind the scenes and then see it come to fruition."

Jessica Holt's childhood sewing teacher, Margaret Garland, said she started to teach Jessica Holt how to sew in middle school. Garland owns a sewing school called Sewfabulous.

Garland said Jessica Holt was always willing to enhance her skills during sewing class.

"Jessica [Holt] always loved to learn new things. So when she got into sewing, and she got into my wing, it didn't make a difference if she made a mistake with something," Garland said. "She just kept showing me that this was something that she wanted to do."

Jessica Holt said she went on to study digital fine arts at George Washington Carver Center for the Arts and Technology, a magnet high school in Baltimore, Maryland.

When it came time for her to apply to college, Jessica Holt realized the closest options to digital fine arts would be graphic design or illustration.

“

That was my first time working a big show. It was super exciting. It was amazing just to be able to work on it from behind the scenes and then see it come to fruition.”

Jessica Holt, VCU fashion design alumna

"I was like, neither of these are what I want to do," Jessica Holt said. "Something just kind of clicked and I was like, well, fashion is what I've always been passionate about."

The alumna said she chose VCU for its fashion design program and the opportunity to create a fashion collection in the program's senior thesis.

The VCUarts fashion program pushed her creatively as a designer, according to Jessica Holt. During her time at VCU, she created a six-piece collection called

Aposematism as a part of her senior thesis, which was centered around the theme of self-protection and vibrant colors inspired by poison dart frogs.

The process of creating the collection was tedious, according to Jessica Holt. The process involved different rounds of cutting, research, prototypes, sketches and experimenting with fabrics — but she felt rewarded when the final product was finished.

Hawa Stwodah, Jessica

Holt's senior thesis professor, said the alumna was a curious designer. During the creation of the senior thesis, Jessica Holt was open to new ideas and perfecting her work, according to Stwodah.

"We were able to expand on some of her experiences, what she was really trying to convey in the garments that she had developed," Stwodah said. "I remember we were talking about her concept. It had to do with camouflage as a form of protection, so she was really interested in the patterns and shapes."

The collection is displayed on Jessica Holt's website along with her shop called On the Wave Durags, where she sells satin do-rags. She created the shop shortly after graduating, and said she wanted to start off small as she continues to network, build ideas and advance her skills.

"I'm hopefully planning to start developing more designs towards the end of this year, so that next year I can kind of hit the ground running a little bit more," Jessica Holt said.

Jessica Holt said she hopes to make an impact in the fashion industry by increasing diverse representation.

"I still feel like there's a lack of representation in fashion, and when it comes to women being at the forefront," Jessica Holt said. "Definitely to see more Black women in fashion, and I would love to be a part of that."



Jessica Holt. Photo courtesy of Jessica Holt

Alumni-written workbooks aim to ease performance anxiety, boost mental well-being of student musicians

JIANA SMITH
Staff Writer

VCUARTS MUSIC ALUMNA AMORA MIKELL remembers the emotional and mental stress she experienced at the beginning of her junior year in college. Whenever she practiced the cello, an instrument she has played since the sixth grade, Mikell said she often experienced negative thoughts and anxiety.

“At a certain point, I was stuck,” Mikell said. “I wasn’t growing anymore because when I went into the practice room, I was borderline abusive, like beating myself up with the things I was saying. It really caused my mental health to spiral.”

Mikell, along with music education alumna Julissa Martinez, plans to release two workbooks titled, “For Mindful Musicians: A 6-Week Guide to Overcoming Negative Self-talk and Performance Anxiety,” projected to be released in spring 2022.

“For Mindful Musicians” was one of 10 projects to receive a 2020-21 VCUarts Undergraduate Research Grant. Mikell and Martinez received \$3,000 for their project, which is the maximum amount a project can receive.

To apply for the grant, applicant projects must be collaborative and interdisciplinary, according to VCUarts Interim Director of Communications Teresa Engle. Grant recipients are selected based on their scholarly investigation, creativity and willingness to take risks, Engle stated.

Mikell and Martinez aim to give musicians the tools necessary to manage performance anxiety and negative self-talk, according to their project proposal. These tools include meditation and mindfulness practices, like identifying constructive and destructive thoughts, to reduce overwhelmed feelings and stress.

Inspired by her struggle with anxiety and depression as a student musician, Mikell said she wanted to start a conversation about mental health in the music community.

“I know that there were others like me that were struggling with their mental health,” Mikell said. “I felt like they needed an advocate.”

Two workbooks total, one for children and one for young adults, will be produced. The workbooks will be presented at five national colleges and five public schools, with an emphasis on historically Black colleges and universities, along with middle schools with mostly minority populations, according to Mikell. The list of schools has not yet been finalized.

Mikell said she wants to make sure students of color have adequate mental health resources.

“When I graduated ... I realized there weren’t many people looking out for people who looked like me,” Mikell said. “They really need someone looking out for them.”

The workbooks are based on research conducted by Mikell for an independent study course supervised by music professor Tiffany Valvo. After surveying 100 former

and current music students, Mikell said she found that most music students struggled with mental health.

“It was really eye-opening,” Mikell said. “It seemed like most people that took the survey were struggling in terms of their music performance and how it affected their mental health.”

Mikell said she hopes the workbooks will draw more attention to the importance of mental health and the brain.

“We all are just walking brains, and we’re nothing without our brains,” Mikell said. “I feel like if we understand our brains a little bit better, we’ll all just be healthier individuals.”

“

It’s been great to see how they have developed their ideas together. [The workbook] is hopefully going to be a super practical resource that people can use.”

Tiffany Valvo,
VCU music professor

The VCUarts Undergraduate Research Grant program started in 2006, according to Engle. Students are awarded up to \$3,000 for their projects, according to the Undergraduate Research Grants web page.

The grants are given to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between arts students, Engle stated. Arts students are also allowed to collaborate with students outside of the arts school.

The grants also encourage students to seek mentorship from arts and non-arts faculty members, according to Engle.

“We invest in collaborative projects—shaped by artists, designers and performers—that reach across the university,” Engle stated via email.

Valvo, who is Mikell and Martinez’s faculty mentor for the project, said she first met Mikell in her Creative Practices course, which is offered through the VCUarts Center for the Creative Economy. The course focuses on developing mindfulness and meditation practice to improve mental health.

“When she approached me about doing more research and exploring these concepts more, I was really enthusiastic about the idea,” Valvo said. “[Performance anxiety] is something that people don’t talk about all the time, although it is obviously super, super common.”

Valvo said that seeing Mikell and Martinez’s project grow over time has been “amazing.”

“It’s been great to see how they have developed their ideas together,” Valvo said. “[The workbook] is hopefully going to be a super practical resource that people can use.”

Engle stated that grants, like the one awarded to Mikell and Martinez, are important to VCUarts because they allow the school to invest in students.

“We believe in a future of boundless possibility,” Engle stated. “VCUarts wants to help [students] bring [their] ideas to fruition.”

Mikell said she hopes to see the workbook distributed by March 2022.

“This is all idealized and soft deadlines, but that’s the goal right now,” Mikell said. “I’m really in the nitty-gritty.”

EDITOR'S LIST OF FILMS TO WATCH

“The Tourist” (2010)

Starring Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp, “The Tourist” is about an unsuspecting American, played by Depp, who gets trapped in a scheme by Jolie’s character’s to help her lover escape both the police and the mob. The two go to great lengths to avoid capture as they spin a dangerous web of deception and intrigue.

20% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Netflix

“500 Days of Summer” (2009)

When a man falls in love with a woman the first time he sees her, he knows he’ll do anything to spend the rest of his life with her. However, she doesn’t believe in romantic relationships. The film goes through all 500 days since they first met, showing how the pair’s relationship develops and changes.

85% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Amazon Prime Video

“Flipped” (2010)

Set in the 1950s, this film tells the story of Juli Baker, who falls in love with her new neighbor, Bryce Loski, the first time she sees him. Bryce doesn’t feel the same way about Juli, complaining about how clingy she is.

As they get older, Juli’s obsession with Bryce and his resentment towards her remains. Yet as they grow into new people, Bryce begins to realize that he’s been mistreating Juli.

54% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Netflix

“Booksmart” (2019)

High school seniors, played by actresses Kaitlyn Dever and Beanie Feldstein, are destined for greatness, having worked hard to get into Ivy League schools by sacrificing their social lives.

When they find out all their classmates who had fun during high school also have futures ahead of them, they decide to spend their last day before graduation trying all the experiences they never got to before they leave for college.

96% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Hulu

“Air Force One” (1997)

A fictional story about United States President James Marshall, played by Harrison Ford, who is forced to save his wife and daughter and all other passengers when terrorists hijack the Air Force One plane and take them hostage.

The president, who is a trained veteran, must use his stealth and skills to take out the terrorists and save his family.

78% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Hulu

“Rain Man” (1988)

Selfish, self-centered Charlie Babbitt, played by Tom Cruise, finds out his late estranged father left him nothing in his will. However, he left \$3 million in a trust fund to Charlie’s autistic brother, Raymond, whom he didn’t know he had.

When Charlie kidnaps Raymond and tries to convince him to give him the money, the two instead form an unlikely bond, brought closer by their differences.

89% Rotten Tomatoes | Available on Netflix

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



Amora Mikell. Photo courtesy of Amora Mikell



Julissa Martinez. Photo by Jon Mirador



The James W. Black Music Center sits on VCU’s Monroe Park Campus on Park Avenue. Photo by Megan Lee

CT Opinions

COVID-19 WILL BE THE SCARIEST THING THIS HALLOWEEN SEASON

MONICA ALARCON-NAJARRO
Contributing Writer

In college, Halloween is the one weekend where almost every single college student goes out to some form of party. But this year, the scariest thing at our doorstep won't be a clown costume — it will be COVID-19.

Halloween falls on a weekend this year. That means the spooky holiday will provide an even higher probability for students to go out and potentially expose themselves to COVID-19.

We've come a long way from when the COVID-19 pandemic first escalated in March 2020, but our progress so far does not define our finish line with the virus. The pandemic still isn't over with and not everything is completely safe yet.

As vaccines continue to roll out, I've seen a shield go over the eyes of my peers — blocking themselves from seeing the minimal chance that vaccinated people could still get COVID-19. Not only that, but other illnesses are still going around as we venture into the flu season. No vaccine will ever make anyone invincible to viruses.

Breakthrough cases with COVID-19 can still happen. Similar to any other vaccine, the vaccine for COVID-19 will not fully protect you from the chance of getting sick, but can help in preventing serious hospitalization.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people with breakthrough infections are less likely to develop severe symptoms, which minimizes their chance at going to the hospital compared to those who are unvaccinated. However, the CDC still states that breakthrough cases, or those who get COVID-19 despite being fully vaccinated, can still spread the virus.

All it takes for someone to get infected at a Halloween party is just one person who has COVID-19. I'm hesitant about my own health when it comes to this upcoming weekend. I'm stuck between wanting to have fun and not wanting to get sick again, as I was sick with a flu earlier this month.

Just because people are getting vaccinated and immunocompromised people are getting booster shots does not mean that the pandemic is gone. The fact that we're still wearing masks in places such as classrooms should be enough to show that COVID-19 can still get passed around among the vaccinated.

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, in some populations, breakthrough infections have shown infection rates of "approximately 1 in 100 fully vaccinated people." The website also states that the delta variant of COVID-19 is more contagious compared to other COVID-19 variants.

It won't be a surprise to me if VCU has at least one COVID-19 breakthrough

case during or after the Halloween weekend. With tons of students being packed into small spaces for Halloween parties, there's no doubt one of us will get sick with something.

Sure, it does seem like things are going back to normal with businesses opening up and our ability to go to different amusement parks or haunted houses with a mask on, but we shouldn't forget that we're still in a pandemic.

I remember going to Kings Dominion's reopening in May, where they gave vaccinated people the option of wearing a mask

or not, which is a rule they still currently have in place.

I would like to live life normally just like you, but it's taking a lot longer than expected to go back to the old lives we all had. If you do decide to go out this Halloween, please make sure to get tested for COVID-19. Nothing would be worse than unknowingly passing around the flu, let alone COVID-19, to other people.

This year, it may be that COVID-19 can make or break your Halloween. I know that not going out may seem like the worst idea because of fear of missing out, but surrounding yourself with a small group of friends who are not sick may benefit your health in the long run. Life isn't back to normal yet, and you should be aware that the dangers of catching COVID-19 are still out there.



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

ISHAAN NANDWANI
Contributing Writer

I have nine younger cousins, all under the age of 11, and much to the dismay of my aunts and uncles, they have transitioned back and forth between virtual and in-person education over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic here in Virginia, struggling to find any consistency in their learning during this formative period in their lives.

Unfortunately, this has been the case for many similar families across the commonwealth. As Virginian families struggle to readjust, they seek elected officials who can help ease their children's transition into in-person education during the pandemic.

Currently, with the transition back to in-person schooling, we're seeing a whole new host of regulations emerge, including mandatory vaccinations and mask mandates, many of which are under major contention during the Virginia gubernatorial race.

Beyond the stricter COVID-19 regulations accompanying the shift back to in-person education, we're also seeing the curriculum in Virginia schools shift to focus on race and gender, as evidenced by the anti-racism policy at Fairfax County Public Schools and the new policies supporting inclusivity for transgender students by the Virginia Department of Education.

This change has been incited by the recent racial and social justice reckoning in our nation — including the protests against police brutality for the death of George Floyd in May 2020 — but not without backlash.

Glenn Youngkin, the Republican candidate in the Virginia gubernatorial race, and his supporters have repeatedly fought



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

Schools in Virginia are evolving, and that's a good thing

against COVID-19 precautions in schools and the new direction our schools are heading with their curriculums, arguing that Democrats are interfering with our education system.

This point of view could not be more flawed.

First of all, the pandemic is still not over. It might feel exhausting to keep hearing this, but it's true. So long as case rates are still up and the lives of our community members are threatened, we must continue to wear our masks — the minor inconvenience is a small price to pay to protect those most vulnerable around us.

As of Oct. 26, there have been nearly 920,000 active cases of COVID-19 in Virginia, and this number is still rising, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

As for vaccines, I'm shocked that we're still seeing a resistance to them. Science has repeatedly proven that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe, and it has already saved countless lives. Living in the U.S., we're privileged enough that any one of us can walk into a local clinic or Rite Aid and get our shot for free, which is simply not possible in lesser developed countries.

Making vaccines mandatory is a necessary step for schools to take. At school, students are constantly in close proximity with their peers and teachers, any of whom could have preexisting conditions or be immunocompromised. Unvaccinated students pose a direct threat to these students and faculty members, and schools should be at liberty to make the decision to protect their students.

At VCU, we've already made that step to require vaccinations for students, barring case-by-case exemptions. According to the VCU vaccination dashboard, 95.1% of students and 97.1% of employees have been vaccinated, as of Oct. 25. The vaccine mandate at VCU has been extremely effective in ensuring that our campus builds its immunity against the virus.

Finally, the curriculum in Virginia schools should reflect our changing values. Historically, our curriculum has been built upon the white man's narrative. When I was in elementary school, I read literature written by white authors, celebrated "heroes" like Christopher Columbus and learned the history of our country from an extremely one-sided perspective. I'll let you guess which side that was.

I seldom had conversations about race or gender, or saw people of color like myself represented in our education system.

But today, I see greater hope for our schools. Each day, as my cousin — now in the fifth grade — comes home from school. She's learning not only about race, but to be an advocate, to be anti-racist and not silent in the plight of the oppressed. And that's a blessing in and of itself to see.

When we see direct attacks on education rooted in making our world more equitable, we must question whether those in opposition truly are acting in the best interest of all of our children.

Education in our state may be extremely divided in this day and age, but the one thing that all parents have in common is wanting the best for their kids. Prioritizing children's safety, and not shying away from uncomfortable conversations, is the only way we do that and continue to grow.

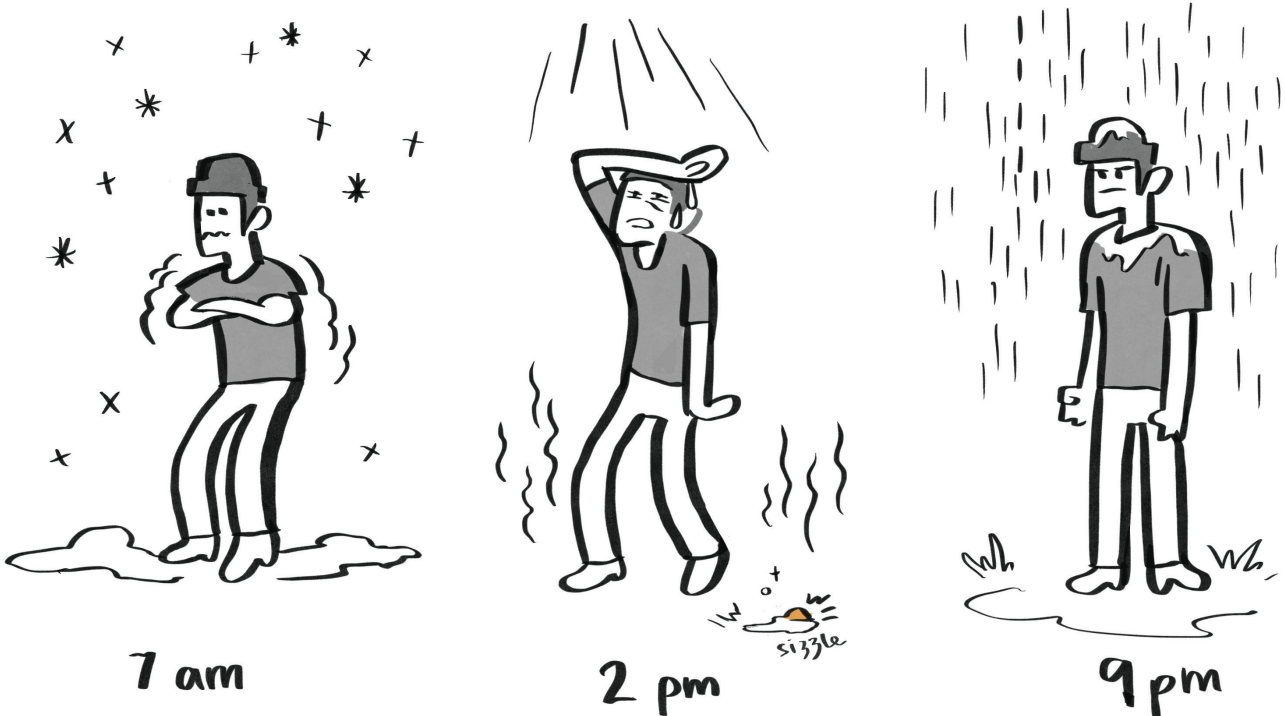
Selfie by Audrey Garrett



Rude Awakening by Lauren Johnson



What Wonderful Weather We Are Having by Craig Blacksmith



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ABOUT THE CT

The Commonwealth Times is the award-winning independent student newspaper at VCU, since 1969. The CT staff maintains all editorial and operations discretion. There is absolutely no prior review by the public, university or VCU Student Media Center administration or staff. The Executive Editor writes and manages the Operations Budget.

ADD YOUR VOICE

The opinions pages of the CT are a forum open to the public. Contributions are welcome by email to Tagwa Shammet, by mail or in-person at 817 W. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23220. Opinions expressed are those of individual columnists and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Commonwealth Times. Unsigned editorials represent the collective opinion of The CT staff.

The Commonwealth Times strives for accuracy in gathering news. If you think we have made an error, please email the appropriate section editor. Corrections will appear on the news pages and/or online. One CT per person. Additional copies can be purchased at the Student Media Center for \$1 each.

CT

Puzzles

Los Angeles Times

Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Nichols Lewis

- ACROSS

1

Model in the Beach Boys' "Fun, Fun, Fun"

6

"Nightmare" street

9

Middles

15

Demonstrating skill

19

Subtle glows

20

Wasikowska of "Damsel"

21

Allergic outburst

22

Hudson Bay nation

23

*Grizzly, for one

25

*Olaf II of Norway, notably

27

Ornamental vase

28

Earthy

30

MLB Hall of Famer Fox and journalist Bly

31

___ a soul

32

Va. winter hours

34

Genesis twin

35

Hose clamp tightener

37

More klutzy

40

Prepare, as a contract

45

Like some dorms

46

*It goes up in cold weather

48

Sound of shock

49

Sharply hit baseball

51

Relax, maybe

52

Wolf down

54

Guru's residence

56

Pool concern

57

Loses steam

60

Claim no longer allowed on cigarettes

62

Fortune

64

Show with constant cliff-hangers

66

Cell division

68

NL Central club

69

*Nickname for Joe DiMaggio

73

Words of understanding
- 75

Uses, as a scale
- 77

Candy bar with a Nordic name
- 78

Self-reproach
- 80

Thinks
- 82

Played really badly
- 85

Comic book artist
- 86

Mentally assimilate
- 88

A musician usually has a good one
- 90

Originally called
- 91

Bête ___
- 92

Willing to listen (to)
- 93

*The sun will eventually be one
- 97

Button alternative
- 98

Posse carriers
- 101

Max Ernst, for one
- 102

True
- 104

Yearn
- 106

Eye, to a poet
- 107

Pickup relatives, briefly
- 108

Condemnation
- 111

Zip one's lip
- 114

"Rugrats" dad
- 117

*ICBM booster until 1987
- 120

They're on the same side ... and a hint to the answers to starred clues
- 122

Pizzazz
- 123

Spiritualist Deepak
- 124

Bagpiper's topper
- 125

Past pudgy
- 126

Target of a military press
- 127

"Dear Evan ___": 2015 musical
- 128

Mahershala of "Moonlight"
- 129

Grown-up efts

5

Insurance that covers dams?

6

Manicurist's board

7

Yarn spinner

8

Dark area on the moon

9

Surfboard/kayak hybrid

10

Yellowfin tuna

11

Response to goo

12

Slugger's creation

13

Shades

14

"I'm ___ to hear from you!"

15

Smoothie fruit

16

Cheese on crackers

17

Telescope part

18

To this day

24

Docking place

26

Result of one too many, maybe

29

Rookie, briefly

31

"I can't agree to this"

33

Scrabble piece

35

Going places?

36

*Kipling's Shere Khan is one

37

Author Sheehy

38

Relaxed

39

Airline with an all-kosher menu

41

Turkish bigwigs

42

**"Virtuous Woman" reggae singer

43

Solheim Cup team

44

Fluoride-in-water meas.

45

Cat's weapons

47

Little trickster

50

Confirms, as a password

53

Sub

54

China ___: showy bloom

55

Use for preservation, as wine barrels

58

Takes off

59

Pass rusher's stat

61

Small intake

63

Attacks

65

Story line

67

Singer Ed featured in the 2019 film "Yesterday"

70

"Just kidding!"

71

Place for a pad

72

Modern Persians

74

___ throat

76

Utopias

79

Knowledge of spiritual matters

81

Bareilles of "Waitress"

83

Without ice

84

Understanding

86

Quote from Homer

87

2012 Facebook event, for short

89

Overhaul

94

Sunbather's pride

95

Poke fun at

96

Best Supporting Actress before Ingrid

99

Merit

100

Discolor by burning

101

Military alert state

103

Jack of "Some Like It Hot"

105

To-do

107

It was added to create an everyday quintet in 1990

108

Tick off

109

Series finale: Abbr.

110

Huff and puff

112

R&B great James

113

Ring at a wedding

114

State of suppressed worry

115

Reason to cram

116

List for a versatile tool

117

Talk acronym

118

Mil. mess duties

119

Before, poetically

121

Presidential nickname

Sporting Chance by Gary Larson

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							
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	35	36					37	38				39			40		41	42	43	44
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49				50		51				52		53		54	55					
56						57			58	59		60		61						
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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				

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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

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

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LGBTQIA+

HISTORY MONTH

2021

HISTORY

IN 1994, A COALITION OF EDUCATION-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES DESIGNATED OCTOBER AS LGBT HISTORY MONTH. IN 1995, A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION INCLUDED LGBT HISTORY MONTH WITHIN A LIST OF COMMEMORATIVE MONTHS. NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY, OCTOBER 11, AS WELL AS THE FIRST "MARCH ON WASHINGTON" IN 1979, ARE COMMEMORATED IN THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY DURING LGBT HISTORY MONTH.

MONDAY, OCT. 4
12:30 - 2 P.M.
VIRTUAL | ZOOM
SOUTHERN-FRIED SAPPHIC:
BLACK LESBIANISM IN THE
AMERICAN SOUTH
OMSA

THURSDAY, OCT. 7
5 - 6:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL
I'M COMING OUT
IEXCEL SC1051 POP-UP
COURSE FOR STUDENTS (3-PART)

THURSDAY, OCT. 7
6:30 - 7:30 P.M.
CARY STREET GYM, CYCLE STUDIO
PRIDE RIDE: INDOOR CYCLING CLASS
RECREATION & WELL-BEING

WEK

ONE

WEK

TWO

MONDAY, OCT. 11
NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY

MONDAY, OCT. 11
6 - 7:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL | ZOOM
ESTABLISHING ANCESTRAL
CONNECTION
OMSA

TUESDAY, OCT. 12
3 - 4 P.M.

OMSA OFFICE
QUEER COFFEE HOUR
OMSA

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 13
5:30 - 6:30 P.M.

MCV CAMPUS RECREATION & AQUATIC CENTER,
GROUP EXERCISE STUDIO
PRIDE RIDE: INDOOR CYCLING CLASS
RECREATION & WELL-BEING

THURSDAY, OCT. 14
5 - 6:30 P.M.

VIRTUAL
I'M COMING OUT
IEXCEL SC1051 POP-UP
COURSE FOR STUDENTS (3-PART)

WEK

THREE

WEK

FOUR

SUNDAY, OCT. 24 - SATURDAY,
OCT. 30
ACE WEEK

TUESDAY, OCT. 26
INTERSEX AWARENESS DAY

TUESDAY, OCT. 26
NOON - 1 P.M.

CARY STREET GYM, CYCLE STUDIO
PRIDE RIDE: INDOOR
CYCLING CLASS
RECREATION & WELL-BEING

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 27
11 A.M. - 12:30 P.M.

VIRTUAL | ZOOM
THRIVING AT THE INTERSECTION:
LESSONS LEARNED BY A BLACK
FEMALE ENGINEER, SURGEON,
& HEALTHCARE EXECUTIVE OF
TRANS EXPERIENCE

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 27
6 - 7:30 P.M.

VIRTUAL | ZOOM
BEING MY OWN BOSS - REDEFINING
CAREER PATHS WITH GRAPHIC
ARTIST LINAS GARSYS & DANNY
FUENTES OF LETHAL AMOUNTS
GALLERY