



VCU

Division of
Student Affairs



**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2023-24



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DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Office of the Vice President

Dean of Student Advocacy Office

Fraternity and Sorority Life

Office of Student Advocacy

Office of Student Engagement

Office of Student Leadership and Engaged Learning

Office of Multicultural Student Affairs

Recreation and Well-Being (RecWell)

Residential Life and Housing

Shared Services

Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity

Student Media Center

University Counseling Services

University Student Commons

University Student Health Services

students.vcu.edu



LETTER FROM THE Vice President of Student Affairs

It has been an outstanding year for our Division of Student Affairs team as we continue our commitment to providing students with exceptional services and transformative experiences. In this annual report, I invite you to explore our innovative advocacy initiatives that go the extra mile to support and retain our students. We have also remained focused on helping both students and the campus recover from the lasting effects of the pandemic, through the collaborative health and wellness efforts of University Counseling Services, University Student Health Services, Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, and RecWell.

You'll also learn about the dynamic work of our Residential Life and Housing team, who creatively accommodated a near-record fall 2023 first-year class. Additionally, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the University Student Commons and re-energized school spirit at VCU with Black and Gold Wednesdays.

While awards are not our primary motivation, we were honored to be named one of the "Most Promising Places to Work in Student Affairs" by Diverse: Issues in Higher Education and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). This prestigious national recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to supporting both our students and staff.

I am incredibly proud of our team across all departments. Their work is truly life-saving, as you'll read about the student team, trained by RecWell staff, who saved a participant's life last year. We continue to enrich students' lives both inside and outside the classroom through strong collaborations with academic partners and the local Richmond community. Our efforts through Transformative Student Experiences and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs help ensure every student finds their place within our community.

Most importantly, our commitment is to building meaningful relationships with students, partnering with them to shape their VCU experience. I'm especially proud of the creation of our Student Leadership Executive Board (SLEB), composed of student leaders from across campus. I think you'll enjoy reading about this initiative and the positive impact it's having on the student experience.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report, and as always—Go Rams!

Aaron J. Hart, Ed.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs

Executive Leadership Team



Aaron J. Hart, Ed.D.
Vice President, Student Affairs



Joslyn DiRamio Bedell, M.Ed.
Special Assistant to the Vice President and Director of Strategic Initiatives



Curt Erwin, Ed.D.
Associate Vice President for Engaged Communities



Jimmie Gahagan, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President for Transformative Student Experiences



Melanie Goodman, MPA
Associate Vice President for Finance and Innovation



Charles Klink, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President for Holistic Well-Being



Gabe Willis, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President and Dean of Student Advocacy



Yiyun Jie, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Assessment Division of Student Affairs



Residential Life and Housing Gets Creative to Accommodate Class of 2027

As VCU prepared to welcome more than 4,500 first-year students for the 2023-24 academic year, surpassing projected enrollment numbers, Residential Life and Housing (RLH) quickly pivoted to meet the increased and unexpected demand for on-campus housing. In the summer of 2023, over just a matter of weeks, the RLH team developed a multifaceted plan to create additional bed spaces to provide an on-campus experience for as many VCU students as possible.

Under the leadership of Gavin Roark, Executive Director for Residential Life and Housing, RLH used creative, quick action to increase bed options. This included converting and adjusting residence hall spaces to increase capacity, as well as securing an off-campus partnership with the Graduate Hotel to house more first-year students.

"I was fortunate to work with such a hard-working team that wanted to help identify as many on-campus options as possible for our incoming students," said Roark.

During the fall 2023 semester, the Graduate Hotel, a short 0.3 miles from Monroe Park, housed a cohort of 80 first-year VCU students in double bedrooms and five Resident Assistants. The double bedrooms included a queen size bed, an in-room mini-fridge, and a microwave. All residents living in the Graduate Hotel had wifi access and access to the common areas in the building such as the game room and lounge. Through creative programming, increased staff, and integration of the Graduate Hotel into RLH operations, students living at the Graduate Hotel were provided the same on-campus experience and level of support as received by their peers living in VCU-owned and operated residence halls.

"I truly loved my experience living at the Graduate Hotel," said Resident Assistant Jonathan Mejias. "As a Biomedical Engineering major, it was extremely convenient living only two blocks away from the engineering buildings. As a resident there, I also loved being able to use the rooftop pool, the gym inside of the hotel, and most of all, the ice machine on the 9th floor."

While accommodations at the Graduate Hotel quickly came together, creative solutions and quick adjustments also occurred in on-campus residence halls. Triple-occupancy rooms in Rhoads Hall were converted to quad-occupancy rooms, double-efficiency rooms were developed in Gladding Residence Center III, and several lounge spaces in Gladding Residence Center were converted into living spaces.

The unprecedented efforts to increase on-campus housing at VCU resulted in an additional 306 bed spaces for incoming residents. Despite the near-record size of VCU's incoming Class of 2027, on-campus housing was offered to all first-year students who applied. RLH opened the 2023-24 academic year with 3,790 first-year residents and 2,225 upperclass residents, for a total of 6,015 students living on campus.

Exemplifying their core departmental values of "Resident Centered" and "Excellence," Residential Life and Housing prioritized the residential experience above all else.

As stated by Executive Director Gavin Roark, "We believe in the power of the on-campus experience and knew it was crucial to find and develop as many on-campus beds as possible."

The on-campus living experience at VCU is undeniably beneficial to students. On-campus students benefit from the intentional support of residents through the RLH Community Development Model and individualized peer support. The data shows that on-campus students earn higher GPAs than their off-campus peers and persist at higher levels. From fall 2022 to fall 2023, 86.3% of first-year on-campus students continued on to their sophomore year, in contrast to only 82.6% of their off-campus peers continuing at VCU.

Historically, the demand for upperclass housing at VCU is greater than the supply. For the 2023-24 returning student application process, 3,548 applications were submitted for 2,104 beds. The consistently high demand for on-campus housing speaks to the importance of on-campus living at VCU.

Top: Executive Director, Gavin Roark, with Graduate Hotel Hall Staff during the 2023 House Calls Program at the Graduate Hotel
Top right: Double-efficiency room in Gladding Residence Center III



6,075
residents
across

11
residence halls

99%
Fall 2023 census
occupancy rate

Division of Student Affairs Recognized as a Most Promising Place to Work

In Virginia Commonwealth University's Division of Student Affairs, more than 250 professionals are dedicated to promoting a safe, healthy and unforgettable college experience for thousands of young Rams. But the team also fosters success for another key group: themselves.

Earning a prestigious distinction, the VCU division was named among the Most Promising Places to Work in Student Affairs. The recognition, designated by news and information source Diverse: Issues in Higher Education in collaboration with the American College Personnel Association, honors student affairs divisions that cultivate a vibrant and diverse workplace and support work-life balance, professional development and inclusive excellence for staff.

Employee surveys touching on categories such as family friendliness, salary/benefits and career support were a key source of consideration for the honor. Of 22 institutions in this year's class, the VCU division is the only designee from Virginia.

"We have so many talented and dedicated staff in our division who are committed to the success of VCU students," said Aaron Hart, Ed.D., VCU's vice president for student affairs. "I thought it was important to share our stories, our passions and our successes. I have an obligation to create an environment where staff feel appreciated, valued and supported."

Hart, who joined VCU in October 2022, noted that achieving workplace distinction has benefits within, as well as beyond, the student affairs realm.

"Dr. Hart emphasized the significance of such a national recognition for the Division of Student Affairs and the greater VCU community, so it was important to respond to his charge," said Myriam Kadeba, Ph.D., director of the division's Office of Multicultural Student Affairs who led efforts to pursue the honor. She also cited the encouragement of Brooke Berry, associate vice president for belonging and inclusion.

Kadeba worked with a small student affairs team that included Yiyun Jie, Ph.D., director of assessment, and Ijuanee Isom, director of human resources. The trio spent two months gathering resources, employee satisfaction data and division information that formed the submission to the selection committee.

The 2024 Most Promising Places honorees were recognized at the ACPA annual convention in Chicago in March 2024. Hart and other members from VCU's Division of Student Affairs were present to accept the honor.

"I was ecstatic – but not for me," Hart said when learning of the award. "I was ecstatic for the entire DSA team. They deserved this recognition."

Diverse: Issues In Higher Education presented this national recognition to the winners on March 19, 2024 at the ACPA24 Convention in Chicago, IL during the Diverse: Issues In Higher Education and ACPA The Most Promising Places to Work in Student Affairs Reception.



85%

rated the division's
FAMILY
FRIENDLINESS
as
HIGH / MODERATELY
HIGH

83%

agreed staff in DSA
are encouraged
to participate
in professional
development

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

7 awards

4 invited speakers

25 service roles*
*58% of these roles were leadership roles

29 presentations

6 publications

15 degrees
Includes 8 certifications



Building an UNcommon Legacy of School Spirit: VCU's Black and Gold Wednesdays

In Spring 2023, Dr. Aaron Hart, Vice President for VCU's Division of Student Affairs (DSA), launched Black and Gold Wednesdays, a powerful tradition designed to elevate school pride. The initiative encouraged students, faculty, and staff to wear black and gold every Wednesday, fostering a shared identity among the VCU community. Kicking off with an April event where attendees received exclusive t-shirts, Black and Gold Wednesdays quickly gained momentum, becoming an official tradition in the 2023-24 academic year.

The Black and Gold Spirit Squad hosted a major event during the Weeks of Welcome in August 2024, featuring appearances by Dr. Hart, VCU President Dr. Michael Rao and Rodney the Ram. Thousands of students participated, receiving t-shirts and engaging in campus-wide activities. Events spanned both the Monroe Park and Health Sciences campuses, with highlights including Popsicles with the President and weekly prize competitions. The School of Pharmacy organized a semester-long competition for first-year students, and DSA hosted an Instagram competition throughout the year that awarded special Black and Gold Wednesday prize packages to the bi-weekly winners.

As the tradition grew, it united thousands of students, creating a lasting sense of pride and belonging at VCU. Black and Gold Wednesdays is now a cherished tradition, embodying school spirit that future generations of Rams will carry forward.



The Commons Celebrates 40 Years of Community and Tradition

On January 17, 2024, VCU's University Student Commons marked a major milestone—its 40th birthday! The all-day celebration brought together students, faculty, staff, and alumni to honor the rich history of The Commons and its evolution over the decades.

The festivities kicked off with a captivating performance by VCU's acapella group, Ramifications. Carole Dowell, Director of University Student Commons, reflected on the moment: "The performance gave me goosebumps. I looked around and saw students and staff across multiple floors, completely mesmerized by the energy of the singing. It was an incredible moment, something I haven't felt since I started at VCU."

Following the performance, Dowell cut the Commons-shaped birthday cake, serving hundreds of students, staff, and faculty who came out to celebrate. A number of public spaces in The Commons included displays that took visitors on a nostalgic journey, showcasing different pop-culture trends and games that defined each decade from the 1980s to the 2020s.

The celebration extended into the evening, with an alumni reception where former Rams reminisced about their days at VCU. The VCU Student Jazz Ensemble added to the vibrant atmosphere, while guests enjoyed decade-themed games, activities, and giveaways.

Built in 1984 and undergoing three phases of construction, The Commons remains a cornerstone of VCU's community and spirit. In the 2023-24 academic year it averaged 7,347 visitors per weekday.



7,347 average weekday traffic

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS



FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

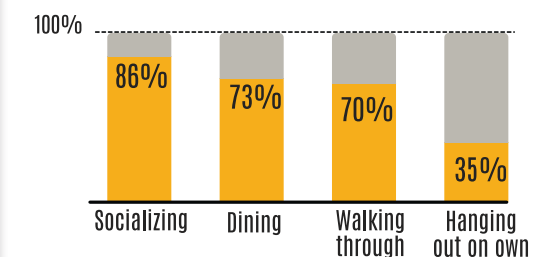
- microwaves
- healthy food
- lockers
- nap pods



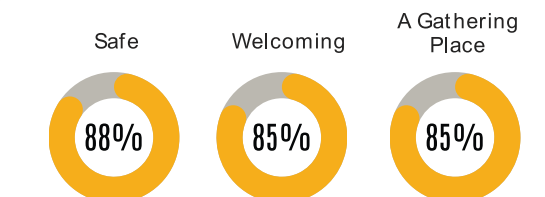
FOR THE SPACE

- comfy seating
- bulletin board
- space for info sharing
- quiet area

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO USE THE COMMONS FOR:



STUDENTS AGREE THAT THE COMMONS IS:



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Launched on February 2, 2023 by Dr. Aaron J. Hart, the Division of Student Affairs began a strategic planning process aimed at strengthening the division's impact on student success.

This timeline highlights the foundational work and collaboration that created the guiding framework for our division's efforts for the next three years.

TIMELINE

FALL 2022

Dr. Hart begins role as Vice President for Student Affairs and initiates new strategic planning process for the Division of Student Affairs.

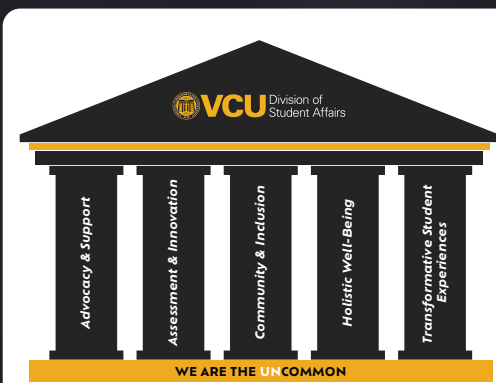


SPRING 2023

Twenty-two representatives across the Division selected to serve on Ad-Hoc Committee created new mission, vision, values, and strategic pillars.

SUMMER 2023

Division of Student Affairs leadership team reviewed and approved new mission, vision, values, and strategic pillars.



MISSION

VCU's Division of Student Affairs fosters students' intellectual, social, emotional, cultural, and personal growth toward their full potential.



VISION

We will be recognized as a leader in centering our students through the unwavering pursuit of equity, advocacy, inclusion, excellence, and innovation. We will be the model for creating a welcoming and supportive environment in which all students can thrive.



VALUES

- Belonging
- Collaboration
- Stewardship
- Student-Centered
- Ram Proud!

FALL 2023

Mission, vision, values, and strategic pillars formally adopted and introduced to entire Division of Student Affairs team, and phase two of strategic plan begins with external environmental scan, needs assessment, and SWOT analysis.

SPRING 2024

Strategic plan committee develops themed objectives by strategic pillar based on the results of the environmental scan, committee presents drafted objectives to SALT for feedback, and ad-hoc committee presents finalized objectives and recommendation of strategies to the Division.

PILLAR 1 ADVOCACY & SUPPORT

Office of Student Advocacy Opens to Offer UNcommon Support to Students

In August 2023, the Office of Student Advocacy (OSA) was officially launched, marking a groundbreaking step in improving student support to students. Led by Dr. Aaron Hart, vice president of student affairs, and an intentionally selected team, OSA was created to not only provide exceptional assistance to students but also to empower them by teaching self-advocacy skills.

Lynanne Jamison, Ra'meer Roberts, Stephanie Coats, and Lisa Mathews-Ailsworth, chosen for their expertise and dedication to student welfare, carefully developed OSA's services to meet the diverse needs of the student body. Reflecting on the past year, Associate Dean of Student Advocacy Lynanne Jamison, expressed her pride in the team, stating, "There are many points of pride, but I am most proud of the small but mighty Office of Student Advocacy team. These individuals came together from different areas of the division, successfully navigating resource challenges and uncertainties, while creating a shared vision and showing through action their unwavering commitment to student-centered care."

Within months of its opening, OSA saw a robust flow of student traffic, indicating a significant demand for its services. Throughout the academic year, data revealed a series of pressing issues that underscored the importance of the office's mission. Rising financial distress among students became evident, with many seeking emergency funds for rent, tuition, and essential personal items such as laptops. OSA responded by facilitating access to these emergency resources, highlighting the office's commitment to alleviating financial burdens. One of the standout achievements of the OSA was its 99% efficiency in case resolution allowing for student concerns to be resolved promptly.

The establishment of the Office of Student Advocacy marked a significant milestone in the university's commitment to student support. Through its innovative approach, OSA has set a new standard for ensuring that students receive the uncommon support they need to thrive at VCU.



Creation of the Inaugural Associate Vice President and Dean of Student Advocacy Position

In an effort to provide intentional and effective support to students, Dr. Aaron Hart established a new role: the Associate Vice President and Dean of Student Advocacy. This position marks a departure from the traditional Dean of Students model, focusing on proactive engagement with students during critical moments of need and ensuring the successful implementation of the Office of Student Advocacy's mission. Following a competitive national search, Dr. Gabe Willis was appointed as the inaugural Dean. His expertise in developing innovative student support models that promote student persistence was a key factor in his selection for this role.

"The most crucial aspect of the Office of Student Advocacy is its presence and responsiveness. The campus community knows that there is a dedicated unit always ready to assist when students reach out for help." — Dr. Gabe Willis



Ram Pantry: A Decade of Supporting Students in Need

Founded 10 years ago to combat food insecurity among VCU students, Ram Pantry continues to provide crucial support. Food insecurity at VCU is influenced by various factors in students' lives, such as limited funds, basic needs insecurity, lack of transportation, access to a kitchen, and time to prepare meals. Ram Pantry directly addresses these challenges by offering assistance to students right on campus where they go to class, live, and study.

To celebrate its first decade, Ram Pantry reopened at a new, spacious location. The large, airy storefront, featuring two window-lined walls, provides a bright and welcoming atmosphere. The new space, shared with the VCU Free Store and VCU Sustainability, marks a significant improvement from its previous, smaller location in University Student Commons. With this upgrade, Ram Pantry continues its mission of ensuring no student goes hungry, while fostering a more supportive and sustainable campus environment.



2,267

STUDENTS SUPPORTED BY OSA

48% ARE SELF-REFERRAL OR PEER-REFERRAL



PILLAR 2 ASSESSMENT & INNOVATION

HOLISTIC WELL-BEING & QUALITY SERVICE

HEALTH SERVICES

22,031 total clinic visits for 7,934 unique students

MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC

9,852 total attended appointments for 1,964 unique students

ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOMMODATIONS

+10% increase with 3,098 students registered with SAEO over last year, a 6-year consecutive growth

DSA FACILITIES

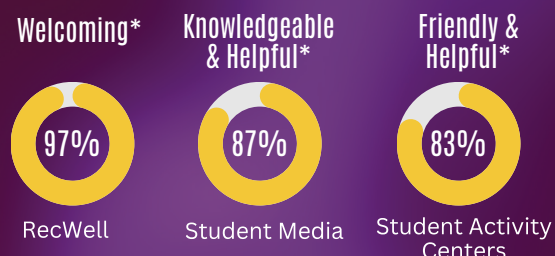
1M+ Total traffic to 3 DSA student activity centers

565k+ visits to 2 RecWell facilities

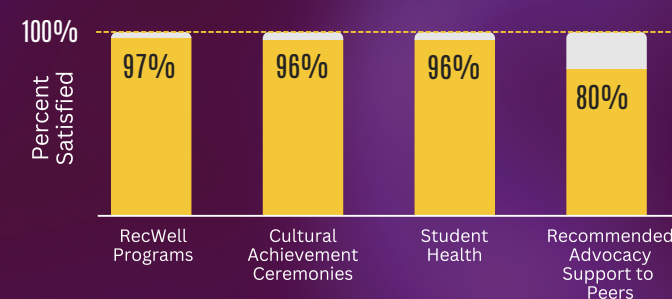
14K+ Unique Student Users
+12% increase from last year

6,075 students living in 11 VCU Residence Halls

WELCOMING, HELPFUL, AND RESOURCEFUL STAFF



PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION HIGHLIGHTS



"I was going through some health issues last semester, and it was just very nice to have good contacts with the nurses."

*Data presented in this report are derived from multiple sources, including various technology application systems, departmental surveys, and internal tracking tools. Sample sizes and response rates for surveys varied. Additional details on data collection, methodology, sample sizes, and survey measures are available upon request.

"I wouldn't have any of the amazing memories or friendships without this club."

- Max Elliott, Vice President Women's Rugby Club



ENGAGEMENT DRIVES CONNECTION, BELONGING, & COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCES & ACTIVITIES



80K+ Involved



6.5K+ Events*

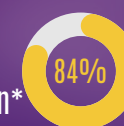


23% increase

in unique recreation and well-being program participants from last year

ENGAGEMENT BOOSTS BELONGING & CONNECTION*

Increased peer connection*



Increased institutional belonging*



Strengthened belonging through Student Media involvement*



COMMUNITY & INCLUSION

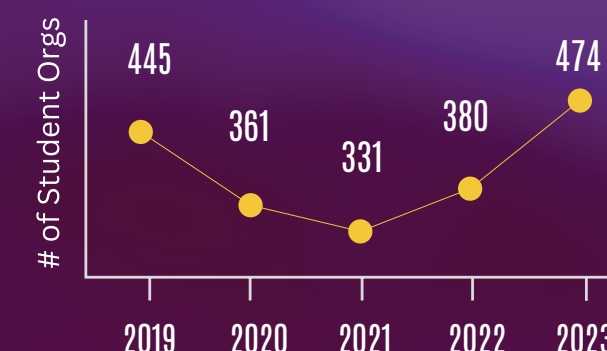
474 Active Student Orgs*

24 Sorority & Fraternity Chapters with 579 Members



25% increase

over past year SURPASSING pre-covid records



PILLAR 2 ASSESSMENT & INNOVATION



TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT EXPERIENCES



PROFESSIONAL & CAREER READINESS THROUGH CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

927 Student employees contributed over **267K HOURS** through DSA roles.

89% of Student Activity Center Employees reported their **campus working experience** contributed to their **SUCCESS AT VCU**

SERVE THE COMMUNITY & REAL-WORLD APPLICATION



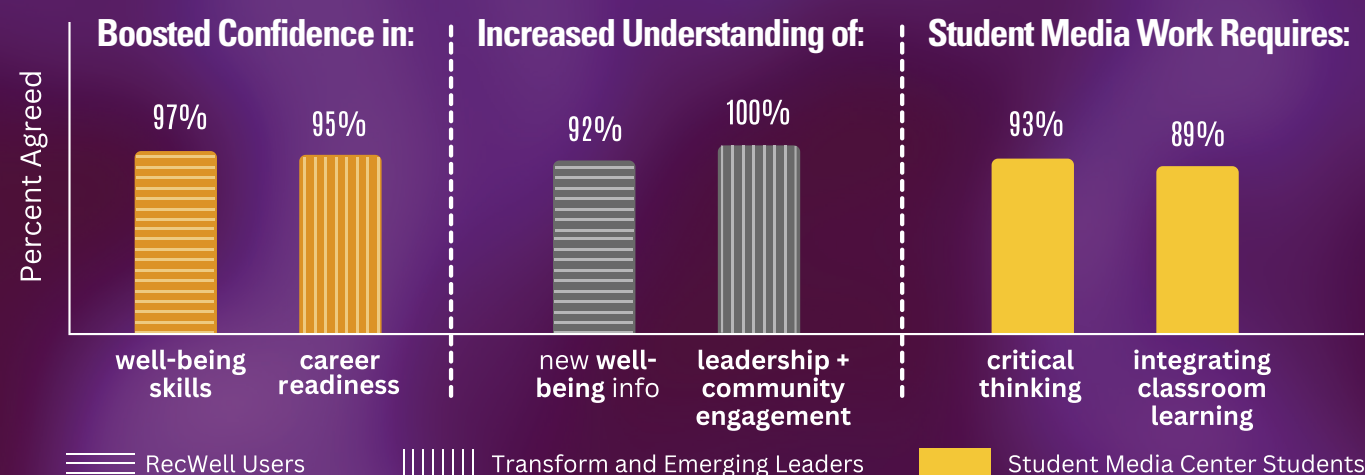
599 Unique Peer Leaders
1,247 Student Org Leaders

+32% Increase with 8,935 hours

of leadership, community, & services contributed by Transform and Emerging Leaders

"The Student Media Center is training me to be a professional!"

IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS



THRIVE & PERSIST AT HIGHER RATES

91% = average persistence rate of

- Student Org Leaders
- Fraternity & Sorority
- Those involved in Student Media Roles

*Data presented in this report are derived from multiple sources, including various technology application systems, departmental surveys, and internal tracking tools. Sample sizes and response rates for surveys varied. Additional details on data collection, methodology, sample sizes, and survey measures are available upon request.

"So grateful [Office of Student Advocacy] are there as it eases the worry I carry in working with students as an advisor and instructor; I know I have a safe space to refer students!"



ADVOCACY THROUGH INDIVIDUAL CARE AND SUPPORT

TOP CONCERNS supported by Advocacy:

- Basic needs
- Finances
- Mental health

SUPPORTING STUDENT LIFE & BASIC NEEDS

2,197 total advocacy and care support through referral cases

500 off-campus housing assistance



+20% increase with 3,603 total Ram Pantry Visits over last year

SAFE PEER-SUPPORT & RECOVERY SPACES

728 Group Meetings < **507** SUBSTANCE RECOVERY Community < **221** IDENTITY-BASED Support

15K+ Sessions



STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS + SUCCESS GUIDE

TOP SUPPORTED TOPICS

- Academics
- Involvement
- Career/Jobs/Internship Prep

STUDENT CONDUCT SUPPORT

1,387 cases



Code of Conduct Academic Integrity Other Conduct/Housing Cases

PILLAR 3 COMMUNITY & INCLUSION

OMSA Hosts Faculty, Staff, and Student Mixers

The Faculty, Staff & Student Mixers, organized by VCU's Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA), unite the university's diverse communities in an inclusive, welcoming space. These events foster networking and collaboration, strengthening the sense of belonging between students, faculty, and staff. Dr. Myriam Kadeba, OMSA Director, emphasizes the lasting connections formed at these mixers. Campus groups like the Office of Inclusive Excellence and student organizations, including the African Student Union and Latinx Students Association, contribute to the vibrancy of these gatherings. The mixers are more than social events; they build meaningful relationships. OMSA plans to expand the events, especially focusing on cultural representation and collaborations with local Native tribes for Indigenous Peoples Heritage Month.



Herd Hugs and Hi-Fives: Building Connection and Supporting Well-being on Campus

The Herd Hugs and Hi-Fives program at VCU has become a beacon of warmth and connection, addressing student well-being, mental health, and the need for belonging in an increasingly digital age. Launched with support from VCU Family Programs, VCU Family Council, and VCU Catering, the program's first event offered hot cocoa, cookies, hugs, and high-fives. The warm beverages and sweet treats provided a sense of comfort and familiarity, breaking the initial barriers and encouraging participation.

Kenlee Andreu, Coordinator of Family Programs, emphasized the goal was simple: to provide emotional support through hugs and high-fives. With growing excitement at subsequent events, the Family Council's efforts solidified this as a campus tradition. Students have responded with gratitude, sharing personal stories of comfort and care. As it expands, Herd Hugs and Hi-Fives reinforces the enduring power of human connection in the VCU community.



A Record-Breaking Family Weekend at VCU

In October 2023, VCU Family Programs hosted the most highly attended Parent and Family Weekend in the university's history. This unforgettable event drew in 716 students and 1,491 adults, with a total of 1,822 family members participating. This remarkable turnout underscored the strong bonds between VCU students and their families, as well as their enthusiasm for engaging with the university community. The weekend provided an exceptional opportunity for families to connect with the Division of Student Affairs and campus leaders while also experiencing a wide array of engaging events and activities. The weekend was a resounding success, fostering a sense of community and pride within the VCU family.

Join us as we take a closer look at the highlights and feedback from this historic gathering.



Building Trust with Indigenous Communities

Over the past few years, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) has made significant strides in building trust and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities both internal and external to VCU. Recognizing the challenges posed by historical oppression, power imbalances, and social identity differences, OMSA staff has engaged in intentional efforts to bridge these gaps. The process requires patience, cultural humility, and an understanding of the complexities of building trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Historically, trust was hindered by factors such as the oppression of Indigenous peoples, power imbalances, harmful past experiences, and differences in race, gender, class, and education. To address these challenges, OMSA staff focuses on reciprocity, authenticity, and long-term commitment. A key element was acknowledging power imbalances and balancing them by engaging with Indigenous communities at pow-wows hosted by local Virginia tribes. This creates opportunities to foster trust and collaborations.

Since Fall 2022, OMSA's commitment has resulted in the development of an expanding network of Indigenous collaborators and increased cultural awareness within the VCU community. The office has hosted 17 educational and community-building programs centered on Indigenous culture and history. Moving forward, OMSA remains dedicated to creating inclusive spaces where Indigenous students, faculty, and staff feel valued and supported, ensuring their voices and experiences are integral to the VCU community.



Establishing Delta Alpha Pi

In Fall 2023, the Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (SAEO) office partnered with Delta Alpha Pi, an international honors society for students with disabilities, to establish a chapter at VCU. Within just an hour of sending an interest email, nearly 120 students responded, underscoring the demand for such a community.

Now officially recognized as the Iota Epsilon Chapter, the organization boasts 78 qualifying members, including some of VCU's most engaged and accomplished students. This overwhelming response highlights the eagerness of disabled students at VCU to be recognized for both their achievements and their disability identity.

The chapter's success aligns with the rising participation in the Accessibility Achievement Ceremony, which doubled in size in its second year, further emphasizing the need for inclusive recognition.



Expanding Cultural Achievement Ceremonies: Honoring VCU's Diverse Graduates

In 2015, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) launched three Cultural Achievement Ceremonies (CACs) and has since doubled the scope of the ceremonies to honor and celebrate significant affinity groups at VCU. These ceremonies complement traditional academic achievement celebrations by providing graduating students from diverse backgrounds a platform to commemorate their accomplishments in a way that acknowledges both their hard work and their cultural identities. CACs also serve as celebratory spaces for friends, family, and community members who have supported the graduates, emphasizing the role of community in their success.

OMSA now hosts CACs for students who identify as Black/African American; Indigenous/Native American; Latine; Asian-American and Pacific Islander; LGBTQIA+; and students with disabilities. Collaborations with the Office of Inclusive Engagement and Philanthropy (housed in the Office of Development & Alumni Relations) and the Office of Inclusive Excellence, further underscore the university-wide commitment to celebrating the achievements of VCU's diverse students and alumni.



PILLAR 4 HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

Division of Student Affairs Working Proactively to Combat Hazing

Since her arrival at VCU, Rachael Tully, Assistant Dean of Students, has spearheaded efforts to implement effective hazing prevention programs. This includes facilitating Adam's Law Training, a hazing prevention education requirement for all current, new, and potential members of student organizations that have new member processes. Over the 2023-2024 academic year, 646 students completed Adam's Law Training.

In collaboration with 11 other institutions, VCU joined the Hazing Prevention Consortium, a research-driven initiative led by StopHazing. The consortium aims to improve campus environments through evidence-based strategies and comprehensive, campuswide approaches to hazing prevention. VCU's selection for this initiative underscores the university's commitment to eliminating hazing.

In February 2024, VCU hosted Adam's Day of Remembrance, honoring the memory of VCU student Adam Oakes, while providing the campus community with hazing prevention education. The year concluded with VCU hosting the inaugural Virginia Hazing Prevention Summit in June 2024, further solidifying its leadership in fostering an environment focused on hazing prevention.



RecWell Saves a Life

On a November evening in 2023, a student playing basketball at the Cary Street Gym suffered cardiac arrest. Thanks to the swift actions of three RecWell student staff members and a RecWell patron, the student received immediate medical attention. Macky Cisse, who was playing basketball nearby, was the first to respond, performing chest compressions while others sought help. RecWell Lifeguards Sydney Smith, Sierra Williams, and Jesus Diaz-Nunez then took over lifesaving efforts until the Richmond Ambulance Authority arrived and transported the student to VCU Health, where the student was treated, resulting in a full recovery.

The students' quick actions earned them American Red Cross Lifesaving Awards, and they were honored at a campus ceremony on May 1, 2024. The recognition event was captured by RecWell's colleagues at the Richmond office of the American Red Cross.



Stall Seat Journal...Easy Concept, Amazing Impact

It's been another great year of "VCU's #1 Toilet Paper," which features colorful Ram illustrations to go along with health and well-being content that students, faculty, and staff can really use. The Stall Seat Journal is a collaboration between RecWell and the Student Affairs Central Communications Team, and has been a fixture in campus bathroom stalls for two decades. With seven brand-new campus-wide editions and several more 101 editions aimed at first-year students, content welcomed students to campus and covered sleep, alcohol use, digital well-being, stress, nutrition, intuition and more! The words "Positive, Inclusive, and Empowering" are a compass the team uses to ensure content is safe and helpful for all Rams. P.S. — this spring, the Stall Seat team won its first Virginia Public Relations Society of America Award of Merit for Creative Tactics!



VCU Hosts Virginia College Counseling Centers Conference 2023

This year, VCU hosted the Virginia College Counseling Centers Conference, a statewide event that had been held annually at various institutions prior to the pandemic. Held at VCU's University Student Commons, the 2023 conference brought together 130 participants from 18 Virginia higher education institutions, creating a valuable space for college counseling center staff to build community, share best practices, and discuss student well-being.

The conference featured panels, presentations, and informal breakout groups, where college counseling center therapists discussed trends and concerns related to student mental health. "One highlight of the conference was having therapists share how they are addressing these issues on their campuses," said Dr. Jihad Aziz, Director of VCU's Counseling Services and a conference organizer.

Dr. Aziz emphasized that the key takeaway was the recognition that therapists are not alone in their efforts. "They have colleagues across the state with valuable knowledge and skills they can turn to for help and support."

VCU hopes the conference will return to an annual or biannual schedule, rotating among Virginia universities to continue fostering collaboration and support.

Research to Recovery Conference Provides Forum for Treatment and Support for Individuals Experiencing Substance Use Disorders

In its first five years, the Research to Recovery conference has provided a forum for reviewing the latest research and innovative practices for the treatment and support of individuals experiencing substance use disorders. Speakers from VCU and across the country have participated to share expertise in a wide range of areas, from basic research and public policy, to treatment and recovery. The 2024 conference, held in April, saw a record-breaking attendance of over 400 participants. Discussions spanned various critical themes, including translating research into clinical practice, the impact of colonialism and addiction with a focus on Indigenous recovery perspectives, the interaction between social and biological factors, and the mental health of Black men.

Research to Recovery's success is supported by a dedicated team of staff and student volunteers who manage its planning and logistics. Organizers are preparing to move to a larger venue for the 2025 conference to accommodate increasing interest and further strengthen efforts to enhance student care through education and collaboration.



PILLAR 5 TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Fostering Transparency and Dialogue: The Creation of the Student Leadership Executive Board (SLEB)

The VCU Student Leadership Executive Board (SLEB) was established in the fall 2023 to strengthen communication between key student leaders on VCU's campus and the Vice President for Student Affairs. The group convenes monthly and consists of leaders on campus representing large student populations. This includes the President of the Student Government Association, members of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, representatives from VCU's Board of Visitors and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, as well as members from the Graduate Student Association and the Residence Hall Association. The meetings are a time for student leaders to raise key issues and concerns affecting student life on campus and for the Division to promote greater information sharing and transparency.



Strengthening Student Organizations: A Comprehensive Plan Created by Students and the Division of Student Affairs

In fall 2023, The Office of Student Engagement at VCU launched a comprehensive plan to strengthen over 480 student organizations. The plan aims to recognize student organizations as transformative experiences that foster leadership development, civic engagement, and social-cultural interaction. It seeks to enhance trust and communication between students and university units, address the risks and responsibilities associated with student organizations, and redesign processes to reduce barriers and improve the effectiveness of student organization operations. Assessment measures were also introduced to track engagement, leadership development, and community impact. Four subcommittees made up of students and staff developed recommendations which included raising the Student Activity Fee for the first time in two decades, updating the Student Organization Handbook, developing new officer training programs and other measures to strengthen student organizations and their effectiveness.



"As a student leader at VCU, the connection to administration (DSA) and to other student leaders at VCU is invaluable."

— GULEER SHAHAB (GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE - BOARD OF VISITORS)

Lobby Day 2024: Empowering VCU Students Through Advocacy

Sponsored by VCU's Student Government Association (SGA), Lobby Day provides students with the opportunity to advocate for the university before members of the Virginia General Assembly each February. Held on February 13, 2024, at the Virginia State Capitol, 14 student leaders participated in small group meetings with legislators, discussing key issues related to VCU's success and higher education. The event, co-sponsored by the Office of Government Relations' Civic Innovation & Partnerships division, included networking opportunities with state leaders, tours of the Capitol, and a reflection lunch.

Students gained hands-on experience in Virginia politics and developed a deeper understanding of how government decisions impact their education. Testimonials highlighted the empowering nature of the event, with one student sharing how advocating for their peers gave them a sense of pride and connection to the university.

Looking ahead, the SGA aims to increase participation from 14 to 30 students in 2025.



12-Day Expedition to Mexico Blends Environmental Research with Outdoor Skills

In January 2024, ten VCU students participated in a 12-day research expedition on the Usumacinta River in Chiapas, Mexico, a collaboration between RecWell's Outdoor Adventure Program, VCU's Center for Environmental Studies, and academic partners in Mexico.

The trip blended environmental research with outdoor skills, giving students the opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in real-world settings while learning fieldwork practices such as cooking, rafting, and data collection.

OAP student staff member Laurel Dent also conducted a study on participants' sense of belonging, showing a significant increase in group confidence and connection by the trip's end. This expedition exemplifies how RecWell's partnerships with academic departments provide students with transformative experiences that enhance both their career readiness and sense of belonging at VCU.



Photo Credit: Dr. James Vonesh
VCU Life Sciences Program



Student Media Center Star Student "Found the Perfect Path"

Hope Ollivant's journey at VCU is a powerful example of how aligning academic and extracurricular passions can maximize a student's experience. Initially a fashion major, Ollivant transitioned to craft/material studies after discovering the metals and ceramics studios, where she found her love for jewelry-making. Her entrepreneurial drive kept her creating even during a pandemic-driven gap year, eventually leading to her work being featured at London Fashion Week.

Beyond the classroom, Ollivant immersed herself in the Student Media Center, rising to editor-in-chief of Ink, VCU's student-run digital magazine that celebrates art, music, culture, and fashion. "It's definitely my favorite thing about going to school here," she said. "It's a professional learning experience like no other. There's nowhere else where I could learn what I'm learning and get the experience that I'm getting on a professional level like this and get to be surrounded by my friends and amazing creatives every single day."

Ollivant's journey culminated in her first solo exhibition at The Anderson, where she showcased a wide array of her creative work. Now, as she prepares to graduate, Ollivant looks ahead to a career in fashion, continuing her artistic pursuits. "I found the perfect path," she reflected on her transformative VCU experience.



Photo Credit: Thomas Kojcsich
VCU Enterprise Communications and Marketing



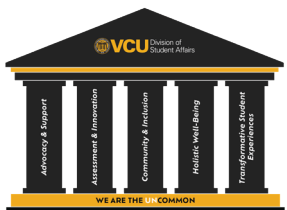
59

Awards won by Student Media Center students

97%

of students strongly agree/ agree that SMC work is student driven and student run

STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND AWARDS:



NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- **Assessment**
 - » Rachel Siefing, Assessment Specialist, Does Personality Type Influence How Campus Involvement Contributes to Students' Sense of Belonging?, IUPUI Assessment Institute
- **Executive Leadership Team**
 - » Dr. Aaron J. Hart, Vice President of Student Affairs, Breaking Barriers: Supporting the Mental Health of Black Male Student Affairs Professionals, Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA) Annual Conference
 - » Dr. Aaron J. Hart, Vice President of Student Affairs, The Changing Dynamic in Student Populations, Southern Association of College and University Business Officers (SACUBO) Annual Conference
- **Fraternity and Sorority Life**
 - » Joe Wheelless, Assistant Dean and Director, The Impact of the North Carolina Promise on Student Loans, Association for Education Finance and Policy
- **Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity**
 - » Kristie Filipchuk, Coordinator, Integrating Student Organizations into the Conduct Process: It Can Happen, Association for Student Conduct Administration
- **Office of Student Leadership and Engaged Learning**
 - » Jonathan Fuller, Assistant Director for Student Leadership, Followership as a Framework for Supervising Student Leaders, Global Followership Conference
- **RecWell**
 - » Delaydia Frink, Assistant Director for Sport Programs, Shining a light on Invisible Disabilities - Unique strategies for workplace Allies, 2024 NIRSA Conference
 - » Joey Parent, OAP Senior Assistant Director, Panel: Overqualified and Under Experienced, Association of Outdoor Recreation & Education Outdoor Professional Conference
 - » Christina Spohn, RecWell OAP Coordinator, Commercial Use Authorizations in National Parks, Association of Outdoor Recreation & Education Outdoor Professional Conference
- **Residential Life and Housing**
 - » Megan Becker, Director of Residential Life, Inventory Optimization: Rethinking Space, Student Needs, and Staffing, Campus Home. Live!: Annual Conference for the Association of College and University Housing Officers- International
 - » Ainsley Hallenbeck, Hall Director, Ripping the Band-Aid Off: Developing a Staff That Can Ask for Help, Campus Home. Live!: Annual Conference for the Association of College and University Housing Officers- International
 - » Kenzel Hill, Assistant Director of Residential Life, Mid-Level Mastery: Navigating Career Crossroads and Strategies for Successful Transitions, Campus Home. Live!: Annual Conference for the Association of College and University Housing Officers- International
 - » Gavin Roark, Executive Director for Residential Life and Housing, SCUP Symposium: Campus Housing Strategies, The Society for College and University Planning
- **Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity**
 - » Chris Parthemos, Associate Director & Interim Co-Director, Exploring Applications of Chat GPT and Similar Large Language Model, Accessing Higher Ground
 - » Chris Parthemos, Associate Director & Interim Co-Director, Creating Access for Graduate Students: A Panel of Perspectives, AHEAD Equity and Excellence Conference
 - » Chris Parthemos and Brandi Levingston, Associate Directors & Interim Co-Directors, Navigating Disability Services in College, Education USA - India
 - » Chris Parthemos, Associate Director & Interim Co-Director, Exploring Applications of Chat GPT and Similar Large Language Model AI to Promote Access, Office of Civil Rights (Federal)
- **Student Media**
 - » Jessica Clary, Director of Student Media, How to Survive — and Thrive — as an Adviser, College Media Association
 - » Owen Martin, Business Manager, The Health of Campus Media: Recruitment and Retention Post-COVID panelist, College Media Association and Associated Collegiate Press National College Media Convention

NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

- **Fraternity and Sorority Life**
 - » Lyssa Rivera, Assistant Director, NALFO Liaison, Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority, Inc.
 - » Joe Wheelless, Assistant Dean and Director, On-site Coordinator for the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Research Writers' Retreat and AFA Research Committee, Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors
 - » Cierra Wilson, Assistant Director, AFA Volunteer Staff for the 2024 AFA Annual Conference (Member Experience Committee)
- **Office of Student Leadership and Engaged Learning**
 - » Kaylynn Hill, Assistant Director for Engaged Learning, Served as Social and PreCon chair of the IMPACT National Conference (2023-2024), Served as Social and PreCon chair of the IMPACT National Conference (2023-2024)
- **RecWell**
 - » Delaydia Frink, Assistant Director, NIRSA Basketball Committee Team Member, National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association
 - » Meredith Hawkins, Director, NIRSA Foundation Scholarship Committee, National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association
 - » Tanika R. Santos MacSwain, Assistant Director, Chairing the National Latinx Caucus and hosting the first NIRSA Latinx Member Social, National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association
- **Residential Life and Housing**
 - » Theresa Franklin, Assistant Director, ACUHO-i Program Career Connections Committee and Program Selection Committee, Association of College and University Housing Officers International
- **Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity**
 - » Chris Parthemos, Associate Director/Interim Co-Director, Research Review Board Member, Association on Higher Education and Disability
- **Student Media**
 - » Jessica Clary, Director of Student Media, Events Director on the Board of Directors for College Broadcasters Inc. and served as the College Media Association representative on the CAS council.
- **University Student Commons**
 - » Lauren Gyurisn, Assistant Director, Regional Director, Association of College Unions International

DEGREES/EDUCATION

- **Residential Life and Housing**
 - » Sachel Purvis, Hall Director, ACUHO-i's RA Supervision Certificate, Association of College and University Housing Officers
 - » Justin Tarbell, Assistant Director, Culturally Responsive Leadership Certificate, Virginia Commonwealth University
 - » Samuel West, Assistant Director, Master's in Business Administration, Virginia Commonwealth University
- **RecWell**
 - » Trisha Saunders, Associate Director, Health Coach Recertification Certificate, American Council on Exercise
 - » Mathew Scott, Aquatics & Safety Coordinator, STOP THE BLEED Instructor Certification
 - » Christina Spohn, OAP Coordinator, EMT Recertification Certificate
- **Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity**
 - » Chris Parthemos, Associate Director and Interim Co-Director, Doctoral, Culturally Responsive Leadership Certificate, Virginia Commonwealth University, Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) Certification, Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Recertification
- **Communications and Marketing**
 - » Connie Kottmann, APR, Marketing Communication Manager, Nonprofit Management Certificate, VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
 - » Heidi Rechin, Communications Specialist, Master's in Mass Communications (Integrated Communication), Virginia Commonwealth University
- **Fraternity and Sorority Life**
 - » Joe Wheelless, Assistant Dean and Director, PhD in Education Policy, Planning, and Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education, William & Mary
 - » Cierra Wilson, Cierra Wilson, Master's in Higher Education, Student Affairs, Liberty University
- **Office of Multicultural Student Affairs**
 - » Beck Oh, Program Manager for LGBTQIA+ Initiatives, Master of Social Work and a Certificate in Gender Violence Intervention, Virginia Commonwealth University



VCU Division of
Student Affairs

Division of Student Affairs

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Non-profit organization

US Postage Paid
Richmond VA
Permit Number: 869

EXPERIENCES & ACTIVITIES



80K+
Involved



6.5K+
Events

↑ +32% Increase with 8,935 hours

of leadership, community, & services
contributed by Transform and Emerging Leaders

31K

Health and Counseling Clinic Visits

15K+

Sessions

STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS + SUCCESS GUIDE



TOP SUPPORTED TOPICS

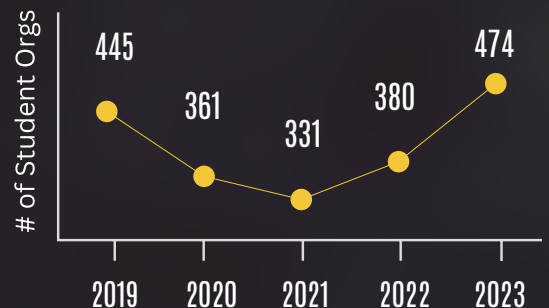
- Academics
- Involvement
- Career/Jobs/Internship Prep

COMMUNITY & INCLUSION

474 Active Student
Orgs

↑ 25% increase

over past year **SURPASSING**
pre-covid records



1.5M+

total traffic and visits to Student
Centers and RecWell facilities



↑ +20% increase with 3,603 total Ram Pantry Visits over last year



VCU Division of
Student Affairs

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MAKE A GIFT:

