

The Compass

A guide to life at VCU

Summer 2020

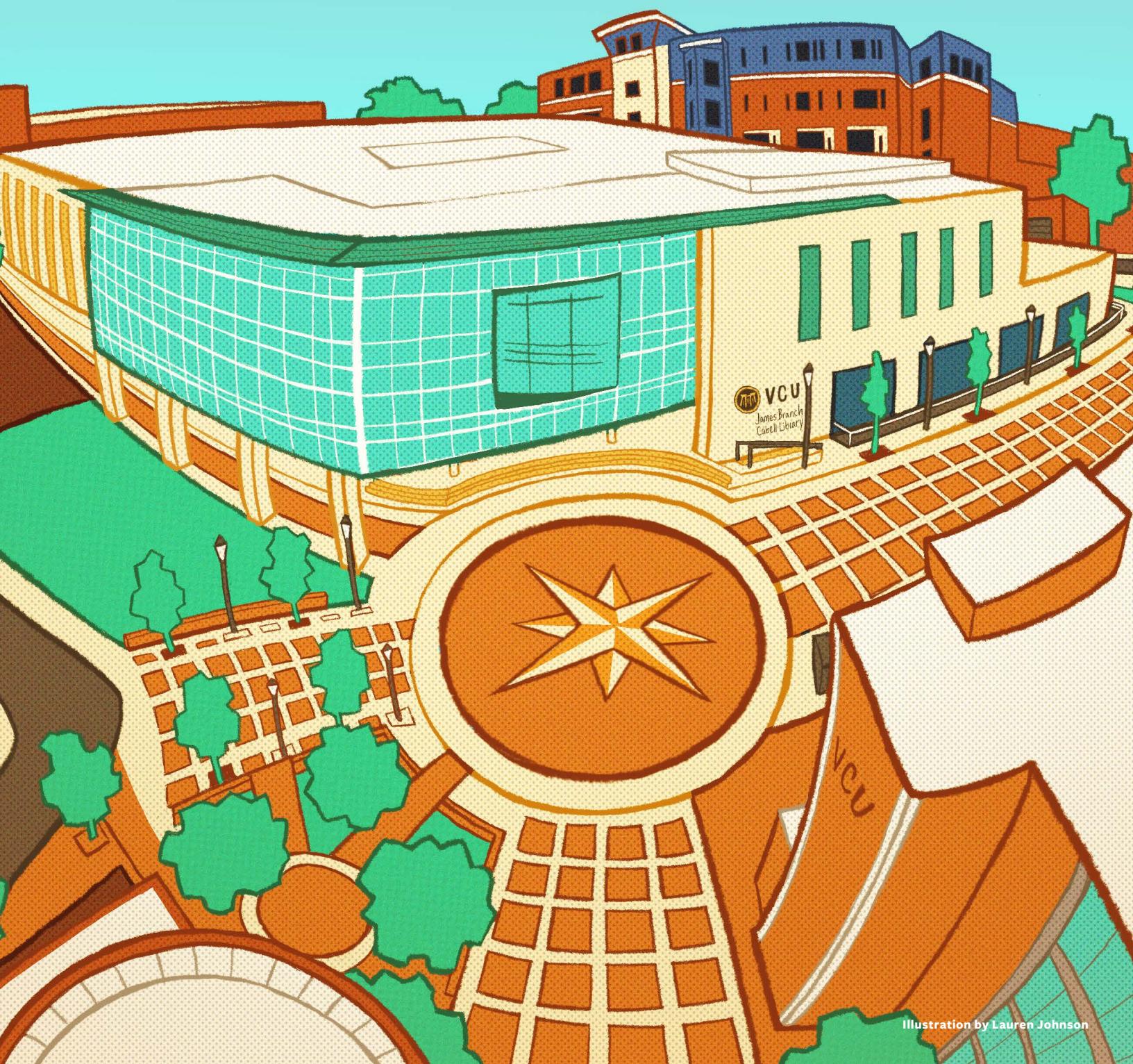


Illustration by Lauren Johnson



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Masthead

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Letter from the Editor

OUR WORLD IS CHANGING QUICKLY.

I know that's a cliche phrase to start this with, but it's true. Nearly everything about being a new VCU student changed this year. For one thing — although this is definitely the least major update in recent events — this year's issue of The Compass is entirely digital.

We wanted to hand each of you a physical copy back when we expected to have in-person orientations. This time last year, I would have shook your hand and told you about where I work, the VCU Student Media Center.

We publish The Compass annually to welcome new students to our university, and we're also home to several student-run media outlets including WVCW radio, Ink Magazine and The Commonwealth Times. It's the yellow building across the street from Dunkin'.

You would've gotten that spiel in person — but then things changed.

As I'm writing this, it's unclear exactly what the upcoming school year will look like. Everything about the way we once learned and interacted on campus is going to be different.

But one thing that won't change is the dedication of student journalists and artists working from that yellow building on West Broad Street.

This is one of our many projects at the SMC, and although production and distribution happened very differently this year, we strived to create another reliable guide for new students coming to college under such uncertain times.

The Compass is a resource created for VCU students, by VCU students. This magazine offers guides to living on campus, staying healthy and making the most out of your time at the university.

In this issue, you'll find articles on grocery shopping, finding the right internship, planning your graduation and more. There's guides to student organizations at VCU, numbers to call in case of emergencies and local restaurants to visit in downtown Richmond.

Although many things have changed, starting your college career is still an exciting time full of new experiences and just as many questions. We hope we can answer some of those for you.

ANDREW RINGLE



Illustration by Lauren Johnson

***Dear VCU students
and families,***

We are proud to welcome you into the VCU Ram Family and look forward to seeing you on campus this fall. I know you will find your time at Virginia Commonwealth University to be engaging, motivating, and will help prepare you to make a difference in the human experience in whatever ways are meaningful for you.

That is what we do every day: Use what we learn, discover, and create here to advance humanity everywhere. We work to ensure that people from all backgrounds and patients of all pathologies can live long, productive, and meaningful lives. And our unyielding commitments to academic excellence, diversity, inclusion, and equity help everyone succeed here in whatever ways they can imagine.

Thank you for joining us in this critically important work—perhaps more critical now than ever as we all face exceptional life-changing challenges. I look forward to seeing how you will use your time at VCU to accomplish your goals and contribute to finding solutions to societal challenges, even while you are still a student. When you graduate four years from now, I have every confidence that the world will be



a better, stronger, more unified place because of the commitments we will make together and the ways we will support your success and partner with you to achieve it.

Outside their classrooms, laboratories, studios, and clinics, our students are also engaged in more than 1 million hours of community service every year and service-learning that defines their educational experience, prepares you for employment, and improves the city we call home.

There are exciting days ahead for you and all of us. What makes them so exciting is the commitments we make with each other and to each other. VCU students in Medicine work with those in Arts and Business to improve patients' experience as they heal. Students in Education, Engineering, and Social Work come together to build brighter futures for young people in our communities. Across our university and health system, we unite as One VCU to ensuring that people of all backgrounds can thrive and live their best, most meaningful lives.

In these challenging times, we know there are exciting days ahead because of the work to which our students have committed themselves. I look forward to seeing the ways you will do this, too, when you join us this fall.

See you soon.
Sincerely,

MICHAEL RAO, PH.D.
President
VCU and VCU Health System

Dear VCU Rams,

On behalf of the Division of Students Affairs, it is my pleasure to welcome those of you who will be making VCU your new home away from home this fall, as well as express appreciation to all our returning students. We look forward to seeing you on campus!

I think you will enjoy this summer orientation guide, produced by the VCU Student Media Center and edited by students from our award-winning Commonwealth Times newspaper. You will gain some new insights into our university



community as well as learn more about the exciting greater Richmond community that envelopes our urban campus. At the heart of everything you read, will be people — the diverse and talented students, faculty and staff at VCU and the wonderful members of the Richmond community. I hope that your exploration of this edition will stimulate your thinking of how to get connected to your fellow Rams once you are on campus and also connection points with the wonderful city of Richmond.

The Division of Student Affairs offers many engaging programs, services, and facilities. We are here to support your personal growth and academic success. We look forward to getting to know you and supporting your success this fall.

CHARLES KLINK, PH.D.

Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs

Dear VCU Rams:

Welcome to your new home! We are excited to have you as part of our new Ramily!

The Office of the Dean of Students looks forward to working with you this coming year. Whether you are an undergraduate,



graduate, or professional student, we are here for you.

The Office of the Dean of Students advocates for all VCU students. We can assist in connecting you with resources both on campus and in the community. If you have an individual or group concern, we can point you in the right direction!

Our offices are located on both campuses, as well as virtually. Some of our services include Ram Pantry, regalia assistance, emergency fund, and general student support.

REUBAN RODRIGUEZ, ED.D.

*Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs
and Dean of Students*

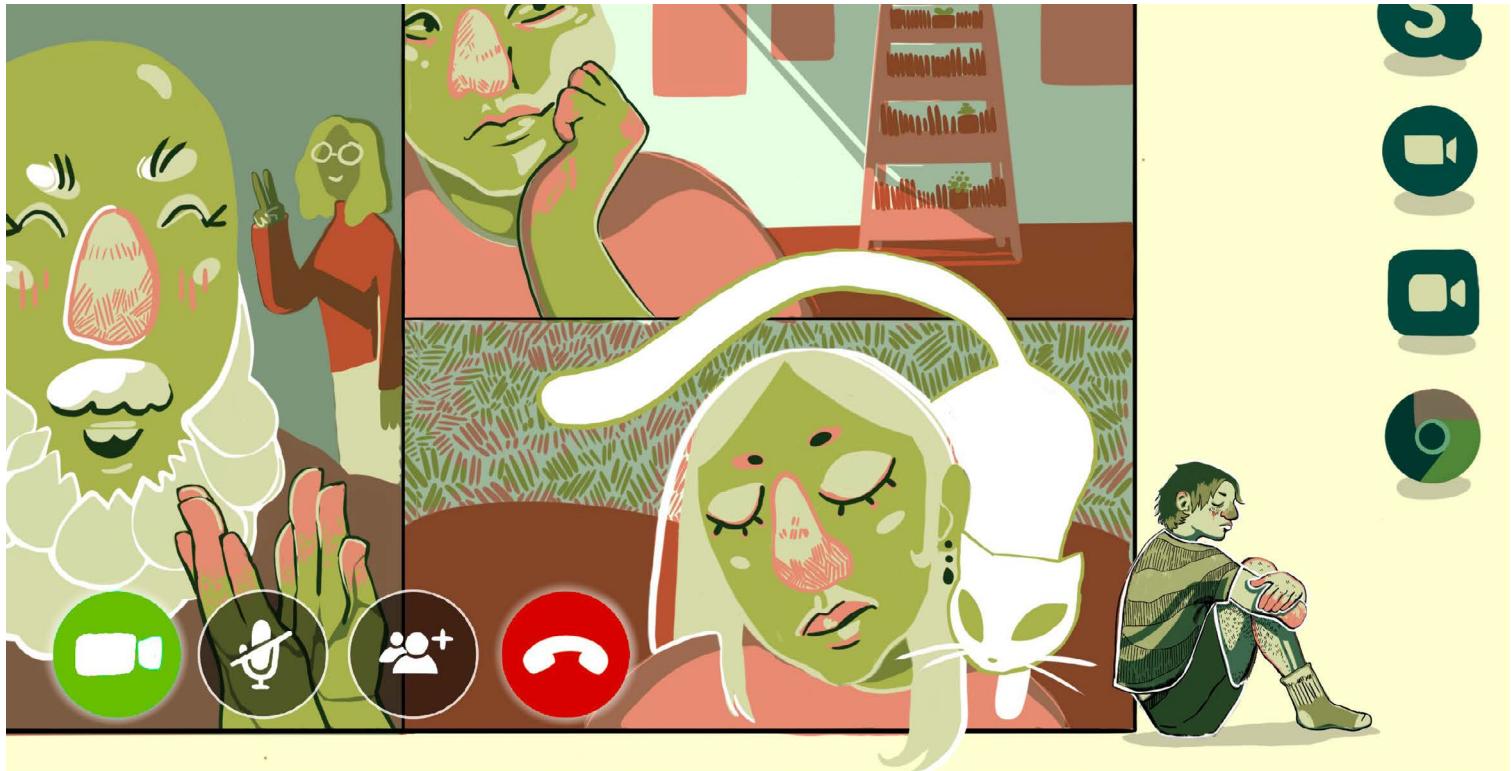


Illustration by Madeline De-Michele

PAOLA CORDERO

Pwatem

WHEN FIRST starting college, the excitement of being on your own and not having parents to watch your every move can be freeing — at first. The trips to Christian's Pizza at 1 a.m. and the all-nighters at Cabell Library will be some of your first experiences as an independent college student.

However, no matter your home situation, homesickness might creep up on you. Homesickness isn't just missing where you used to live, but rather missing the comfort, stability and love that being at home offers. With 12-15 credit hours, a job and extracurriculars, you can easily lose that feeling of stability and comfort. Here are some tips to get that feeling back without having to take a trip to your parents' house.

JOIN A STUDENT ORGANIZATION

Joining a student org might make you feel anxious or seem unrealistic due to your busy schedule as a college student. However, many VCU student orgs don't require you to attend every meeting, and there's an endless number of clubs to choose from for any hobby or interest you might have. Student groups are a great way to build community

Homesick? *Here's how to handle it*

and clear any extra free time you might have to distract your mind from missing home. RamsConnect, available at vcu.campus-groups.com/club_signup, is a great resource to find clubs at VCU and get involved.

CALL YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS

Talking to your family might seem like the simplest answer to homesickness, but it honestly helps. Having a conversation with the person who makes you feel most comfortable and loved can validate your feelings and motivate you to keep going. The people you love are always a phone call away — do not be afraid to ring them up.

EXPLORE YOUR NEW HOME

I know campus life can take a lot of getting used to, especially being at VCU in the middle of Richmond. Take some time to get familiar with your new surroundings. Richmond has a lot of parks, cafes, museums and other places you can explore to make yourself at home.

Familiarizing yourself with where you'll

be for the next four years will make you feel like less of a stranger in this new place. Of course, a new home will never replace your friends

and family from high school, but this is a new beginning. Surrounding yourself with love and positivity will help you succeed in all aspects of your life.

BE POSITIVE

You can easily drown in the feeling of loneliness from being in a place you do not quite belong yet. Try to be optimistic, because you are capable of achieving anything you put your mind to.

Following these tips is a good start to establishing a sense of well-being as a freshman. It isn't easy, but you can do it. Every day is a new opportunity to learn and try something new.

You definitely might face homesickness at some point as a freshman. Just know it will not last forever. Also, make sure what you are feeling isn't more than just homesickness. Counseling services are offered at VCU and will help you with any questions or concerns you might have. Lastly, remember you aren't alone. Grab some of your favorite food from back home, call your best friend, join the poetry club and make your place at VCU.

How to grocery shop in college

IMAN MEKONEN
The Commonwealth Times

Grocery shopping can be hard, especially if you're on your own in college for the first time. There are so many options, making the experience overwhelming and sometimes dreadful. Although it's extremely easy to steer clear of the healthy foods and go straight for the junk, you need to do what's best for your mind and body.

The school year is already tough, so your grocery shopping shouldn't be. Here are some tips and tricks to guide you through the grocery store aisles to make sure you aren't spending any extra time or money.

WHERE TO SHOP

Target at 5401 W. Broad St. has a great selection not just for groceries, but for anything you might need for your dorm. The location has produce, clothes, electronics and a pharmacy. It's the farthest of the bunch, but an easy 15-minute ride with the GRTC pulse to the Willow Lawn bus stop.

If you're looking to stretch your paycheck, Aldi at 927 Myers St. or Lidl at 4700 W. Broad St. are your best options. These pared-down grocery stores don't offer a ton of name brands, but most shoppers end up spending a fraction of what they would at other stores.

Kroger at 901 N. Lombardy St. is closer to campus at 20 minutes walking or five minutes driving. It's the perfect option if you don't want to travel far and need a bigger selection than what's available at the nearby convenience stores.

It has a produce section and a pharmacy. Just be ready for crowds, as it's the only grocery store within a reasonable walking distance of many Richmond neighborhoods.

If you're in need of groceries, apps such as Amazon Fresh and GoPuff deliver on



Illustration by Lindsay Hart

campus. I occasionally like to order from an app instead of physically going to the store because of its convenience. It also saves me time during times when I need groceries but don't have the time to go to the store.

WHAT TO SHOP FOR

The key to shopping for food in a college dorm, or in general as a college student on a budget, is to buy items you can use in a number of ways. For example, bananas can be a snack on their own, a topping to cereal or oatmeal, or a smoothie ingredient. Other examples are eggs, potatoes, pasta, rice, fruit — such as strawberries, blueberries, grapes and apples — and protein, like chicken, fish, ground beef or black bean veggie burgers. These items can be used in a multitude of ways. A helpful tip: when buying produce, frozen veggies — like broccoli, carrots, or asparagus — are more convenient than fresh produce because they last a lot longer.

If you decide to start cooking, your first shopping trip will be the most expensive because you'll have to buy all of the necessary base items and condiments. Some items to consider are hot sauce, peanut butter, parmesan cheese, salt, pepper and olive oil. You should always have some food in your dorm or apartment, preferably non-perish-

Tips to remember when shopping

1. Don't shop when you're hungry. You will end up buying too much and spending an unnecessary amount of money on non-essentials.
2. Make a list of what you absolutely need and your favorite ingredients to cook with before your shopping trip. This will help you stay organized and on track.
3. Go through your fridge once a week to clean out any old leftovers and make sure you don't buy duplicates.
4. Purchase reusable containers. You never know when you might need to take some food to-go or when you'll need extra storage space.
5. Keep your pantry and fridge organized. Keep the most-used items on the shelves for easy access. A clean and healthy fridge is a clean and healthy life, right?

Infographic by Andrew Caress

able. Some examples are ramen, applesauce, instant oatmeal packets, cereal and granola.

HOW TO USE YOUR GROCERIES

If you don't have a meal plan, you can meal prep for the week for a healthy and affordable alternative. To do this, you will need to cook some kind of grain — pasta, rice or quinoa — pair it with a protein, like beef, chicken, fish, black beans or falafel, and vegetables, such as raw or steamed red peppers, asparagus or broccoli. Doing this at the beginning of the week saves you time when you might not be able to fit cooking into your schedule.



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Switching your major is not the end of the world; it's the beginning

TAGWA SHAMMET

The Commonwealth Times

GOING TO COLLEGE HAS TO BE one of the most exciting, yet terrifying times of our lives. The concept of having to pick a singular subject to study that will inevitably lead me to the career of my life seems impossible. Sometimes, it is. Even in the midst of a pandemic, finding the perfect major for you can be hard.

Have no fear, you're not alone. When I first came to VCU, I was a pre-clinical laboratory sciences major. If I'm being quite honest, I don't really even know what that major entails, but my African father wanted me to be a doctor and this was the closest thing I could find without disappointing him. However, I knew deep down that my fear of blood and distaste for my intro to biology class meant I was not going to make it in this field.

So, I switched to the business school at VCU. I liked the concept that I had two years to decide what I actually wanted to major in. You see, the VCU School of Business doesn't allow you to declare a definitive major until you've passed all of the general business classes. Once that happens, you can choose from the array of different majors they have. I can't honestly tell you why I jumped into the business school, but one intro to economics class and I was stuck searching for another major.

Now, before I tell you about my last and final major choice, which was the right one if I may add, I'd like to tell you how I got there. VCU advising. You may not believe me, but VCU advisers truly are the people who will help guide you to success during your time at the university. Their entire job is to ensure you are graduating on time in a field that genuinely interests you.

It's recommended to see your adviser once a semester, but I would definitely recommend seeing them more, especially if you're an undecided student. For undeclared students, there are advisers who work exclusively with students who are lost on



Illustration by Kamryn Gillham

picking a major. They even hold one-credit seminar classes that can help you pick your major. This can be very helpful because they introduce a lot of different majors you might not have even known existed.

For students who come in declared, but would like a switch like me, there are also many options. You can talk to your assigned adviser and they will either connect you with an adviser from the new major you've decided on or an undeclared adviser.

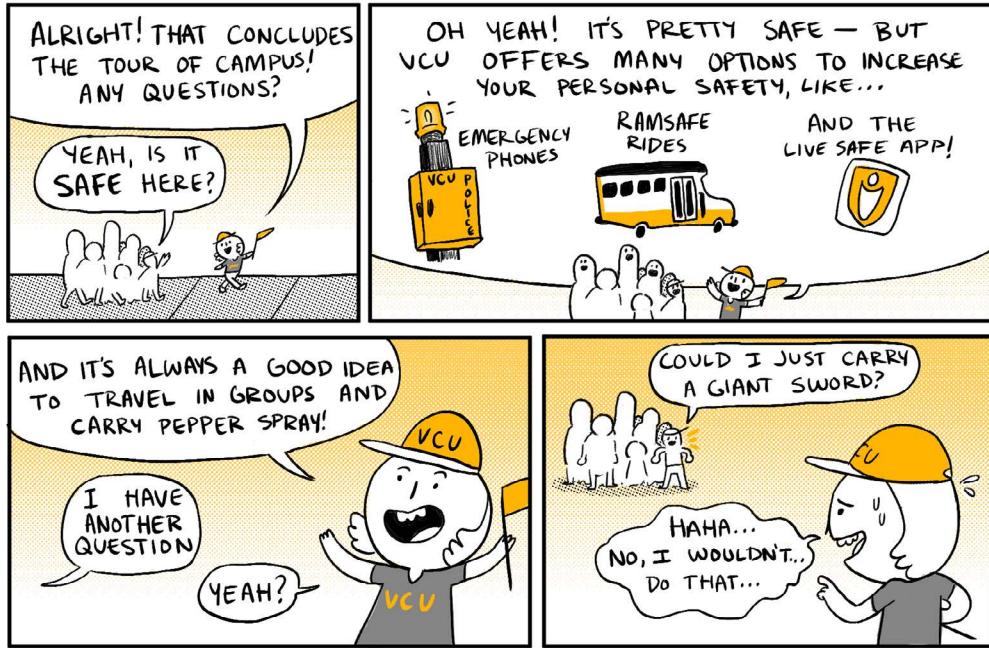
Changing your major really isn't hectic at all. For most majors, all you have to do is fill out the change of major form. However, below are the listed steps according to the VCU Advising website:

1. Before changing your major, concentration or minor, contact the program's advising office.
2. Review the requirements and prerequisites in the table below. Be aware that some programs have higher tuition rates and additional course fees. Credits previously earned at VCU or another university may not apply to the new program.

3. Submit the Change of Major/Concentration Form or the Change of Minor Form, and complete any additional steps required by your program.
4. The program change becomes official after Records and Registration receives authorization from the academic department head. Any changes made after the add/drop period will apply to the following fall or spring semester.

And, for the final reveal: I am a double major in political science with a concentration in public policy and administration, as well as philosophy with a concentration in philosophy and law. Pretty intricate, and I can say that without the help of VCU advising, I'd still be floating around wondering what my next crazy major will be.

Trust me when I say that changing your major is not the end of the world. It is the beginning of everything. Don't freak out when you realize that you might not like what you're studying. It is better to change and excel than stay in a failing position. So, when you decide it's time for a change, make sure to take advantage of the resources available to you.



BE CAUTIOUS WHEN WALKING ON CAMPUS AT NIGHT

Even if you live on campus, always consider your safety and the time of day when thinking about walking on campus. Never walk alone at night. Even for the shortest trips, taking a RamSafe can be extremely helpful. Don't try to brave it out when you're stuck at the library late at night. If you live a little farther from campus, taking an Uber or Lyft might be a better option.

The black, gold and white buses commonly seen around campus at night are RamSafe buses. RamSafe is a transportation service for students, staff and faculty that allows you to call a ride to on-campus locations on the Monroe Park Campus and the Medical Campus. The operational hours may vary, but are generally 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. for both campuses. To schedule a ride, follow these steps:

1. Download the RamSafe app for iOS or Android, or access the RamSafe website on a computer or mobile device.
2. Enter your VCU eID and password on the VCU login screen. For first time users, you may need to enter a phone number to receive text notifications. Then, on the RamSafe screen, enter information to request a ride. You must provide your current location, destination, number of people with you and any request for accommodations.
3. Once you are assigned a ride and given a bus number to look out for, you can track the location until it arrives. Be sure to look out for the right number bus when looking for your ride.
4. You will receive both a text notification and an in-app notification when the RamSafe has reached your location. You must scan your VCU student card upon entering the ride, so place it in an easily accessible area. The driver will wait three minutes before leaving, so be sure to plan accordingly when you first request a ride.

A guide to staying safe on campus

IMAN MEKONEN

The Commonwealth Times

Being on your own at college can be scary at first. A new environment means that there's a lot to get used to. Every year, it's good to brush up on safety information that will not only benefit you, but your community as well.

Take advantage of the various available resources to VCU students intended to ensure a safe and secure environment. Here are a few tips that will help you stay safe on campus.

KEEP NOTE OF THE VCU POLICE DEPARTMENT'S EMERGENCY NUMBERS

On-Campus Emergency: 804-828-1234

Off-Campus Emergency: 911

Non-Emergency: 804-828-1196

RamSafe Escort Service:

804-828-SAFE (7233)

STAY UP TO DATE ABOUT VCU ALERTS

VCU text alerts keep the community up to date with information regarding traffic, fire, robbery and other emergencies. You should always make sure you have a fully charged phone in case of emergencies. Being able to access your phone in an emergency and receive text updates are the best ways to stay up-to-date on safety-related information.

Sign up for text alerts on VCU alert's website, which lists the steps and options for family members and community members.

ALWAYS CARRY PEPPER SPRAY

Pepper spray is great to have as a self defense tool; it's also discreet enough to fit on your keychain. Pepper spray can give you a sense of safety and peace of mind should you find yourself in a dangerous situation.

Although you should always carry pepper spray with you, be mindful of places where it may not be allowed. For instance, don't make the mistake of accidentally bringing pepper spray into a concert venue, as they will take it away from you.

UTILIZE THE VARIETY OF SAFETY APPS VCU HAS AVAILABLE IN THE APP STORE

The LiveSafe app allows users to communicate with VCU Police and provides resources. The app allows access to a safety map to see surroundings in an unfamiliar area, help to be requested in an emergency, a tool to virtually escort peers or request an escort from VCU Police.

How to set up the LiveSafe app

1. Download the app from the Android or iOS app store
2. Select VCU as your local agency
3. Set up your profile

If your RamSafe's wait time is unbearable and you must walk at night, ask a friend to walk with you or call a friend or family member to keep you company so you're not completely alone. And if you're walking home alone, stay alert with minimal distractions — avoid wearing big headphones or listening to loud music.

Visit <https://police.vcu.edu/stay-safe/> for more information.

Preparing to live off campus

SCOTT MALONE

The Commonwealth Times

At some point almost everyone is going to have to live off campus, and that's certainly a worrisome prospect for college kids who are just making their way out into the world.

The first thing any VCU student looking to live off campus should do is start browsing through offcampus.vcu.edu — a VCU office dedicated to helping students find housing — Zillow, Craigslist or Richmond Facebook group Lindsey's List. Look for reviews of the leasing company or landlord, because being stuck in an apartment at the mercy of a bad landlord is more than unpleasant. When touring locations, be skeptical of any issues that might need repair.

Depending on your personality, the thought of roommates is either exciting or worrisome. After all, living with a stranger can be unnerving. A word of advice, though, funds are going to be tight, especially if you are going through college on your own with

no parental help. Getting a roommate will dramatically decrease your rent. In many cases it's unavoidable. You can try to see if any friends are willing to room with you, but it's not always a good idea to live with friends, depending on your dynamic. Don't shy away from off-campus services or posting in Facebook groups to search for roommates with similar lifestyles.

Even though it's early in the school year, the time to think about next year's housing will creep up on you. Units at the more preferable options will start to fill up as early as halfway through the spring semester for leases beginning in late summer. It's better



Illustration by Karly Andersen

to start your search early to have housing locked down long before you leave Richmond for the summer.

If you'd rather speak to someone about your questions in person, you can set an appointment with the Off Campus Housing Service online at vcuoffcampus.youcanbook.me, by phone at 804-828-4514 or by email at offcampus@vcu.edu.

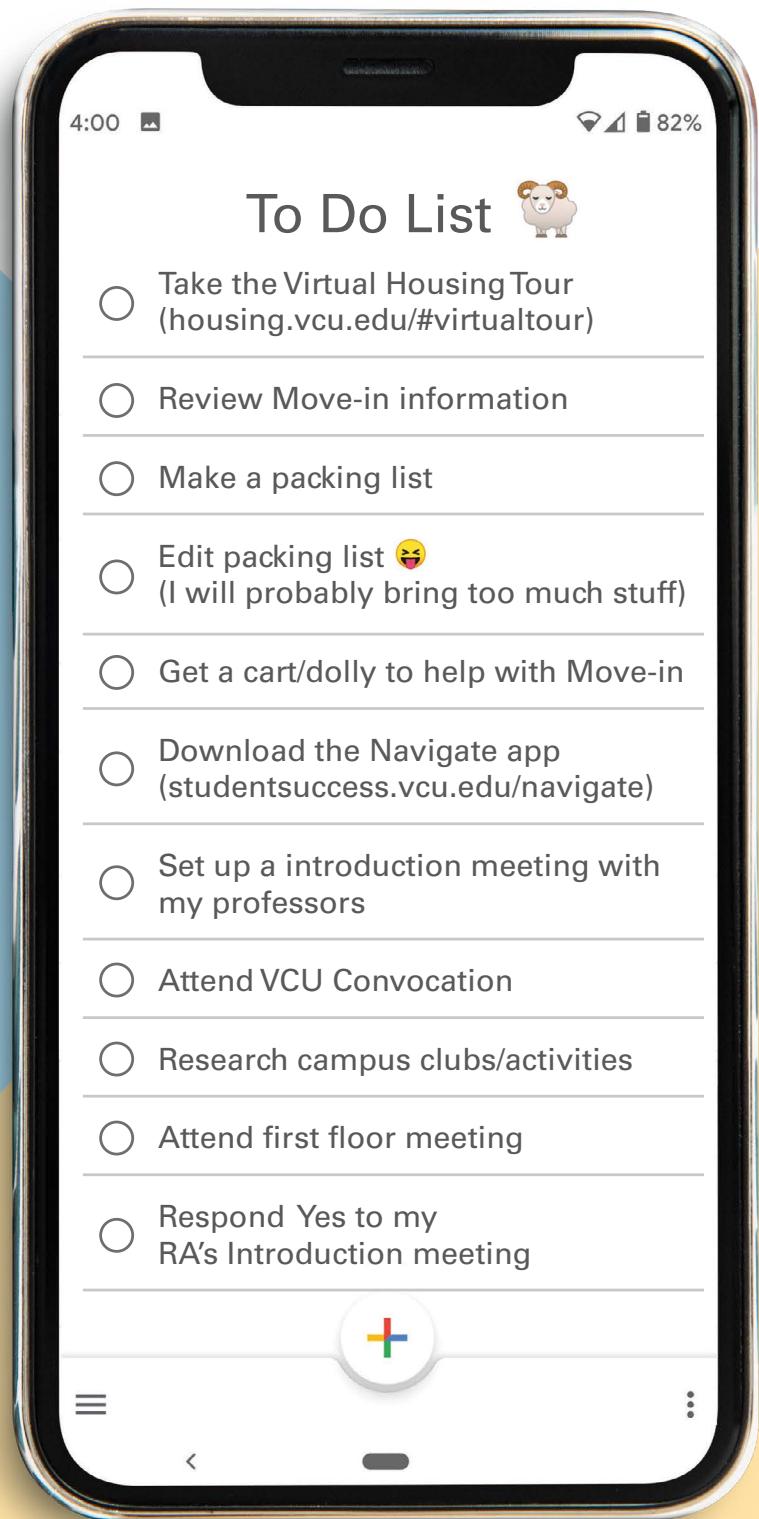
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Check off your Fall On-campus to-do-list.



VCU Residential Life
and Housing

Wait, what is that again? A VCU dictionary of terms

GEORGIA GEEN
The Commonwealth Times

No matter how many AP, IB or dual enrollment courses you took, nothing could have prepared you for the onslaught of new lingo splattered across the grid of an unfamiliar city. Two campuses, multiple bus systems and countless buildings can get confusing. Though it's far from comprehensive, this brief list of terms might help you navigate VCU with fewer bumps in the road.

Brandt

Cabell Library

B

Brandt (n.):

A suite-style dorm located at 710 W Franklin St. next to its older neighbor, Rhoads. It offers suites connected by a private bathroom and common area.

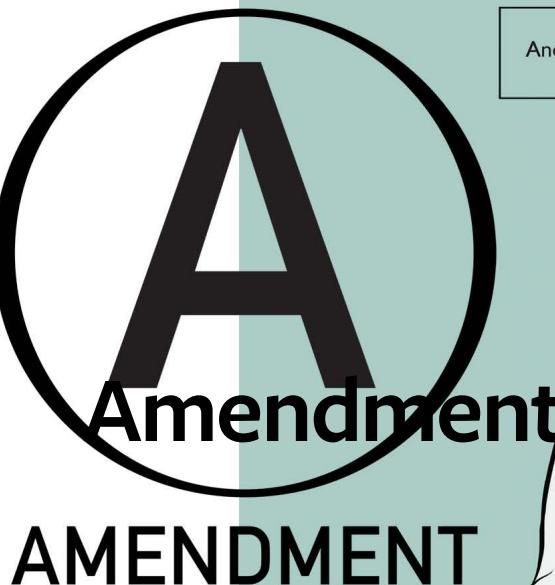
C

Cabell Library (n.):

VCU's Monroe Park Campus library at 901 Park Ave. which usually attracts tens of thousands of visitors a week during the school year. Its databases, accessible at www.library.vcu.edu, are essential for most students and the Starbucks located near the front entrance is heavily utilized.

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Carleigh Ross
DEAR LOVE
Excerpt from
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The Commons**The Commons (n.):**

Home to Taco Bell, Chick-fil-a, Pizza Hut and Freshii, this student hub is a popular dining destination. It's located at 907 Floyd Ave. and houses organizations like the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA), Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (SAEO), Career Services, and Fraternity & Sorority Life.

G**Gladding Residence Center (GRC) (n.):**

The newest residence hall at VCU, located at 711 W Main St., was opened in fall 2019. GRC includes a kitchen for each “neighborhood” of 125 to 200 students and built-in USB charging ports.

J**Johnson (n.):**

VCU's most hipster residence hall is located at 801 W. Franklin St. It features mostly double-occupancy rooms, crown molding and possibly ghosts.

Jonah's (n.):

Somewhat similar to Shafer Dining Court, but we think it's better. Located on the MCV Campus, it's just a bus ride away for most students. Almost everything, including made-to-order hamburgers, pizza, cheesecake and a salad bar, is Swipe-able. For the menu and operating hours, visit <https://vcu.campusdish.com/en/LocationsAndMenus/Jonahs>.

M**Monroe Park Campus (n.):**

Home to Shafer Dining Court, Cabell Library and most undergraduate housing, this area — sprawling north and south between Cary and Marshall Streets and roughly confined east to west between Belvidere and Harrison — is where most undergraduate students spend a majority of their time.

MCV Campus (n.):

Located downtown, MCV houses the VCU Medical Center and the university's health science programs. Food carts are prevalent in this area, due to the high number of professionals in need of a quick lunch. No freshman year is complete without a trip to Jonah's.

O**OMSA (n.):**

The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, often called OMSA, is located in the Commons. The office celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion, and advocates for social justice, through a variety of programming throughout the year. OMSA offerings include cultural heritage month celebrations, cultural achievement graduation ceremonies, mentorship and leadership development. For a full list of events and programs, visit <https://omsa.vcu.edu/>.

R**RamSafe (n.):**

An evening shuttle service available to students, faculty and staff between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. 365 days a year. Users can request rides to locations on and near the

Swifey

Monroe Park and MCV campuses via the RamSafe app, online at ramsafe.vcu.edu or over-the-phone at 828-SAFE.

Rhoads (n.):

Rhoads is a traditional residence hall located at 710 W Franklin St. and connected to Brandt.

S**Shafer Dining Court (n.):**

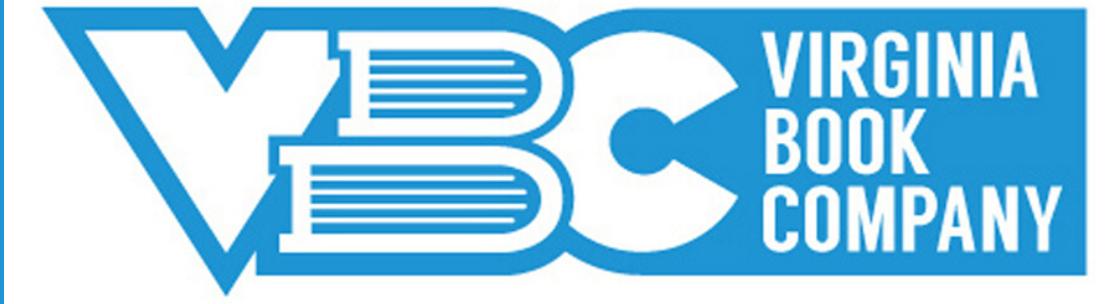
The good parts? The variety of options, the ice-cream machine that usually works, and it's open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends. Oh, and it's all-you-can-eat for one Swipe.

Swipes (n., v.):

The staple of every dining plan, those living in freshman residence halls — like Johnson, Brandt, Rhoads and GRC — are required to have hundreds of these. One swipe equals one meal — or entry for one person into Shafer — from VCU's dining locations during their swipe hours. Note: not everything on the menus can be swiped. If you're feeling generous, you can become a Swifey for someone without a dining plan.

Swifey (n.):

A generous soul who Swipes food for someone without a dining plan. Swifey relationships can be long-term, casual or so brief you don't even learn the person's name.



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Illustration by Lauren Johnson

Mental health resources to get you through freshman year

ANYA SCZERZENIE
The Commonwealth Times

It's not uncommon for college students to struggle with their mental health from time to time. Luckily, VCU, like most other universities, offers resources to help students during difficult times.

University Counseling Services — On the second floor of the Commons and at counseling.vcu.edu, University Counseling Services is one of the main resources for mental health care at VCU. Counseling Services is offering tele-health appointments to students, including video teletherapy. To schedule an appointment, call 804-828-6200. Additionally, the office's Advocacy Services

offer support related to sexual violence, intimate partner violence and stalking. To speak to an advocate, call the number listed above. In the case of a mental health emergency, students can speak with a crisis clinician by calling the number above as well.

The Well — The Health Promotion and Well-Being Center, commonly referred to as The Well, is a one-stop shop for all sorts of wellness resources. It hosts Rams in Recovery, a group for students recovering from substance abuse disorders. Mindfulness and meditation activities that can help with daily stress are also available. Visit thewell.vcu.edu for more information.

Student Health Services — Although you may think of Student Health as a regular doctor's office, it can also help you with

the medical side of mental health issues. If you take any prescription drugs, such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications, Student Health can be great for medication management. It has its own pharmacy with lower prices than those at a normal drugstore. Located on Broad Street next to the Siegel Center, Student Health is open five days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the academic year. Visit health.students.vcu.edu for more information.

Outside counseling centers — Sometimes, if you have a long-term problem, you may be referred to a community provider to continue therapy. There are many of these in Richmond, which vary in location and price. You can ask a university counselor at UCS to match you with an outside counselor who takes your insurance, specializes in treating your issue, and even narrow your search by gender and location.

Your RA — They're here to help you. Although it may be nerve-wracking to talk to someone you don't know, it's an RA's job to help you navigate college life. If you're living on campus, you will have an RA either for your whole floor or for a section of it, and it's always a good idea to try to get to know them. They may be able to help you out or guide you toward other resources — after all, they've been through their first year already.

The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) — LGBTQ students face higher rates of mental health issues than their straight peers. If you are part of that community, OMSA may be a good place to seek community and resources.

Remember, you're not alone. You're not the first, nor will you be the last, college student to struggle with their mental health.

Those in need can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

Staying creative during the pandemic

MARLON MCKAY

Pwatem

The coronavirus pandemic has changed most of our lives completely. Many have adjusted to working and learning from home, and are limiting or eliminating outings to practice social distancing. These stresses and changes have put a strain on the creativity of people stuck at home as they try to live life day-to-day. In these troubling times, it is important however to try to nurture our creativity so that we don't lose our outlet in the world.

I can understand being creative now might seem like the least of people's worries. However, nurturing your creativity can help you cope with the world and keep a sense of normalcy.

It can offer an escape from the stress of everything and let you have control again.

You have to find that balance somehow.

One way I've been able to stay creative recently is using the extra time on my hands to write. When I say write I mean writing about anything: new story ideas, characters, or even revisiting old pieces. When I can't think of anything to write that day, I'll search online for prompts to write just to keep my skills sharp. The consistent writing helps me keep a flow of ideas going through my head to work from, and distract my mind from the current state of the world, making it easier to focus on my writing.

While for me personally I find writing helps to distract me from the pandemic, others might lean into the pandemic to help them write. Pulling from life experiences is a well-known writing technique and can help get your creative juices flowing. Observing how the pandemic affects the world and pulling inspiration from that for

your writing opens a world of possibilities to work with. You can write about how the virus has personally affected you and/or your family, what you see happening in your environment, or how you think the world will change in the aftermath of the virus.

My tips are mostly geared toward writing because that is how I show my creativity. But that's not the only way to be creative while stuck at home. You can do many other things, including drawing, playing music or cooking. There are so many creative outlets in the world to try; I know many people who have spent this time painting and fixing up their homes and adding their own personal flair to their living space. My mom has tried new recipes and styles of cooking any chance she gets. These little acts of creativity are great ways to pass all the extra time that we've been given.

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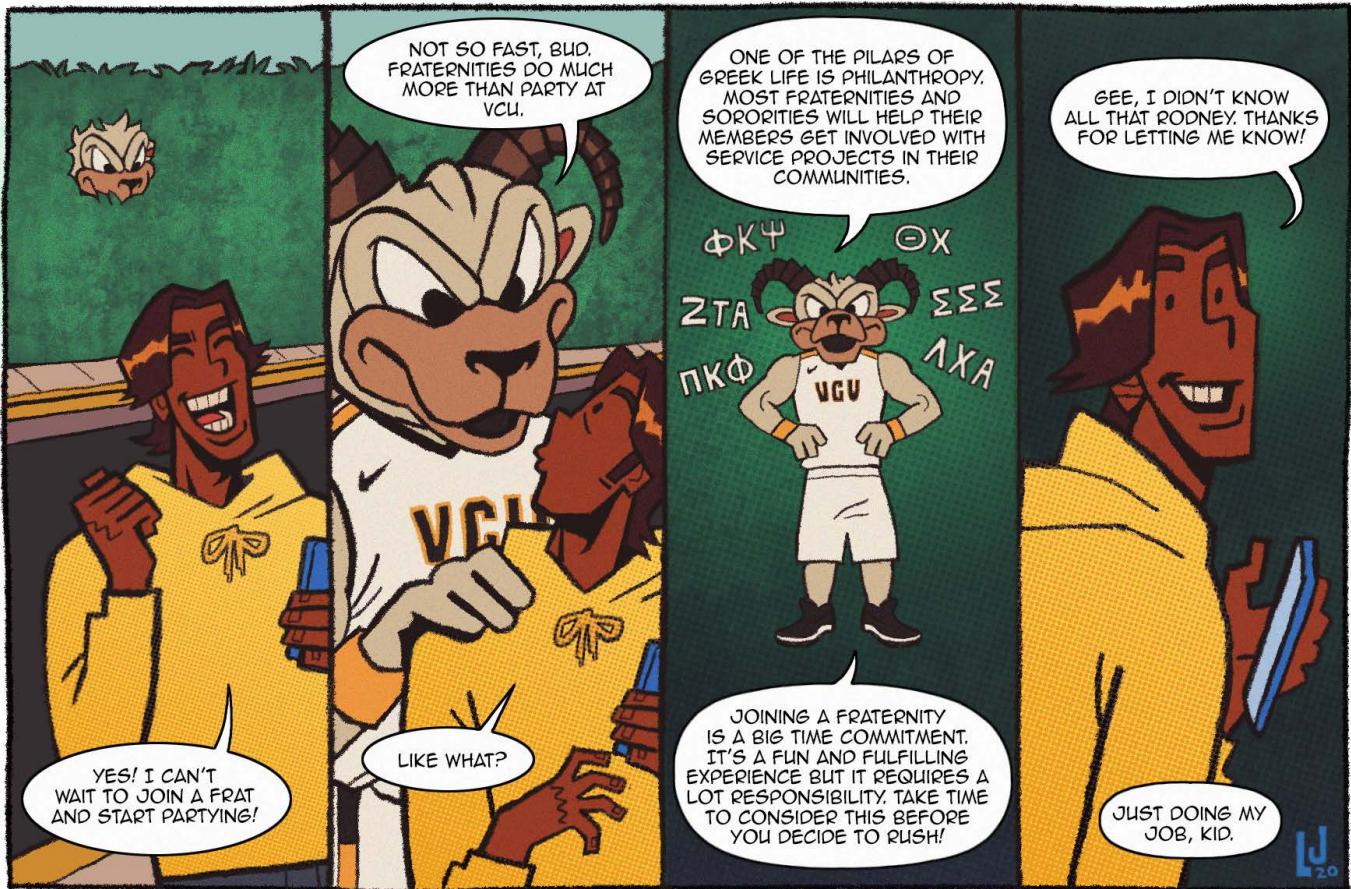


Illustration by Lauren Johnson

Values Based Fraternal Experience at VCU

Riley Vespoli, MA
Coordinator of Fraternity & Sorority Life

Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) has held a negative stigma in the eyes of the general public for decades, with the narrative that it is a social club that consists solely of parties. Some even go as far as to say that members buy their friends. To those who are not a part of Fraternity and Sorority Life, it would be easy to see only this. However, if you were to look a little deeper, you would see the tenants of the VCU FSL: community, scholarship, leadership, philanthropy, and service.

Community

What on the surface we call brotherhood and sisterhood really amounts to so much more. There is friendship, support, networking, and mentorship just to name a few ways these students foster community.

Scholarship

Academics are a high priority for the community. The minimum GPA to join is a 2.5, with many individual chapters requiring

higher. Many students find that their academics are boosted through the support and programming that their chapters provide.

Leadership

This community is full of leaders, engaged both within fraternity and sorority life as well as outside organizations at VCU. The community is highly involved in leadership development by participating in national and local conferences to further their skills.

Philanthropy

A cornerstone of fraternity and sorority life is philanthropy. Through collaboration and creative programming, these organizations work tirelessly to fundraise for their respective causes. In the 2019-2020 academic year alone, the VCU FSL community raised over \$100,000.

Service

Service is another essential part of the fraternity and sorority life experience. Given the location of VCU, there are numerous

opportunities to be a part of the community and give back. During the 2019-2020 academic year, the community completed more than 8,000 service hours.

Students make real connections on how their membership has affected their overall student experience. Aliyah Simmons, the Council President of the National Pan-Hellenic Council says, "FSL at VCU is amazing because it provides you with opportunities to further your leadership development, connect with others who hold your same values, and make your mark in your organization, on campus, and in your community". In addition, Kevin Norizadeh, the Council President of the Interfraternity Council says, "FSL is great because it offers students of all backgrounds an opportunity to find a home on campus. There is a place for everyone and there is so much room for personal and professional growth within the community. FSL has provided me with some of my closest friends, greatest experiences, and chances to give back to our community."

As of 2020, the VCU FSL community has over 1,500 members and 40 organizations. To find out more, please check out our website <https://vcu.campusgroups.com/fsl/home/>.



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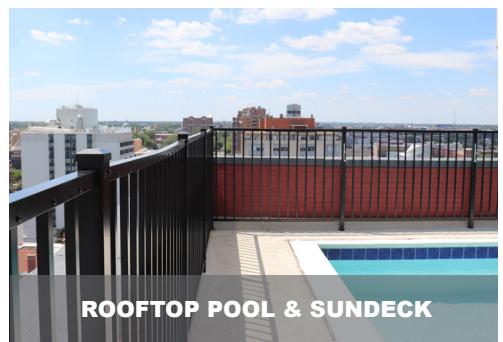


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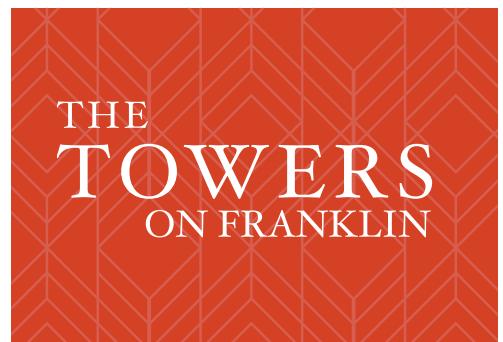




Illustration by Madeline De-Michele

Facing my coronavirus-induced anxiety

SHAMS HAMID
Amendment

ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES. For us privileged enough that our main concern is the boredom of staying inside, how have we not yet cured cancer or learned every single TikTok dance? We claim that the coronavirus with its ramifications has increased the amount of free time each person has. I argue that instead most of us are giving ourselves more time for avoidance.

We avoid anything related to the coronavirus and our ever-changing reality. We are instead claiming we have more free time. In my case, instead of the simple act of reading my emails, I have baked a cheesecake, made dinner for my family several times,

worked in the yard, spent several hours in bed watching television, and learned three TikTok dances I would personally like to believe require an intermediate level of skill. I felt, for the most part, I was still being “productive” (a questionable word in itself).

It wasn’t until the activities were no longer distracting me, and I was lying on my floor with red star stickers plastered on my forehead and Hershey’s chocolate wrappers surrounding me, that I realized this isn’t ending anytime soon.

I can now clearly see the rising signs of my anxiety, but at the time, I read it as boredom. So if you feel bored, I challenge you to test yourself. Sit still and allow yourself to think. For me, it was initially overwhelming (although most things are). The anxiety I already had presented itself anew

with different nuances. I felt like I lost my purpose because of the pandemic and how it affected my plans. But I challenge you to let the thoughts flood your mind, because like a wave, the current chaos will always pass back into calm waters.

We are all trying to distract ourselves, and in my case, the subconscious goal was to distract myself until the pandemic was over. But it’s taking longer than expected. We are going to be in a state of unknown for, at the very least, months more. And nothing is scarier than fear of the unknown.

So try to keep yourself stable, wash your hands, and if you are lucky enough to be social distancing with other people, be considerate to one another. Oh, and don’t forget to read your emails.

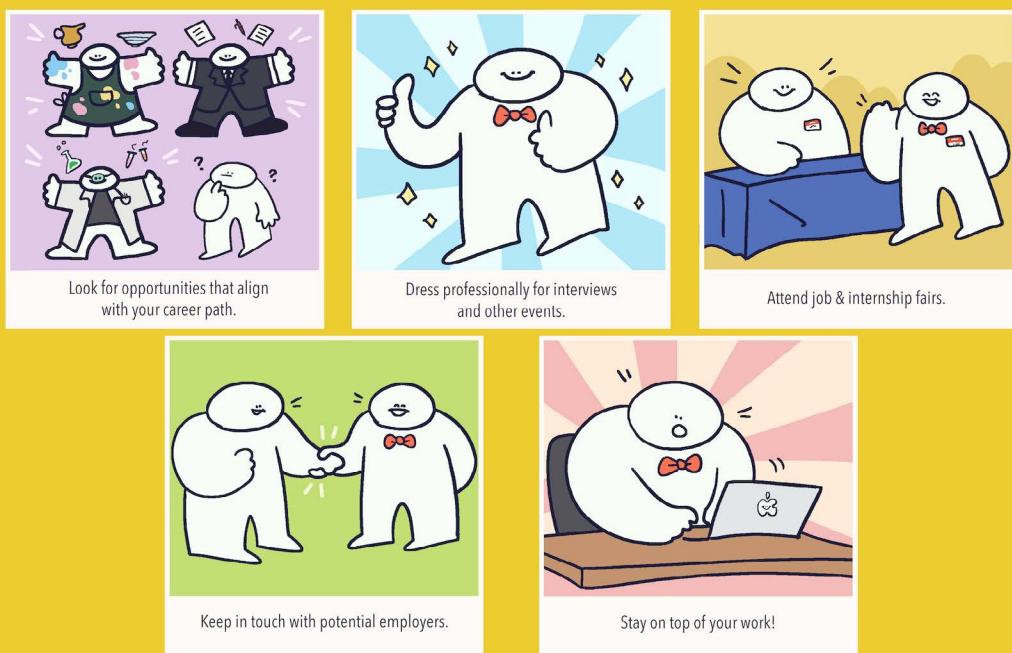


Illustration by Claire Deely

NAOMI GHAHRAI
The Commonwealth Times

Internships.

Networking. Opportu-

nities. These words constantly bombard the minds of college students. Although academics may be at the forefront of a college education, graduate schools and employers want to see experience outside of the classroom.

According to a 2012 survey conducted by the Chronicle of Higher Education cited in The Atlantic, employers listed experiences outside of academics — such as internships, jobs, volunteering and extracurriculars — as the most important element in hiring a recent graduate. College students constantly feel the pressure to maintain good grades, but on top of that, they have to find meaningful experiences outside of the classroom.

VCU provides multiple channels to discover university, local and national opportunities. For example, on the VCU Career Services website, at careers.vcu.edu, students can find internships through Handshake. If you need guidance to find the perfect internship, Career Services welcomes students to set an appointment. Many departments also host their own internship events, and some majors require internships in order to graduate.

An appointment with the National Scholarship Office, or NSO, helps students explore prestigious opportunities such as the James C. Gaither Junior Fellows Program, Herbert

Scoville Jr. Peace Fellowship, Fulbright scholarships and the SMART Scholarship, short for Science, Mathematics and Research for Transformation. Moreover, NSO helps students create competitive applications for these scholarships and fellowships.

Sometimes, the best internships are hidden from public view, usually resulting from networking. VCU Career Services hosts multiple networking events such as the Education Career Fair, Nonprofit Organization Fair, and Math & Science Career and Internship Fair. For pre-med students, events at the MCV campus can be networking opportunities too.

In addition, the daily late-night Telegram email is a source of networking events across campus. One of the most well-known events on campus for exploring opportunities is the Student Organization Fair, formerly known as the SOVO Fair, which is usually held near the beginning of each semester.

On another note, professors are also sources for networking. Students can become research assistants for a professor, or the professor can be a source of contact for other opportunities. Office hours are an undergraduate's best friend, so find out when they are and take advantage of them.

Moreover, events hosted by the student's academic department are excellent for networking.

For instance, the math department hosts a "Math Tea" event every Friday in which undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty can mingle.

Involvement in research is beneficial for academic and career goals for many areas of study. Research symposiums and seminars introduce undergraduate students to the faculty and graduate students conducting professional research in their fields. Although research is generally associated with STEM, research is relevant to all disciplines. The VCU Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship Summer Fellowship is a great starting point for research exposure.

Even with all the campus resources and events, with the right search terms, Google can be a source of valuable internships and opportunities. However, it is important to ensure these internships and opportunities are reputable and legitimate.

Opportunities and internships outside the classroom are readily available, and can provide invaluable experience for college students of any major or class level. It can be stressful to choose which opportunity to pursue, but it is important to find internships that resonate with your passion and future goals.

Dear Freshmen, An advice column for the modern first-year

1. GO TO CLASS

Attending class is important. Learning the material in person helps you to better understand the lesson!

2. CREATE A ROUTINE

Develop long-term and efficient time management skills by building a schedule. Make time for studying / school-work and social activities, such as extracurricular or hanging out with friends. Don't forget to set aside time for self care and mental health.

3. KEEP TRACK OF DEADLINES

Find a planning and organization system that best works to help you stay organized. No one way is the right way. You can use physical planners, any piece of paper in your vicinity, or mobile

and online resources, such as Google Calendar or the notes app on your phone.

4. TAKE GOOD NOTES

Speaking of good organization systems, developing a note-taking strategy is just as important. Whether you're in an academics-heavy major, like science or business, to creative practices, such as art and design, notes can help you keep track of important information.

5. DON'T GET TOO WORKED UP ABOUT YOUR GRADES

Grades are important, but they don't need to cause unnecessary stress. Trust your knowledge of the material.

6. MAKE FRIENDS/STUDY BUDDIES

Meeting new people in class can help you to create study groups. This is a great way to have others help you with difficult concepts, and, of course, you can also return the favor.

7. IF YOU NEED HELP, ASK

Never be afraid to ask for help. You are your best advocate in college. Your advisors, professors, TAs, and CLC tutors are there for you.

8. JOIN A CLUB

Clubs allow you to pursue any passion, and interact with people you may not know are around you. It's a wonderful way to relax after, or in the midst of a stressful week. We personally highly recommend checking out the publications at the SMC :)

9. FIND A GOOD STUDY/WORKING SPOT

VCU is full of study spaces, from the five floors of Cabell Library, to the upper floors of MCALC, and the Student Commons. If you live on campus, some dorms have study rooms.

10. EXPLORE RICHMOND!

The City of Richmond is a RICH and diverse community. From the vast art and gallery scene, to the locally owned fashion shops and small businesses, there's something for everyone. Be sure to also explore all the yummy food stops and grab a bite.

Have fun and do great things :)
Sincerely, Amendment

Infographic by Andrew Caress

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The Commonwealth Times



Top 10 things to do in your first year at VCU

1.

Cast lines.

You will catch nothing if you don't take a few shots in the dark. Make sure you go to student organization involvement fairs when they're offered. Search for that thing or group of people that gives you direction. Don't worry if you don't find it at first. So long as you try, it will find you, eventually.

2.

Establish a favorite hangout.

Restaurant, coffee shop, etc. Reliance on your meal plan is to be expected, but Richmond's culinary scene is too vibrant to ignore.

3.

Go to class.

For real, y'all, don't waste the tens of thousands of dollars you or your parents or guardian are paying for you to be here. You will almost certainly pass (at first) if you just show up.

4.

Hit the river while it is still warm.

Our favorite is Texas Beach, but you have options; Belle Isle, Pipeline and Pony Pasture, to name a few. If you don't have an intimate relationship with the James River, you are not a true Richmonder.

5.

DO NOT feel pressured to choose a major.

Take some gen-eds and figure things out. Nearly everybody switches at least once. Schedule an appointment with your academic adviser and brainstorm together.

6.

Create a weekly agenda.

Time management skills are imperative. Develop them if you, like many of us, are not naturally gifted in this capacity.

7.

Touch the Ram Horns ONCE.

Terrible things will happen and your time at VCU will be cursed if you do multiple times. You touch them again when you graduate. Keep a 50-foot perimeter in the meantime.

8.

Go to No Shame Variety Show.

It's held at Cary Street Playhouse on Friday nights (every other week). It's a sketch comedy show by and for VCU students and a perfect introduction to the community.

9.

Reach out to your dorm-mates.

You are all scared to one extent or another. Everybody just wants to make friends.

10.

Be unapologetically yourself.

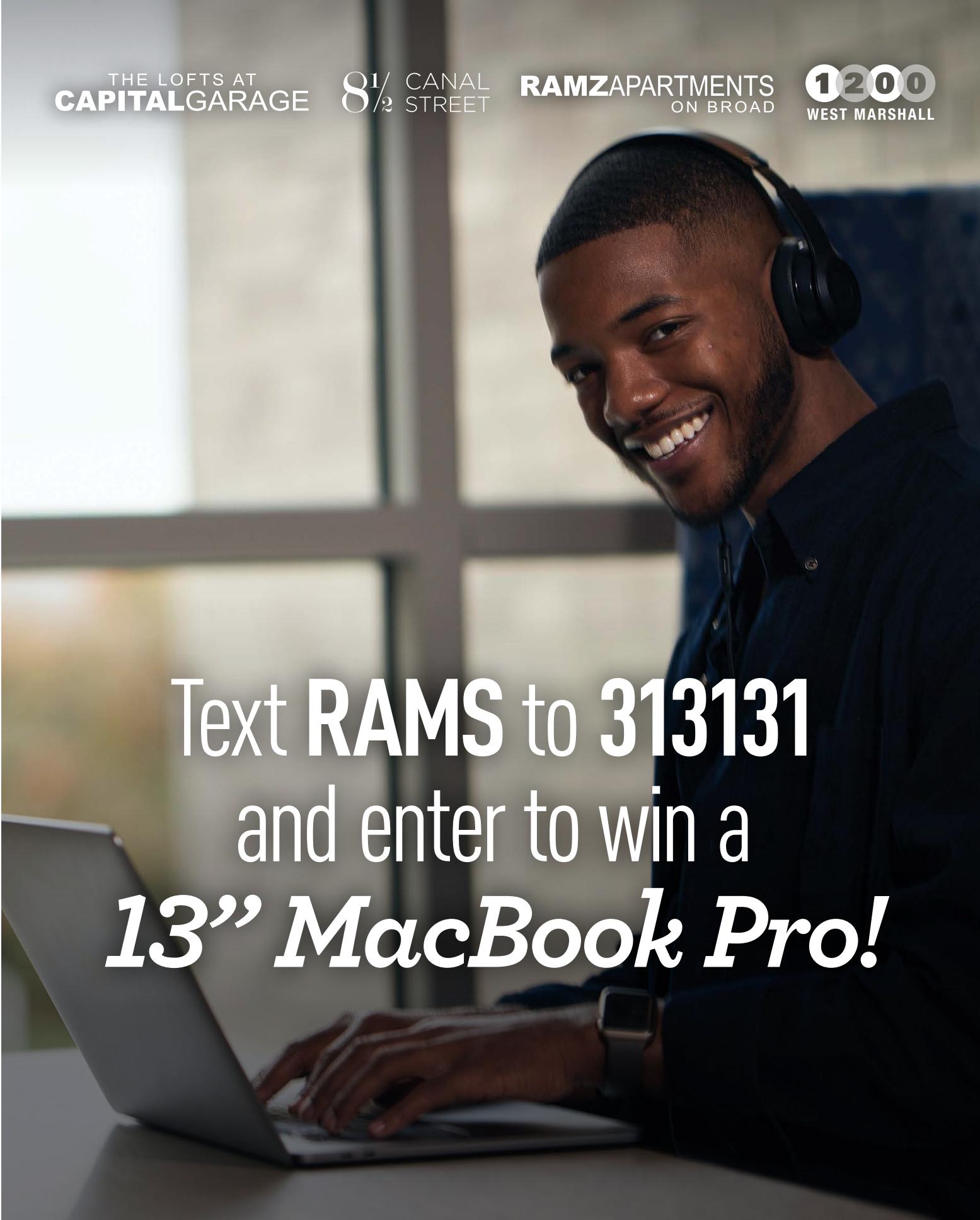
Do not be who you think others want you to be. Fronting does not behoove Richmonders.

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- Get a selfie with Rodney.
- Meet the university president.
- Show your pride in the Ram Spirit Walk.
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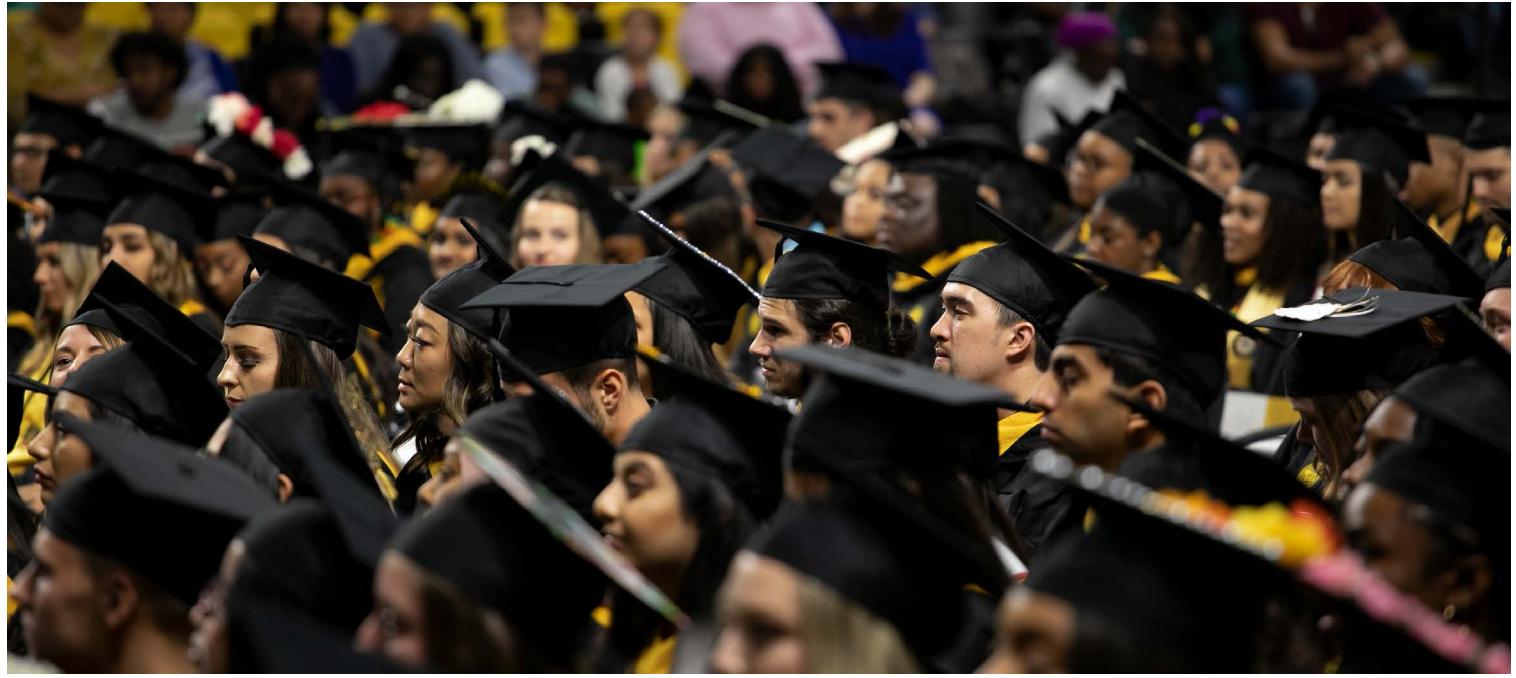


Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez

How to plan your graduation

GEORGIA GEEN

Compass copy editor

The road to graduation isn't as simple as doing the math and taking 15 credits a semester for four years. It might seem simple at the beginning, just a matter of listening to your adviser and not failing your classes. But for many students, college has a way of complicating itself.

It's easy for life to get in the way, especially for students who work a part- or full-time job during the semester or have similar obligations. Throw a minor or two, or a double-major, into the mix, and planning soon becomes overwhelming. Advisers are there to help with the process, and they're valuable resources, but preparation and knowledge on the part of the student makes planning to graduate a much smoother process. Plus, it's not like advisers have a magic wand that can undo every misstep.

Setting a goal for your graduation date, if that's something you'd like to do, involves addressing a number of factors, like the number of credits required for your major,

“

It might seem simple at the beginning, just a matter of listening to your advisor and not failing your classes. But for many students, college has a way of complicating itself.

*Georgia Geen,
Compass copy editor*

whether you want to add a minor or a double-major, how much time you have to dedicate to your course load and how long you can afford to pay tuition. Some students who might be able to graduate early decide not to because they want to add other areas of study or don't think they'll be ready to face the real world so soon.

Familiarize yourself with the required courses for your major through the course bulletin, available at bulletin.vcu.edu, and through DegreeWorks, an eServices tool that lets students view their progress in their programs. Knowing what courses are ahead of you can help you pace yourself — it's generally a good idea to balance general education courses with those from your major every semester, especially the first few semesters, so that you don't burn yourself out. Once you have a better idea of how much you can handle, you can evaluate

whether to speed up the process by taking on more credits each semester or to slow down and take on fewer classes.

But there's every chance proper pacing can be interrupted by an unexpected

scheduling conflict or a full class. Looking at the course schedule for previous semesters, in addition to the current or upcoming one, can give you an idea of when certain classes are offered and if they're only available during certain semesters. Of course, schedules change, so it's a good idea to reach out to the professor or department if you realize a few classes you need to take in the upcoming semesters conflict with each other and you're a year or so out from graduating.

One of the pluses of advancing through your major is the smaller class sizes, but that also means courses fill up faster. It might not seem like a big deal not to be able to take the exact class you wanted, but small inconveniences can add up, especially if you have multiple majors or minors to coordinate. In order to minimize the risk of being locked out of a class you needed to take, be sure to sign up as soon as registration opens for you. If you can't get a spot in a class at first, keep checking over the following months — a lot of people change their schedules, so you could get lucky.

College isn't a race, but for those who want to work toward a specific graduation date, empower yourself to know what steps to take to achieve that goal. Planning ahead will always be a more effective strategy than taking 15 credits a semester and hoping for the best.

Consider these student organizations, broken down by interest

SOCIAL JUSTICE

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL at VCU is a group of Black, brown, LGBTQ, women and allied students fighting for human rights at VCU, the Richmond community and across the globe. Members meet regularly and advocate for human rights through community events, social media campaigns and fundraisers.
Contact: amnestyintvcu@gmail.com

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

GENERATION ACTION at VCU organizes events on campus and in the community to advocate for reproductive rights and sexual health. This group connects with other chapters throughout the country to create change through national campaigns, conference and leadership opportunities.
Contact: vcugenact@gmail.com

THE FREEDOM PROJECT at VCU raises awareness of human rights violations, with focus on human trafficking. The group tables to provide information, collects donations for trafficking victims and educates on human trafficking.
Contact: freedomprojectvcu@gmail.com

ART

ART HISTORY CLUB strives to bring people of all disciplines together over a mutual love for art history. The group hosts art walks, potlucks and group trips.
Contact: matiasd@vcu.edu

MUSIC

AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTOR'S ASSOCIATION Student Chapter at VCU is dedicated to excellence in choral music performances, compositions, publications and research.

It holds several big events, including a concert with high school students, fundraisers for master classes, workshops and travel opportunities.

Contact: acda.vcu@gmail.com

BRASS PLAYER'S ASSOCIATION at VCU works to strengthen the VCU brass ensembles and promote knowledge of brass instruments and literature.

Contact: vcubrassplayers@gmail.com

THE PEPPAS, VCU's athletic pep band, play at sporting events — including, but not limited to, men's basketball games and the NCAA and A-10 tournaments. Interested students can audition at the beginning of the school year and fill out a Google form available at vcuathletics.com/information/PepBand.

Contact: vcuathleticband@gmail.com

STUDENT MEDIA

With multiple student organizations, the Student Media Center is a starting point for anyone interested in photography, writing, illustrations, design, comics, social media, etc. *Not sure what to join? Email join@vcustudentmedia.com.*

THE COMMONWEALTH TIMES, the independent student newspaper since 1969.
Contact: editor@commonwealthtimes.org

WVCW, the online student-run radio station.
Contact: hello@wvcw.org
PWATEM, a student-run journal showcasing student writing and art.
Contact: pwatem@gmail.com

INK MAGAZINE, a student-run annual publication covering fashion, music, art and culture.
Contact: inkmagazine.vcu@gmail.com

RIVER CITY FASHION (RCF), the online-only student-run fashion site. *Contact: rivercityfashion@vcustudentmedia.com*

AMENDMENT, a student-run literary and art journal that focuses on social issues.
Contact: amendmentvcu@gmail.com

EMANATA, the annual student comics anthology.

Contact: emanatacomics@gmail.com

POLITICS

COLLEGE REPUBLICANS at VCU promotes and supports conservative values in all levels of government and with other political activists in the community. They hold biweekly meetings, discuss current news and hold social events often featuring guest speakers.
Contact: middlecoopsa@vcu.edu

YOUNG DEMOCRATS at VCU works to support the Virginia Young Democrats and Democratic Party of Virginia, as well as volunteering and working to elect democratic candidates for public office in Virginia and nationally. Meetings feature discussions of political topics and networking opportunities.
Contact: youngdemocrats.vcu@gmail.com

YOUNG DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS at VCU organizes for the interests of students and workers and participates in local activism. It hosts monthly meetings, in addition to occasional supply drives and free car repair clinics.
Contact: vcuyds@gmail.com

FASHION

COMPLEX MODELING TROUPE aims to enhance modeling and dance talents while also developing self-confidence, poise and leadership among members. The group meets regularly and holds workshops on self-esteem, modeling and choreography.

Contact: prailowp@vcu.edu

GROUPMODA FASHION ORGANIZATION & MODELING TROUPE is a student-run fashion organization that promotes diversity, creativity and confidence in personal style.

Contact: mckeeverkp@vcu.edu

ENGINEERING

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERS provides access to volunteer opportunities, networking

events, facility tours and conferences for mechanical engineering students.

Contact: pinneyfr@mymail.vcu.edu

ENGINEERING STUDENT COUNCIL works to develop the engineering student body through promotion of the success within the School of Engineering. Any full time student of the School of Engineering is welcome to attend and contribute at meetings.

Contact: rajeshk@mymail.vcu.edu

ENVIRONMENTAL

SUSTAINABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY & PARTNERSHIP encourages collaborative, intuitive and realistic solutions to modern environmental issues in Richmond. The group strives to encourage education and action within the community on environmental issues and solutions globally, regionally and locally.

Visit: vcu.campusgroups.com/sap/home

LGBTQ

QUEER ACTION is dedicated to empowering strong, engaged and active students who identify as LGBTQIA+. It aims to create a space safe for all students within this spectrum.

Contact: qaatvcu@gmail.com

QUEER AND/OR TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR COLLECTIVE aims to create a welcoming space for students within the QTPOC community. The organization strives to include all voices, including the most marginalized.

Contact: qtpoc.vcu@gmail.com

Compiled by Hannah Eason
Infographic by Jayce Nguyen

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Drawing the Fool Over the River

ERIC KALATA And so I drew the Fool—
the beginning, the naive
soul, enthused
and engrossed with
the world around him,

the world still new,
a child

wrapped up
in the sensation
of the new, nearing
a state of raw instability—

And so I drew the Fool,
over the river, mid-
way through the journey, my position

as it stands now.

It reads circular,
a recursive
return that is
wholly inevitable—



Creative communities within communities

HALDEN FRALEY

Pwatem

Before attending VCU, I always had preconceived notions of what life here would be like. I knew that VCU contained a vibrant creative community within the school.

After all, that reputation was part of what drew me to the school in the first place. However, I honestly didn't account for Richmond itself being part of what makes VCU such a creatively fulfilling place to study.

And then, like a strange matryoshka doll, I found communities within communities. Richmond helps to fuel the creative life at VCU. Within VCU, the Pwatem literary & arts journal is able to connect with artists of all practices within the school, and provide a view at what creating impactful work within an art-focused community can look like.

Working with Pwatem has given me both a context with which to inform my current education, as well as a goal to aspire to as I move forward. Throughout last semester's weekly meetings, the staff of Pwatem discuss some of the best artwork and writing that VCU students create.

Working within a classroom critique has its own merits. But even those exist within the confines of the classroom itself, often never able to look above and see how the cumulative work that the class creates contributes to the whole. Thus, it is difficult to see the effect work has on the larger culture around VCU, Richmond, and even out into the world.

Pwatem can help fulfill this need. I haven't been at VCU long, so I often still find myself unsure of where exactly my work is going, or where it's taking me.

Pwatem has acted as somewhat of a critical junction for me, allowing me to take in work from all corners of the university, and discuss the incredibly large volume of work with peers that are as varied as the work itself.

It feels liberating, being able to see work from outside my own program, and from students who are a little further along the road from me, and have benefitted from the context that experience brings.

The Pwatem staff shares this quality, and have all spent time creating work of their

own, from illustrations to poetry. They are able to bring their own studies to discussions, creating what feels like a complex web of interactions and creative practices.

The outside context of professional artists and creatives within Richmond creates an energy. And their work, which many times is literally painted onto the surface of the city, creates an atmosphere, drawing other prospective artists into the city.

The energy created by the city inspires those artists, who gather in a hub like VCU.

Every single one of the artists who contribute to Pwatem, whether they know it or not, exist as a link in a chain of creative energy.

It's through that chain that their work can spread beyond the confines of the classroom and the traditional critique space, and hopefully out into the city of and the world beyond Richmond. It's inspiring.



Working with Pwatem has given me both a context with which to inform my current education, as well as a goal to aspire to as I move forward.

*Halden Fraley,
Pwatem*

College as a First Generation student

STATISTICS

According to the US Department of Education in 2018, 33% of college students were first generation.

WHAT IS FIRST GEN?

A student whose parents or legal guardians have not earned a bachelor's degree.

COMMON CHALLENGES

First gen students often face challenges when it comes to adjusting to college, receiving family support, and facing imposter syndrome.

FROM A FELLOW FIRST GEN

Being a first-gen student has impacted me in numerous ways and still continues to do so. I've had to figure things out on my own like financial aid, classes, adjusting to college life, managing time in college, etc. As a first gen student, I felt out of place and unsure of what I was doing. I thought that everyone else had everything figured out while I was stuck. I was able to overcome this by building a support system of friends, peers, advisors and club members. A support system can help you feel connected, seen, and cared about. Without one, it's easy to go through college feeling untethered.

YOU FIRST

Join You First! You First is an organization run for and by first-gen students. With mentoring programs, weekly hang outs, and other fun events, You First is a great way to meet other first gens at VCU (both students and faculty).

Learn more at youfirst.vcu.edu

Staying in the loop: the accounts you should follow as a VCU student

SCOTT MALONE

The Commonwealth Times

Before talking about accounts to follow, don't forget about one of the most important tools social media offers: hashtags.

For example, if you want to connect with other freshmen to room with, things to do or just to make friends, go on Twitter and search the hashtag "#VCU" or "#VCU24" for other Rams in the same graduating class. It may seem like a simple tip, but it's quite useful and easy to forget.

Another good idea is to look up the individual Twitter accounts for your major, department or school to stay up to date on internship opportunities and events pertinent to your area of study.

Now, on to the accounts to follow.

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY (@VCU)

Follow the official Twitter account for the university to stay up to date on news, announcements, and more from VCU.

VCU PRESIDENT'S OFFICE (@VCUPRESIDENT)

Tweets from VCU President Dr. Michael Rao.

VCUDINE (@VCU_DINING)

All students should be familiar with the available dining options. View dining brochures and stay up to date with VCU's dining hours of operations and specific swipe times by following this account, which lists all a student needs to know about grabbing a bite to eat on campus.

VCU LIBRARIES

(@VCULIBRARIES)

Follow this account and never miss out on the information associated with one of the most important resources VCU offers: the library. The account posts everything from updates concerning the school's two libraries, important events and even tidbits from their archives. Stay sharp and educated with help from this account. Also follow @VCUCabell for Cabell Library specific information.

VCU PARKING (@VCUPARKING)

Don't let the name fool you: the VCU Parking account is very much useful and important. The account provides updates on RamRide, RamSafe and RamAway — all services that get you where you need to be, potentially save you money and keep you safe.

VCU POLICE (@VCUPD)

Speaking of safety ... be aware of local crime and news on the wellbeing of VCU faculty and students by following this account. Also, this account has a phone number in its bio for any potentially — and hopefully this won't be the case — dangerous situations in which you need to contact VCU police.

THE COMMONWEALTH TIMES (@THECT)

The award-winning independent student newspaper at VCU keeps students informed with news, sports, culture and opinions content on almost every social media, including Twitter. With regular posting during the school year and intermittent content over breaks, give The Commonwealth Times a follow to stay up to date on everything from basketball to breaking news on campus and in Richmond.

VCU CAREER SERVICES

(@VCUCAREERS)

Whether you want to stay up to date on job fairs, or are looking for a job on campus, this is the Twitter account to follow.

VCU DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS (@VCUDSA)

For an overview of everything going on in student affairs at VCU, this account can give you the updated scoops.

VCU STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (@VCUSGA)

The Student Government Association (SGA) represents the student body at VCU. The SGA Twitter account will keep you up to date with all the activities and help they offer to the students at VCU.

VCU HOUSING (@VCU_HOUSING)

Stay up to date with everything you need to know about VCU's Residential Life & Housing office, residence halls, and more.

SPORTS ACCOUNTS — @VCUSPORTS @WAYNEEPPSJR @FLEISCHMAN_NOAH @WVCWSPORTS @VCU_HOOPS @VCUWBB @VCUBASEBALL

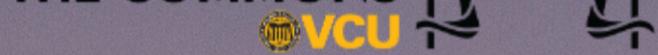
Everyone at VCU knows just how big basketball is, so what better way to get into the social experience than with a bit of sports excitement? Follow local sports outlets and journalists covering VCU athletics for a more generalized sports feed, because you never know what you might end up liking. Or, follow the accounts of the more prevalent teams at VCU, such as men's and women's basketball and baseball. Any other team that interests you can be found with a quick Twitter search.



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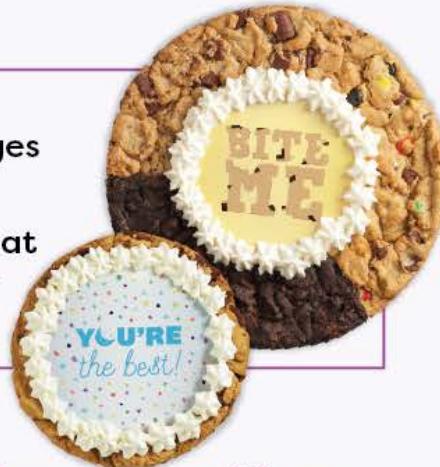
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Photos by Gessler Santos-Lopez

Best spots near campus to curb freshman munchies

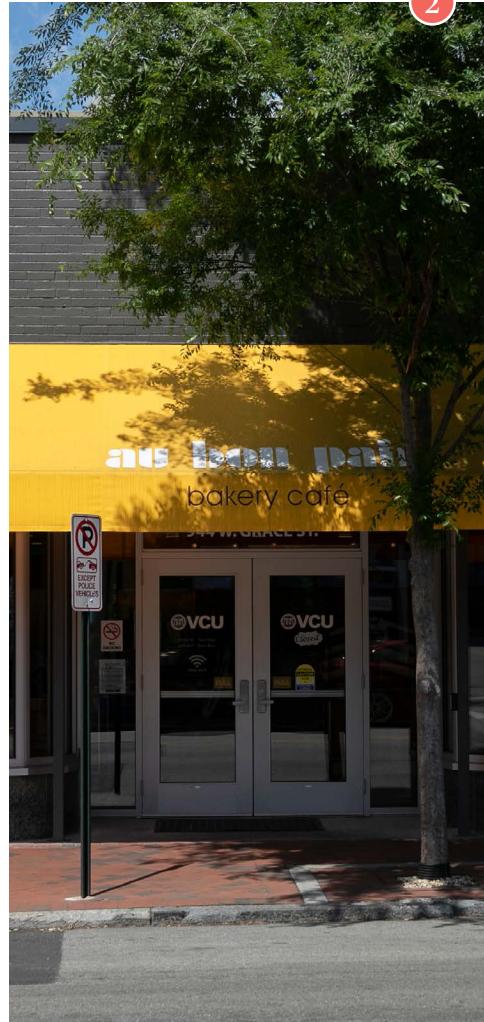
ANDREW RINGLE
The Commonwealth Times

If you find yourself hungry, poor and tired of the ramen and Pop-Tarts you stashed in your desk, it might be time to spread your wings and try a nearby restaurant. It can be expensive to eat in Richmond, and it's hard to find a place where you can bring all your lacto-ovo-vegetarian friends. So here's where to get a bite around campus, on and off the standard dining plan, with options for everyone.

1. CHRISTIAN'S PIZZA (404 N. HARRISON ST.)

Every college campus needs a greasy, late-night spot with cheap food. Christian's Pizza gracefully fills that role, inviting drunk and sober students alike to dine together at its long tables. Every night after 11 p.m., a slice of cheese or pepperoni is only \$2.25, and it'll be nice and hot in a matter of minutes. Try the signature ranch dressing — it's a little extra, but it'll bring your pie-eating experience to another level.

Meal plan: None
Price: \$
Vegetarian options available



2. AU BON PAIN (944 W. GRACE ST.)

This is a popular bakery chain that was added to the VCU Dining plan last year. Au Bon Pain offers classic entrees such as sandwiches, croissants, salads, baked goods, macaroni and cheese etc. If you're going without swipes, a full meal costs around \$10 — perhaps a bit overpriced for the student budget, but the food is always fresh and filling.

Meal plan: VCUDine
Price: \$\$
Vegetarian, vegan options available

3. HARRISON STREET CAFE (402 N. HARRISON ST.)

It's easy to adopt a meatless diet in Richmond, but this laid-back hipster cafe makes it cool. Both the breakfast and lunch menus are entirely vegetarian, with a handful of vegan options as well. The service is quick, the food has a homemade charm and prices stay around \$10 or less.

Meal plan: None
Price: \$\$
Vegetarian, vegan options available

4. ASADO (727 W. BROAD ST.)

Taco nights are fun, but if your dorm kitchen is limited to your roommate's microwave, it might not be so easy to DIY. Instead, go to Asado — get two tacos for \$10, or pair one with a side of wings for a dollar more. The atmosphere is energized in the small bar-restaurant combo, making it a great spot for small groups and dates. Try the homemade buffalo sauce, be prepared for a bit of a wait and make sure your friends tip the server.

Meal plan: Elevate

Price: \$\$\$

Vegetarian options available



5. MAMA J'S (415 N. 1ST ST.)

Homesickness is easily cured at this Jackson Ward restaurant, where the food is as good as your grandma's. The menu offers classic soul food selections, including fried chicken, catfish and ribs. To convince your vegetarian friends, tell them Mama J's has a veggie burger and a few different salads. It's a 20-minute walk from Monroe Park, but you'll need the exercise after eating there. Prices vary depending on size, but expect to spend around \$12.

Meal plan: None

Price: \$\$\$

Vegetarian, vegan options available



OTHER SUGGESTIONS FROM RAMS ON IG

@iliasanwar1:
Cava (810 W. Grace St.)

@aayamb:
Jamaica House (1215 W. Broad St.)

@ernie.lee:
Thai Top Ten (911 1/2 W. Grace St.)

@i_is_georgia:
Mary's Empanadas (907 Floyd Ave.)

@erineedgerton:
City Dogs (1309 W. Main St.)

@gessler_lopez:
The Eatery (3000 W. Cary St.)



Local studios, restaurants, businesses celebrate art in monthly First Friday event

NICO FELSENHELD

Ink Magazine

While Richmond has many arts events year round, one of the most prominent ones is First Fridays. It's a walkable arts tour that takes place, as the name indicates, on the first Friday of every month from about 5-9 p.m.

The event is especially accessible to VCU students as many of the participating galleries are just steps away from campus. Galleries and stores all around Jackson Ward's Arts District stay open late and host events, many of which are free. Participating is as simple as walking down Broad Street and seeing whatever catches your eye.

VCU's galleries, The Anderson and the Institute for Contemporary Art, often host their own events. The ICA

frequently has performances by local artists, and The Anderson holds openings for exhibitions featuring art by VCU students.

Further down Broad Street, many other galleries also host opening or closing receptions for new exhibitions. This is a perfect opportunity to see some art with friends, and considering all these events are free, you can stay as long as you like.

Some places, such as Gallery 5, offer live music later in the evening. Other openings will have free snacks, and what college student could pass up free food?

Many restaurants along Broad will also

participate in First Fridays, including one particularly popular with students, the ice cream shop Charm School. Stores will also stay open later, and an especially interesting one to visit is Circle Thrift. It's an eclectic thrift store which has just about anything you could imagine. Circle sometimes even displays work from local artists, often VCU students.

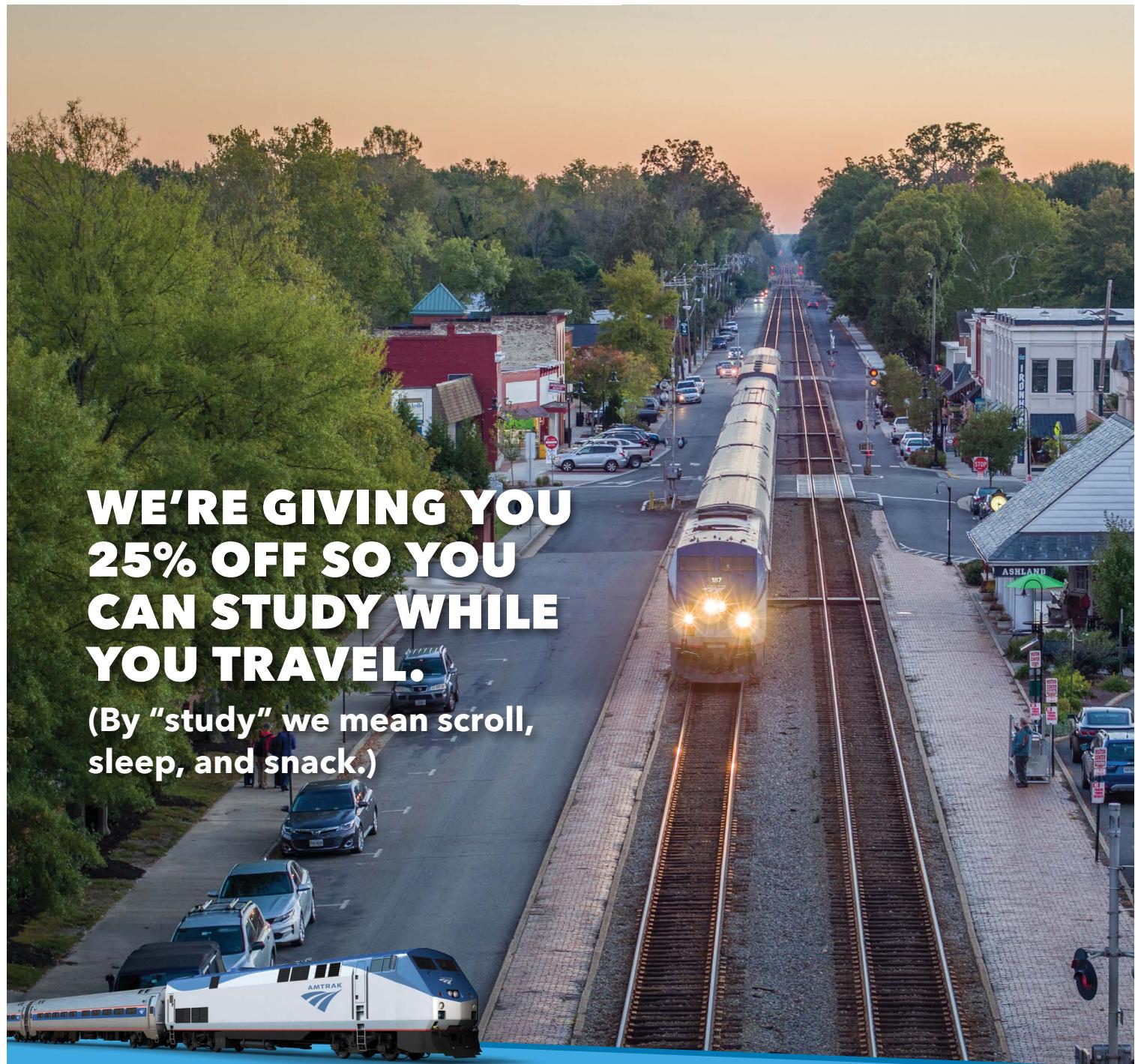
ld, First Fridays are the perfect opportunity to go out with friends and see all sorts of new art, and all for free. It's a great way to see the newest things in Richmond's art scene and support local businesses.

This is a perfect opportunity to see some art with friends, and considering all these events are free, you can stay as long as you like.

Nico Felsenheld,
Ink Magazine

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Photo courtesy of Safa Eltaib

VCU puts on an annual fashion show, and you do not want to miss it

CAROLINE JENKINS
Ink Magazine

My decision to come to VCU was not a particularly hard one. It included everything I wanted in a school and more; I was sure this was the right fit for me. When I went to Accepted Students Day and other events put on by VCU before my freshman year, I was thrilled at the boundless opportunity there was, especially considering I came from a small town in North Carolina. Since I was majoring in fashion merchandising, there weren't a great number of things that really excited me back home concerning my major. This all changed when I got to VCU and discovered countless events put on by VCUarts led and run by students, such as the annual VCU Fashion Show.

The year 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of this annual tradition within VCU, making 2020 the 51st year the fashion show would've been held. But 2020 posed unique circumstances, and so for the first time in 50 years, the fashion show was not held. However, this does not mean the end of the show forever, and I hope it will continue to be as dazzling as it has been in past years, once we return to some level of normalcy.

The fashion show is made out to be a convergence of two very talented, yet highly contrasting sectors of the fashion department:

the merchandisers and the designers. As one may expect, the designers design and make the clothing, while the merchandisers deal with production and precise planning to ensure the show runs smoothly, free of hiccups and flaws. This event culminates the skills both groups of students have learned in their years of study, making it both a creative outlet and a chance to apply their studies in a real life event.

“

VCU makes it a priority for students to engage with one another and collaborate on events and ideas

*Caroline Jenkins,
Ink Magazine*

It is the goal of the event to prepare the students in tasks they may expect to perform in their future jobs. With the highly competitive nature of the fashion industry,

it is essential that students graduating from VCU are equipped with real-world skills that will bolster their resume above others. As VCUarts states on their website, “the mission statement for VCUarts Fashion is to prepare students for varied careers in the fashion industry, emphasizing analytic abilities, creative problem solving, and a global perspective.” Therefore, in participating in the fashion show, both programs will collectively have gained an appreciation and knowledge base for the many things that go into the show’s development and production.

What is so exciting about each year’s fashion show is that there is a theme that is decided in advance. This theme will encompass the direction of that year’s show, and

will many times include a relevant topic that is both entirely unique and inventive. This year’s theme was “Zenith,” and as Patricia Brown (chair and associate professor of the VCU Department of Fashion Design & Merchandising) said on VCU’s website, “the theme ‘Zenith’ denotes this expanding of creative individualization. At the same time as our students explore their own directions and artistic inclinations, they are also learning to predict, problem solve and become well-prepared for the ever-changing fashion industry landscape.” Past themes have been “Shimmer,” “Impact,” “Reach,” and “Catalyst,” all of which invoke provocative thought and meaningful clothing.

Taking place in the spring semester, the

fashion show requires months of preparing and planning, students dedicating their time to ensure it is an event they are proud of. This hard work ultimately pays off and attracts a multitude of audience members and onlookers. There have been many different locations in the past, such as the Train Shed at Main Street Station, the VMFA, and the Science Museum of Virginia’s Dewey Gottwald Center.

VCU makes it a priority for students to engage with one another and collaborate on events and ideas, using varying skills together to create something spectacular. This is, in a nutshell, why you should consider being a part of this event in the spring. For fashion lovers and creators, or maybe just fashion spectators, the VCU fashion show is not one you will want to miss out on.

For more information on VCU’s fashion show, follow @vcuartsfashion on Instagram or visit arts.vcu.edu/academics/departments/fashion.

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“La Comunidad II” by Ever at 534 N. Harrison St. Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez

Murals illustrate Richmond’s vibrant art scene

ZACH JOACHIM
The Commonwealth Times

The River City has many characteristics that set it aside from other college towns, chief among them the local art scene. Richmond’s multitude of murals have grown to represent this vibrant, blossoming facet of RVA. You spend enough time here, and you’re bound to develop a few favorites — here’s an assortment the SMC picked out.

RICHMOND MURAL PROJECT

The Richmond Mural Project is a yearly event with the goal of creating more than 100 murals throughout the city and establishing Richmond as a premier destination for internationally recognized murals. Ongoing since 2012, founder Shane Pomajambo also sought to drive local tourism and

business with his initiative. According to its website, the project consists of “the largest grouping of murals in the nation.” Check out the full gallery and find out how to get involved at richmondmuralproject.square-space.com/about-1.

- *Ekundayo* (301 S. Laurel St.)
- *Greg Mike* (2600 W. Main St.)
- *Greg Mike* (821 W. Cary St.)
- *Jaz* (212 W. Broad St.)
- *Aneikan* (535 N. Second St.)
- *Chazme and Sepe* (918 W. Grace St.)
- *Ever* (534 N. Harrison St.)

TEXAS BEACH MURALS

A spiral stair tower leads down from a parking lot in the back of Randolph neighborhood to the North Bank Park, commonly known as Texas Beach. VCU students gave

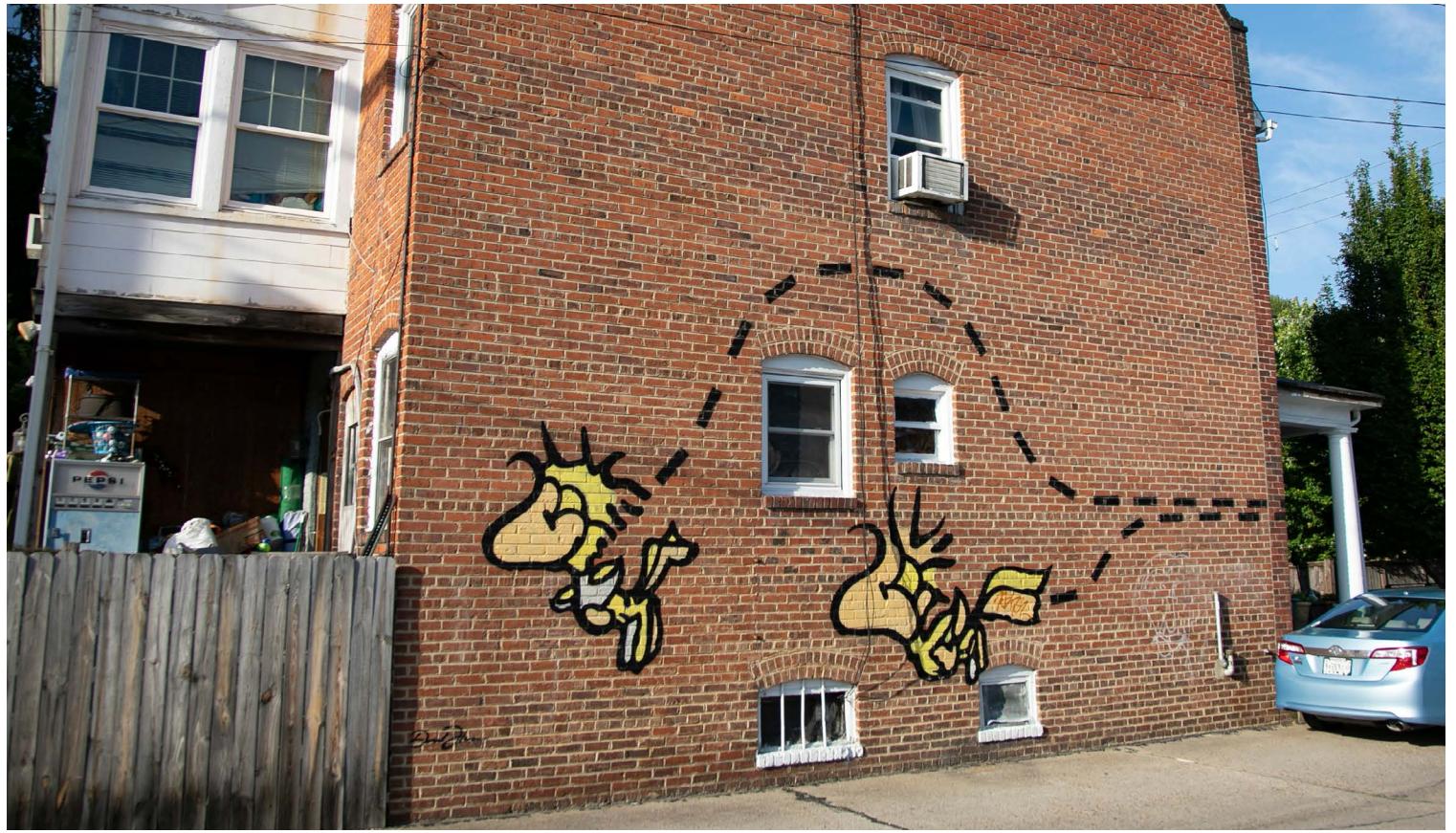
this treasured staircase leading to one of Richmond’s favorite river spots a makeover. In a project sponsored by City of Richmond Parks and Recreation, the VCU Painting and Printmaking Department, Friends of the James River Park and the James River Hikers, students painted the walls of the North Bank Park tower with 30 murals depicting an assortment of James River residents from swimmers, hikers and dogs to turtles, bats, owls and raccoons. The artists were students from the Painting and Printmaking Department — Rebecca Grennan, Elina Oehlert, Dorothy Sysling, Ji Yun Park, Sarah Burnley, Megan Michelle Phillips, Julia Stewart, Dellil Mohammed and Kana Danzey, along with Ross Newcomb from Richmond Parks. Professor Ruth Bolduan and Graduate Student Michael Royce directed the project.



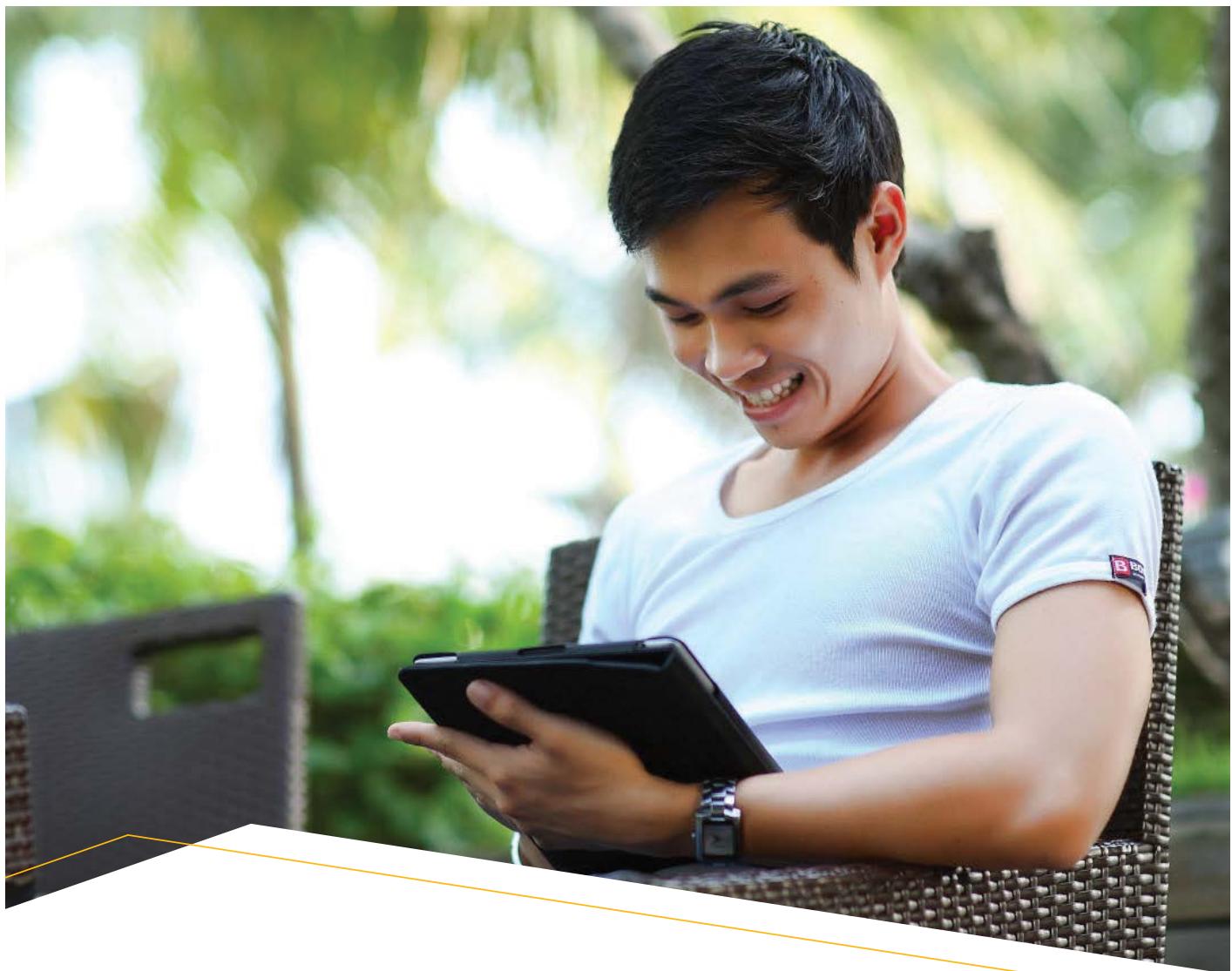
"Visual Symphony" by Remi Rough at 701 W. Grace St. Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez



"Moonshine" by Etam Cru at 1011 W. Grace St. Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez



"Woodstock" by David Flores at 12 S. Shppard St. Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez



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VCU Libraries

VCU is an EO/AA University



Belle Isle. Photo by Gessler Santos-Lopez

Happy Trails to you

ZACH JOACHIM

The Commonwealth Times

RICHMOND IS A PRIME LOCATION

For bikers and runners to traverse a multitude of trails and environments. In 2015, Richmond hosted the UCI Road World Championships, an indicator of the globally recognized biking community and trails germane to the River City. Here's a few of the SMC's favorite routes and sites.

BELLE ISLE

Hiking, sightseeing, biking or just lounging — the famed Belle Isle can play host to a variety of outdoor activities. The footbridge leading there and circular trail around the island make for a perfect short route, whatever manner of travel you fancy.

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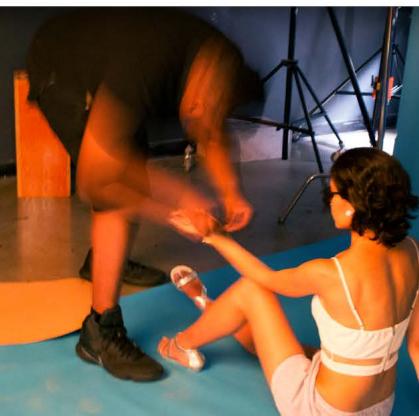
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NORTH BANK TRAIL

The Oregon Hill overlook is a perfect place to start a good run or bike ride. Walk a short distance down the hill and you'll arrive on the North Bank Trail, leading west all the way to Texas Beach or a short distance east over to Brown's Island. This area is particularly perfect for bikers, as the section between Texas Beach and Oregon Hill features an assortment of obstacles, terrain challenge, ascents and descents. Keep your eyes peeled, though — there are some tight corners and collisions are not unheard of. The entire trail makes a loop; you can use the Buttermilk or River trail, cross Nickel Bridge and wave to the animals at Maymont.

BROWN'S ISLAND / CANAL WALK / PIPELINE

Park at or stroll down to Brown's Island to begin a short yet scenic biking or running trip. The park itself constitutes the beginning of the trail, until visitors travel under the train tracks to the canal walk and an assortment of murals and artwork.

Around the corner is the entrance to Pipeline, where travelers can traverse a metal walkway suspended over rapids leading back up to Brown's Island.

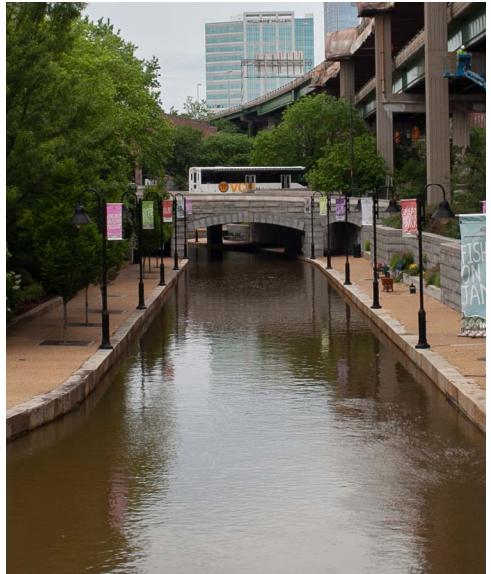
FOREST HILL PARK

This former farm turned trolley stop turned amusement park turned park has an incredibly charming personality and past. Check out the lake and variety of bike trails.



GREAT SHIPLOCK PARK

Adjacent to Shockoe Bottom, this piece of River City history is out of walking range for most VCU students, but provides a can't-miss array of river views and architecture dating back to the 1800s.



Left: Brown's Island. **Right:** Canal Walk. Photos by Gessler Santos-Lopez

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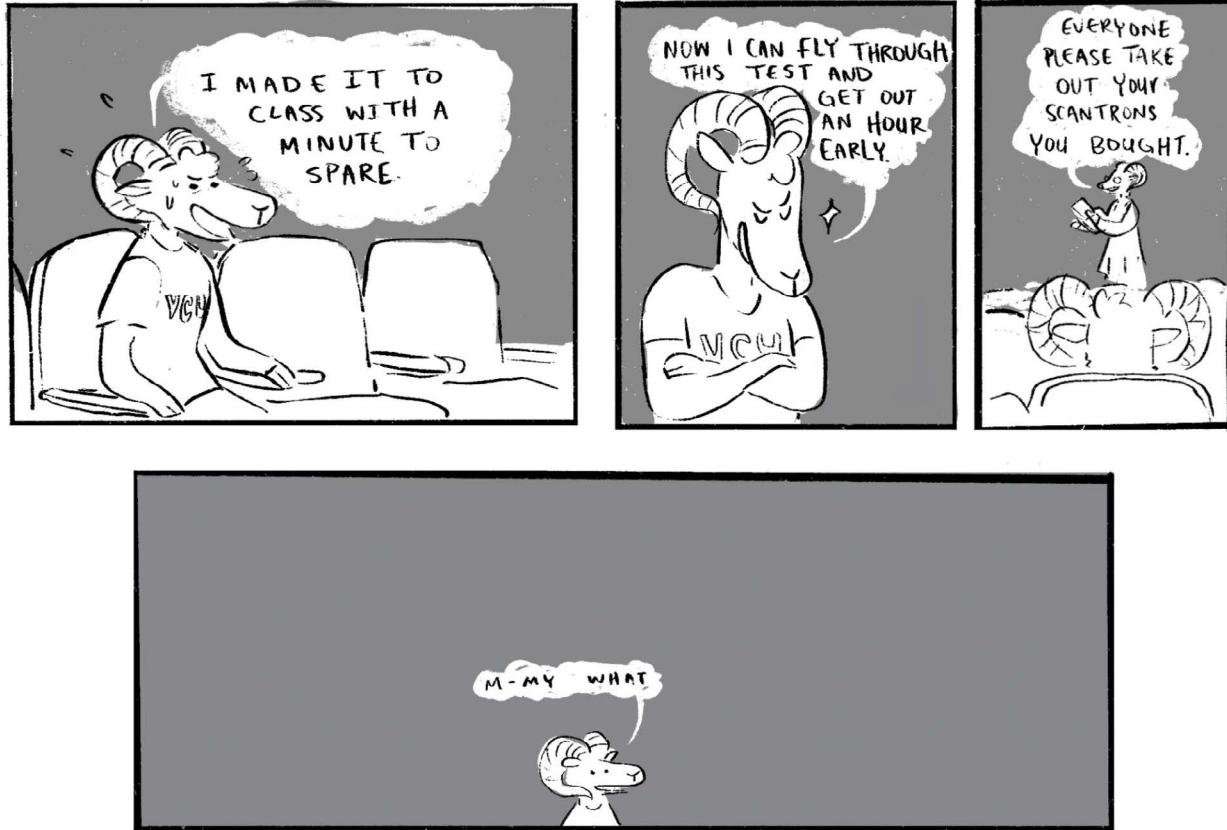
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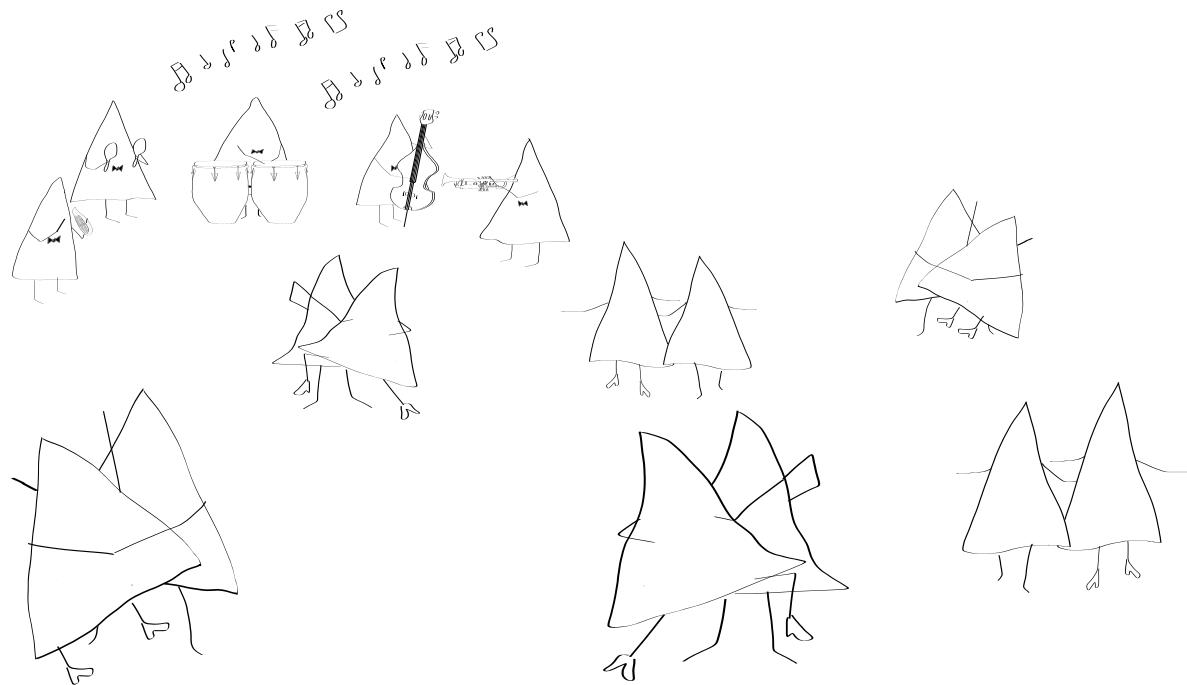


Comics

From Personal Experience by Kamryn Gillham



Chips and Salsa by Adam Goodman

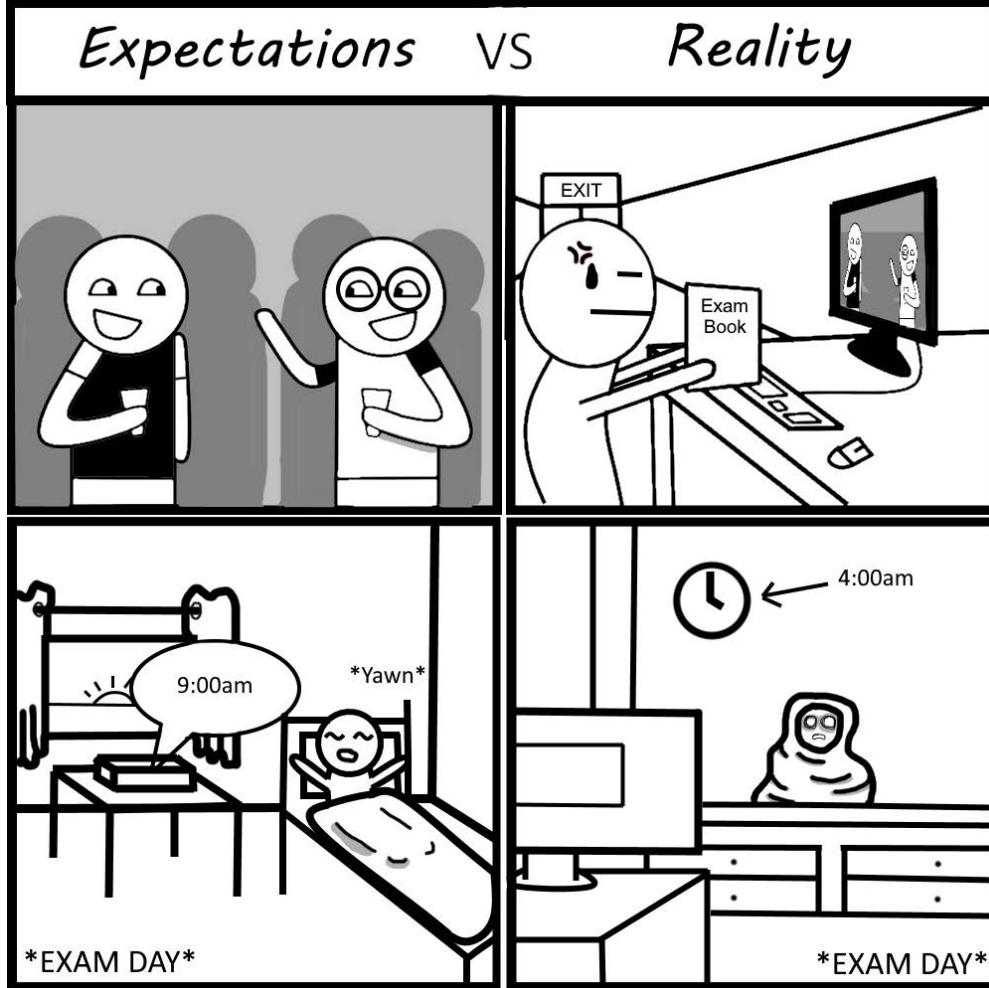


Welcome Back by Ameera Abbas



"Hello class! Lovely to see us all together again
and to see all these new faces!"

How college really is by Johnny Cao



VCU Student Resources

New to VCU? Here's a few important resources you might need in your first year as a Ram.

STUDENT SUCCESS

studentsuccess.vcu.edu
804-827-8648
success@vcu.edu

FINANCIAL AID

finaid.vcu.edu
804-828-6669

CAMPUS LEARNING CENTER TUTORING PROGRAM

clc.vcu.edu/tutoring
804-827-8108
clc@vcu.edu

MATHEMATICS HELP CENTER

math.vcu.edu/undergraduate/resources/help-center
804-828-1301
math@vcu.edu

WRITING CENTER

<https://writing.vcu.edu/>
804-828-4851
writingctr1@vcu.edu

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE

dos.vcu.edu
804-828-8940
vcudean@vcu.edu

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES

counseling.vcu.edu
804-828-6200
uccounseling@vcu.edu

UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

health.students.vcu.edu
804-828-8828

RAMSAFE

parking.vcu.edu/transportation/ramsafe
Free evening transportation service for the Monroe Park campus:
804-828-7233 (VCU-SAFE)
For the MCV campus:
804-828-9255 (WALK)

RAM BIKES

bikes.vcu.edu
804-828-BIKE (2453)
rambikes@vcu.edu

RAMPANTRY

Addressing food insecurity for in-need VCU students.

vcustudentfoodpantry.com
rampantry@vcu.edu

CAREER SERVICES' SUIT YOURSELF CLOSET

careers.vcu.edu/resources/suit-yourself
804-828-1645
careers@vcu.edu

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

students.vcu.edu
Be Well: students.vcu.edu/be-well
Get Involved: students.vcu.edu/get-involved
Find Resources: students.vcu.edu/find-resources
804-828-1244
dsa@vcu.edu

THE WORKSHOP TECH AND FABRICATION HUB AT VCU'S CABELL LIBRARY

library.vcu.edu/spaces-tech/the-workshop
804-827-3594
theworkshop@vcu.edu

MENTOR PROGRAM FOR FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS THROUGH YOU FIRST AT VCU

youfirst.vcu.edu/resources/youfirst-mentors
804-827-4586
youfirst@vcu.edu

NAVIGATING YOUR FIRST YEAR (HUB OF RESOURCES)

vcu.edu/current-students

STUDENT SERVICES CENTER

ssc.vcu.edu
804-828-1550
ssc@vcu.edu

VCU POLICE

804-828-1234 (Emergency line)
804-828-1196 (Non-Emergency line)
police.vcu.edu

EQUITY AND ACCESS SERVICES

Also serves as the Title IX Office

804-828-1347
equity@vcu.edu
titleix@vcu.edu
equity.vcu.edu

STUDENTS TODAY, ALUMNI TOMORROW (STAT)

vcualumni.org/students/stat

Academic Calendar

University calendars are accurate at the time of publication/posting, but subject to change. Some school and/or departmental calendars may differ from the university's academic calendar. Please check with the specific program of study to ensure the appropriate calendar is followed. For the most updated information, visit academiccalendars.vcu.edu.

AUGUST 2020

Sa	15	Weeks of Welcome Begin
Sn	16	New Student Convocation
M	17	Classes begin
M	24	Last day to add a course and late registration
F	28	Deadline for students to provide advance written notification to instructors of intent to observe religious holidays*
M	31	Last day to drop a course

SEPTEMBER 2020

M 7 University closed

OCTOBER 2020

F	23	Midterm grades due
T	27	Spring semester advance registration begins

NOVEMBER 2020

W	11	Veterans Day - University Open - Classes in Session
T	24	Last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of "W" – both campuses (except for courses not scheduled for the full semester)

T 24	Last day of classes – both campuses
W-Sn24-29	University closed - <i>University will close at 12 p.m. on Nov 25</i>

M-F	30 - Dec 4	Final examinations, held remotely – MCV campus				MARCH 2021
M-M	30 - Dec 7	Final examinations, held remotely – Monroe Park campus	Sn-Sn	7 - 14	Spring break for both campuses	
			F	19	Midterm grades due	
			F	26	Last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of "W" – both campuses (except for courses not scheduled for the full semester)	
		DECEMBER 2020				
TBA		December School and Departmental commencement ceremonies	T	30	Fall semester advance registration begins	
TBA		December university-wide commencement ceremony				
M	14	Final grades are due by noon using Faculty eServices				MAY 2021
M-F	21 - Jan 1	University closed	T	4	Last day of classes – Monroe Park campus; classes beginning 4 p.m. or later continue through May 8	
M	28	Holiday intersession classes begin				
W	30	Deadline for students to provide advance written notification to instructors of intent to observe religious holidays – holiday intersession*	W	5	Reading day, no day classes held; classes beginning 4 p.m. or later are held – Monroe Park campus	
			R-R	6 - 13	Final examinations – Monroe Park campus	
			F	7	Last day of classes – MCV campus	
JANUARY 2021						
M-F	Dec 21 - Jan 1	University closed	Sa	8	Last day for grades of incomplete to be converted from fall semester	
Sa	9	Holiday intersession classes end				
M	18	University closed**	M-F	10 - 14	Final examinations – MCV campus	
T-M	19 - 25	Add/drop and late registration	R-Sn	13 - 16	May School and Departmental commencement ceremonies	
F	29	Deadline for students to provide advance written notification to instructors of intent to observe religious holidays*	Sa	15	May university-wide commencement ceremony	
			T	18	Final grades are due by noon using Faculty eServices	
		FEBRUARY 2021				
T	16	Summer semester advance registration begins				



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CONTEMPORARY ART
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH
UNIVERSITY

