

CNHS Fall 2024 NEWSLETTER



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Student Spotlight

**Student Research:
Psychoneuroimmunology of
Risk and Disease Laboratory**

**Student Research: Center for
Biotechnology, Genomics,
and Bioinformatics**

**Student Research:
Pharmaceutical Engineering
Pathways Project**

**Student Research: Nuclear
Science Lab**

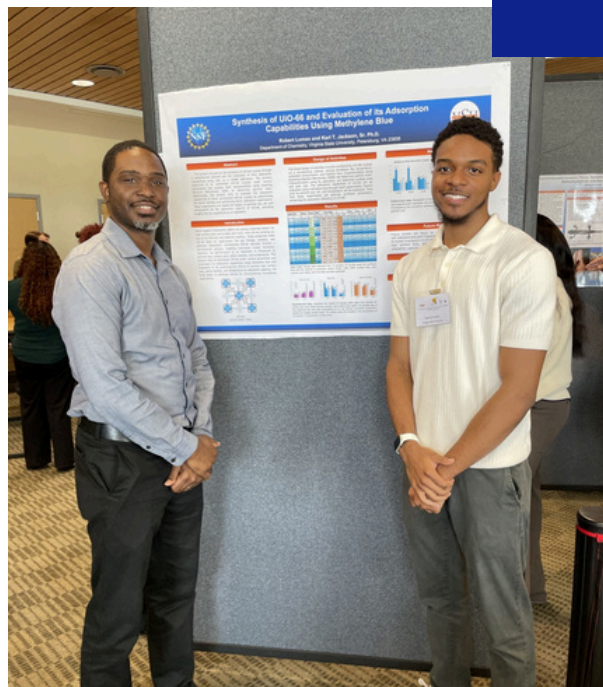
Student Accomplishments

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**Trojan Empowerment
Summit**

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Student Research: NURVa

On October 26, 2024, Virginia State University hosted the 5th annual NURVa conference, with 165 attendees. Seventy-five students from universities including Virginia State, VCU, Liberty, and others presented their research. The event also featured a Graduate Student Fair with representatives from Marymount, ODU, VSU, and VCU.

Dr. LaChelle Waller, Director of Undergraduate Research, led the conference with the help of seven student volunteers.



[Read More about the NURVa Program](#)



Student Spotlight

Chelsey (Cooper) McGill attended and presented her Colorectal Cancer research at the annual American Psychological Association (APA) Convention. Chelsey received the highest honor in APA's Division 38- Health Psychology, being awarded the Outstanding Poster Presentation silver star Seattle, Washington, August 2024

Chelsey (Cooper) McGill, now Dr. Chelsey McGill, successfully defended her doctoral dissertation and is currently a T32 Postdoctoral Fellow at VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center in Richmond, VA.





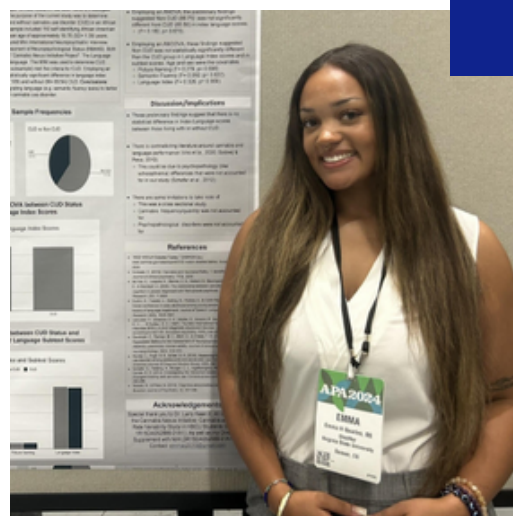
David Clifton at ABRCMS

Student Research: Psychoneuroimmunology of Risk and Disease Laboratory

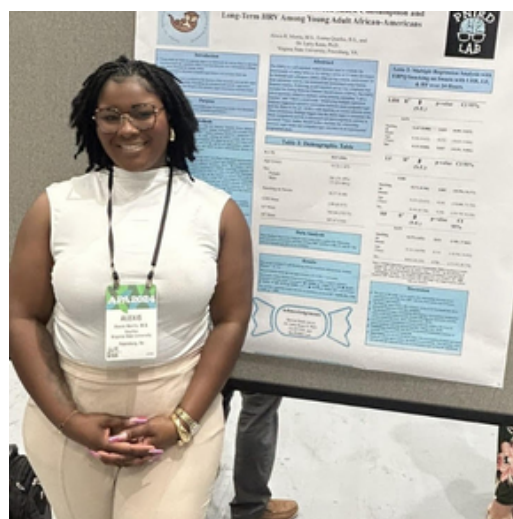
Davian Clifton presented “Examining Internalizing Symptoms and Their Association With Sexual Attraction-Identity Discordant Individuals” at the [2024 Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists](#) in Pittsburgh, PA.

Alexis Morris and Emma Quarles both attended and presented their research at the annual [American Psychological Association \(APA\) Convention](#) in Seattle, Washington. Alexis Morris also presented at the Society for Psychophysiological Research Conference in Prague.

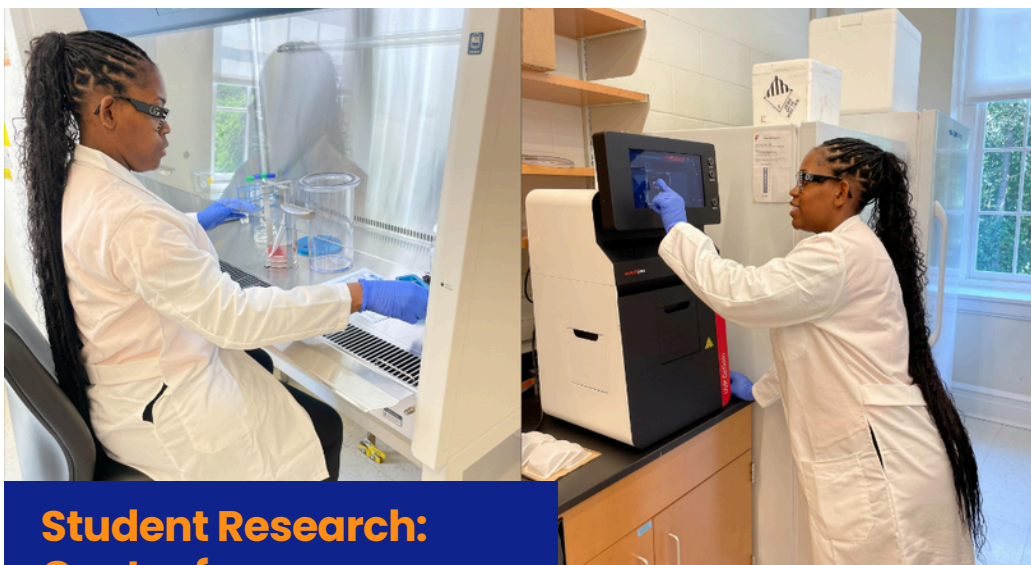
[Read More about the PNIRD Lab](#)



Emma Quarles at APA Convention



Alexis Morris at APA Convention

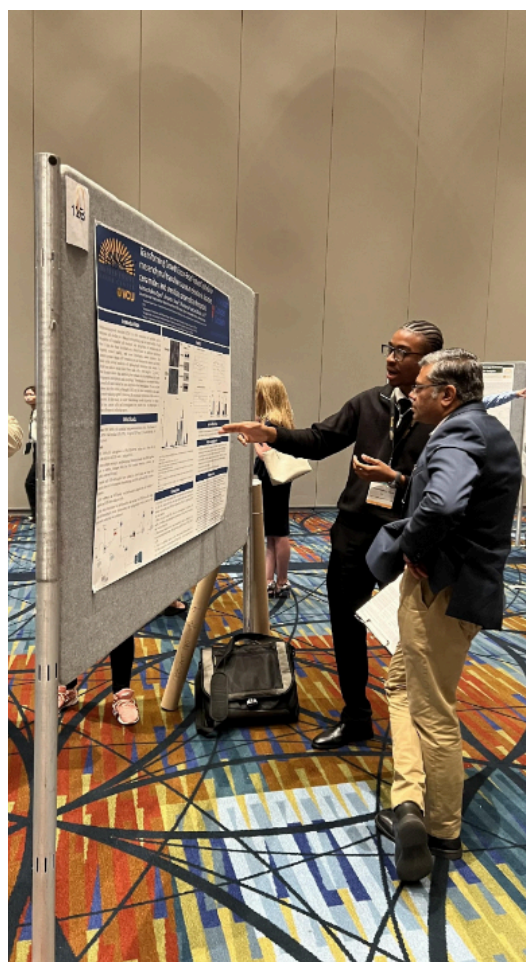


Student Research: Center for Biotechnology, Genomics, and Bioinformatics

Jada Jones, M.S. in Biology student, Conducted graduate research at Dr. Xie's lab in Fall 2024. Dr. Xianfa Xie is the Director of the VSU CeBiGeBi and Associate Professor in the Department of Biology,

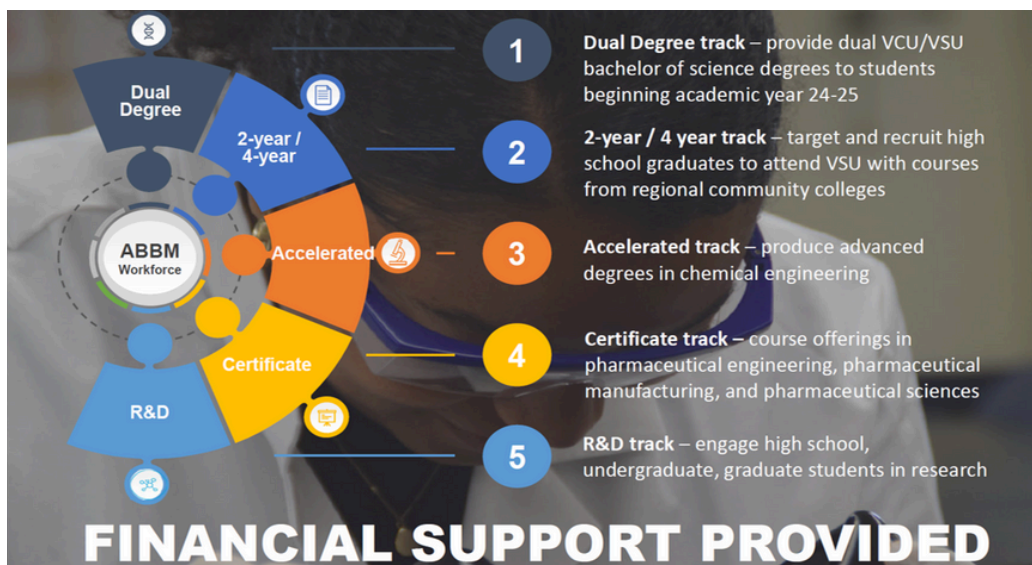
Arinze Egwu, advisee of Dr. Xie completed summer research at the VCU Massey Cancer Center (MCC) and presented a poster at the MCC Research Retreat in September 2024.

Jada Jones at work GeBiGeBi center



Arinze Egwu at MCC Poster Session

[Read More about the Center](#)



Student Research: Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project

Three students, Tayona Burgess, Jada Watkins and Robert Lomax III, presented their summer research in Fall 2024 at the 5th Annual Network for Undergraduate Research in Virginia Conference.

These students were among several (titles listed to the right) who participated in the Build Back Better Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project and mentored by Chemistry faculty (in bold).

[Read More about the Pathways Project](#)

R&D Track. VSU Undergraduate students, their mentors and research

Rayna Jones; Development of Uniform Organic Crystals; Mentored by Dr. James Feffi (2024 VCU Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) REU program)

Robert Lomax III: Synthesis of UiO-66 and Evaluation of Particle Size Dependence and Adsorption Capacity; Mentored by **Dr. Karl Jackson** (VSU-VCU Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project) ([Cover photo](#))

Andralyn Sandoval: Design and Synthesis of Azepine as Potential Serotonergic Agonists; Mentored by **Dr. Vincent Nziko** (VSU-VCU Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project)

Mic'Kayja Tatum: Design and Synthesis of Azepine as Potential Serotonergic Agonists; Mentored by **Dr. Vincent Nziko** (VSU-VCU Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project)

Jade Watkins: Synthesis and Characterization of 10-thiastearic acid and initial inhibition studies with *Aspergillus* sp.; Mentored by **Dr. Robert White** (VSU-VCU Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project) ([NURVa Photo](#))

JANUARY 2025

Detector testing at Triangle Universities Nuclear Laboratory



Student Research: VSU Nuclear Science Lab

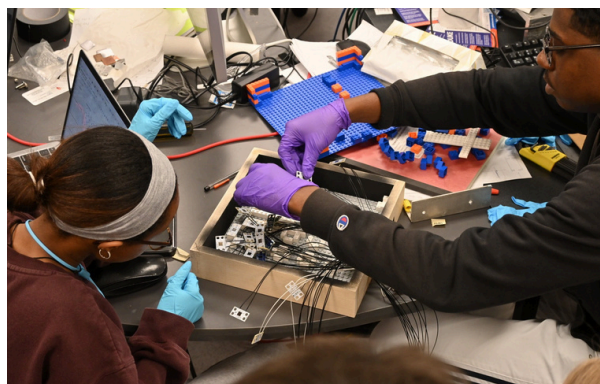
Dr. Thomas Redpath, associate professor in the Department of Chemistry, tested a neutron detector prototype at the Triangle Universities Nuclear Laboratory (TUNL).

The VSU team included Dr. Thomas Redpath, with students Jalen Felix, Trinity Allen, Justin Brown, and Sarah Timothy. Other members of the team hailed from Augustana College, Davidson College, TUNL, Michigan State University and James Madison University.

[Read More about this Winter Experience](#)



Jalen Felix (left) working with Mackenzie Lauridsen (center) Hanna Gebremariam (right) from Augustana College to assemble the SiPM grid for one of the detector tests.



Justin Brown working on detector assembly.



Research Article

Determining associations between Big Five personality traits and executive function in an undergraduate student sample

Emma Quarles^{1,2} , Samuel J. West^{1,3} and Larry Keen^{1,2}

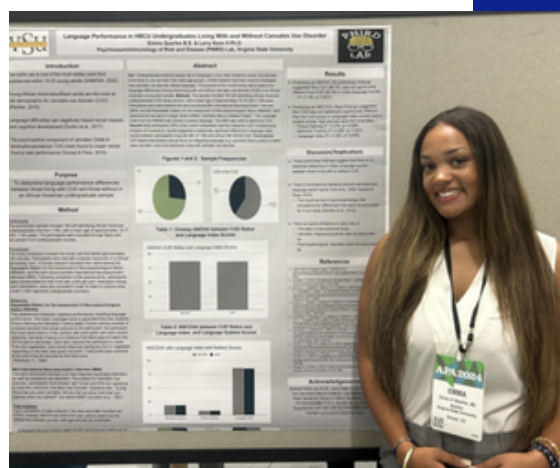
¹Department of Psychology, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA, USA, ²Center for Outreach and Treatment Through Education and Research, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA, USA and ³Department of Surgery, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA

Notable Student Accomplishments

Emma Quarles, VSU Post Bac in the department of Psychology, was first Author on a publication *Determining associations between Big Five personality traits and executive function in an undergraduate student sample*.

Taylor Davis, a senior nursing student in the online RN to BSN program, received a \$10,000 Abbott Scholarship from the National Black Nurses Association for her academic excellence, financial need, and commitment to serving vulnerable populations. She was honored at the 2024 NBNA Institute and Conference in San Francisco.

Biology Alumni: Aaliyah Thompson (2024) was accepted to Howard University dental school and Dr. Keyaita Hodge, accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at Morehouse School of Medicine.



Above: Emma Quarles, VSU Post Bac in the Department of Psychology



Middle Left: Taylor Davis, senior nursing student.



Bottom Left: Dr. Keyaita Hodge, VSU Biology Graduate and Math Minor (Summa Cum Laude 2011).

[Read The Research Article](#)

[Visit the Department of Nursing Webpage](#)



Community Engagement

Drs. Witiak and Whalen conducted a series of activities for the Urban Forestry and Ecology Laboratory (Special Topics). The class introduced students to ways Biology can be used to improve urban systems. As part of the course they learned about the importance of tree cover, water management, community participation and service. Students performed research and several received certifications in woodland fire, drone piloting and herbicide applications. The implementation of this course is part of grant number 23UCF35 - Development of Arborist and Forestry Curriculum at Virginia State University.

[Read More about this Community Effort](#)

[Read about the VSU Research](#)

[See Petersburg Heat Map](#)

On Friday, 20 September 2024, Dr. Matt Whalen accompanied 17 students from his ecology class on a boat tour of the James River with James River Association (JRA). JRA, founded in 1976, is a non-profit dedicated to preserving the 10,000 acres of watershed for the James River. VSU partners with JRA for education and research initiatives. During the boat tour, students recorded water quality data, collected fish in a trawl, and visited both Presquile National Wildlife Refuge and the mouth of the Appomattox River at Hopewell.

Chanel Randall, Denasia Garland, Folashade Jones, Franchesca Synsmir, Jazlyn Howell, Jetuan Bourne, John Portier Jr, Kamieo Starling, Khari Hall, Kiara Boone, Makayla Moss, NaDayesiah Norman, Nicolas Effang, Nore Jackson, Jaila Walton, Jamiyah





Community Engagement

The Psychoneuroimmunology of Risk and Disease Laboratory, PNIRD, and the Center for Outreach and Treatment Through Education and Research, Ce. OTTER, team directed by Dr. Larry Keen, associate professor in the department of Psychology interacted with the community in multiple venues during the Fall 2024 semester.

The Team attended [the Community Recovery Day in Petersburg](#). The event celebrates sobriety and supports others in recovery. The team also conducted a clothing drive for [the James House](#), a nonprofit aiding victims of sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking in the Greater Tri-Cities region. Dr. Keen and his team also attended the James House Hooray for Hollywood Casino Night.



The PNIRD Lab Presents:

WINTER CLOTHING DRIVE

ACCEPTING DONATIONS FROM:

NOVEMBER 04-27

- **New** Underwear (ALL SIZES)
- **New** Women's and Children's Pajamas
- Hygiene Products such as Shampoo, Conditioner, Soap, Toothpaste, Toothbrushes, and Lotion



Community Engagement

The Virginia State University Public Health Institute, Delta Omega Chapter of Omega Psi Fraternity Incorporated, City of Petersburg, and Bon Secours collaboratively hosted a Prostate Cancer Awareness event on September 19th. The program served to "kick-off" an ongoing campaign addressing health disparities that plague communities of color. Leading up to the event, CNHS Dean Derrick Scott and the Honorable Mayor Samuel Parham, City of Petersburg, appeared on CBS channel 6 Virginia This Morning to promote and encourage residents in the Tri-Cities area to attend



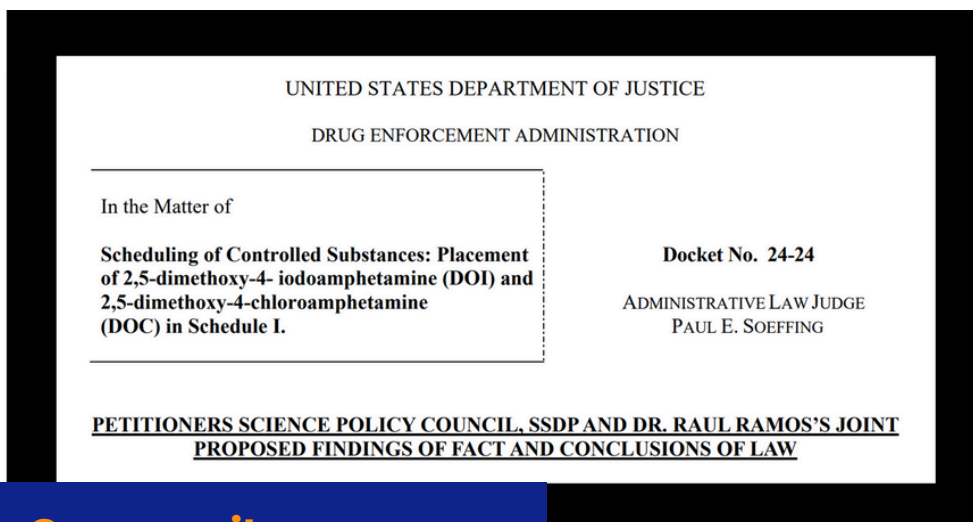
Virginia State University Student Chapter,
congratulations on earning your 2023-2024 Honorable
Mention Student Communities Award credential!

[Share on LinkedIn](#)[View my credential](#)

The American Chemical Society Recognized the VSU Chemistry Club/ACS student affiliate for the second year in a row. The Honorable Mention was based on their service to the community.



[Read More about the Prostate Awareness Event](#)



Community Engagement

Jason W. Younkin associate professor of biology, testified at a DEA hearing involving scheduling DOI and DOC, two psychedelic drugs used in labs. Fifteen persons testified as to why DOI and DOC should not be Schedule I.

Dr. Younkin holds a Ph. D. in neurochemistry and his research interests include the study of psychedelics as potential therapeutics. Psychedelics are increasingly being examined as treatments for psychiatric diseases, including PTSD, depression, addiction, and many others.

[Read the Legal Brief](#)

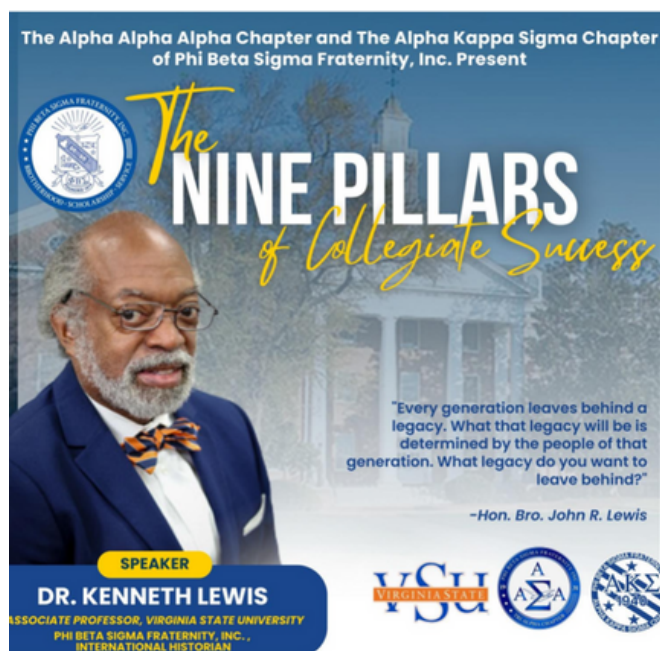


SSDP Kicks off DEA Court Hearing with Press Conference in Arlington, Virginia

This morning in front of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Headquarters in Arlington...

SSDP / Nov 12, 2024

Dr. Kenneth Lewis, associate professor of Psychology, continues his work helping students succeed. His past community engagement has included engaging VSU students in the cleanup and restoration of Petersburg Legends Park trails.



The Alpha Alpha Alpha Chapter and The Alpha Kappa Sigma Chapter
of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. Present

The **NINE PILLARS**
of Collegiate Success

"Every generation leaves behind a legacy. What that legacy will be is determined by the people of that generation. What legacy do you want to leave behind?"
—Hon. Bro. John R. Lewis

SPEAKER
DR. KENNETH LEWIS
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY
PHI BETA SIGMA FRATERNITY, INC., INTERNATIONAL HISTORIAN



Trojan Empowerment Summit

On September 5, 2024, the College of Natural and Health Sciences hosted its first Trojan Empowerment Summit on the second floor of Jones Dining Hall, designed for chemistry, biology, and psychology majors. The summit's theme, "The RIGHT STUFF," featured sessions on intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social wellness. Uniquely organized and led by students, the event focused on relevant topics to support today's undergraduate challenges. Exhibits, including booths by the Divine 9, were also student-led.



[Read More: The Empowerment Summit Program](#)

[Read More: The Empowerment Summit Report](#)



VSU P.R.I.M.E.

The Office of Pre-Professional Health Services & Career Strategy introduced the P.R.I.M.E Executive Board. PRIME, Pre-Health Related Interest in Mentoring Experiences, is dedicated to inspiring and supporting students at VSU who are pursuing careers in health care.

Ms. Laila Jones (Right), Bennika Mitchell, Biology Junior, and Zy'Kia Williams, were funded by Sentara Healthcare to participate in an individually tailored premedical program at the University of Central Florida School of Medicine. The three scholars are featured on the Future Physicians of America website.



Connect with VSU PRIME

Read Feature story about Ms. Laila Jones

Read More about the Office of Pre-Professional Health Services & Career Strategy



Faculty Activities

Dr. Samuel-Harris, Chair of the Nursing Department, presented at the AACN Transforming Nursing 2024 Conference and attended a Mentoring for Success of Nursing Schools workshop at Morgan State.

Dr. Larry Keen, Director of PNIRD and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology attended the Society for Psychophysiological Research Conference in Prague.

Dr. Kimberly Lawrence, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, presented at the Institute for Academic Feminist Psychologists in Philadelphia, PA. She also completed the CIMER Mentorship Training Program at Duke.



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Center for the Improvement of
Mentored Experiences in Research

Visit the Department of Nursing Webpage



Faculty Activities

Dr. Christian D'Orgeix, professor in the Department of Biology, presented "Hear that Lonesome Whistle Blow: The Impact of Railroad Tracks on Turtles," at the World Congress of Herpetology in Borneo. The work was based on research conducted with VSU students.

Dr. Christian D'Orgeix's lab reports the first case of a melanistic variant of Slevin's bunchgrass lizard (*Sceloporus slevini*) in Arizona. This rare coloration may offer thermal advantages in high-elevation populations, paving the way for future studies on thermal absorption in melanistic versus typical variants.

The study of Slevin's bunchgrass lizard was conducted by Dr. Christian d'Orgeix, Avery Monroe, Dr. Paul Kaseloo, and Tatiana Weiford, with partial funding from the NSF under Cooperative Agreement No. HRD-1719504



[Read More about Dr. D'Orgeix's Research](#)



Faculty Activities

Dr. Xianfa Xie, Director of the VSU CeBiGeBi and Associate Professor in the Department of Biology, presented twice at the 3rd Joint Congress on Evolutionary Biology: "The Proper Role of Epigenetics in Evolution: Supplemental or Paradigm Shift?" and "Why Have Most of the Phylogenetic Analysis of COVID Virus Evolution Been Wrong?"

Dr. Xie attended the NIH-funded Genomic Data Science Community Network (GDSCN) Symposium at the University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla with Community members, NIH officers, a guest speaker from Harvard Medical School & guest visit from the UPRag Provost.

Dr. Xie served as an SSE Diversity Committee officer, representing the committee and organizing workshops and social events at the 3rd Joint Congress on Evolutionary Biology.



[Read More about the CeBiGeBi Center](#)