

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF NATURAL HEALTH SCIENCES ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



TABLE OF CONTENTS



2	Student Honors
3	Student Volunteerism
4	Open House
5	Outstanding Students
6	Undergraduate Research Conference
7	Undergraduate Research Conference Cont.
8	Faculty Achievements
9	Faculty Achievements Cont.
10	Teaching and Learning Initiatives
11	College Initiatives
12	College Initiatives Cont.
13	College Initiatives Cont.

Annual Newsletter

CNHS HONORS STUDENTS

Recognized at the Spring 2024 Honors Convocation, 133 students from the College of Natural and Health Sciences earned a 3.0 or above as of Fall 23. Dean Derrick Scott proudly poses with the students in front of the Hunter McDaniel building after the College level celebration.



NURSING



On December 15, 2023 the Department of Nursing had its White Coat and Pinning Ceremony at the President's House. This ceremony honors and recognizes the essential role nurses play in professional health care. The donning of the white coat symbolizes purity of purpose that one has affirmed in stepping into the healthcare profession. The nursing pin is a symbol of educational completion and service that involves many professional rights and responsibilities. Two students Carol Marsh and Cynthia Pegram-Wyche graduated with Honors in the December Commencement Ceremony.

INDUCTION CEREMONIES



BIOLOGY

On Friday, April 12th, 2024 from 3-5pm in Owens Hall 306, students were inducted into Mu Eta Chapter of the [Beta Beta Beta Biological Honor Society](#). Mrs. Wanda Velez, advisor for VSU Chapter, presided over the ceremony. Honored guests included VSU President Makola Abdullah, Biology Dept. Chair Dr. Brian Sayre, and guest speaker VSU Alumnus Dr. Bernard Parker. Dr. Parker is a generous donor and supporter of the VSU Biology Department. The ceremony included installation of new officers.

PSYCHOLOGY

[Psi Chi](#), the International Honor Society in Psychology welcomed 14 new members to the VSU chapter on April 18, 2024 in a formal ceremony held in the Psychology Conference Room in Hunter McDaniel. These scholars have earned a 3.0 cumulatively and a 3.0 in psychology coursework.

PARKER SCHOLARSHIP

Biology majors Ty'Kirah Bonner, Ryan Davis, Adjoah Oduraa, Baabu Donkor, Alani Horton, Bennika Mitchell, John Shaquille Poitier, and Raevyn Ray were awarded the Parker Scholarship which requires a minimum 3.0 GPA and aspirations for the health care field.

STUDENT VOLUNTEERISM

Dr. Shedrick McCall accompanied undergraduates from the psychology club including Kamille Swygert (right), President, Lashaunde Smith, Chloe Street and Shaniah Steed on a visit to [Beulah Elementary School](#) in Chesterfield County on November 16th from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. The VSU undergraduates read to students in multiple classrooms including; one third grade, two second-grade, three first-grade and four kindergarten classes. The focus of the psychology club is on community service with a health focus.



AWARDS



Graduate Biology student Sahmod Earls was awarded second place for his oral presentation on the occurrence of antibiotic resistant bacteria in goats in the at the recent ARD (U.S.D.A. – Association of Research Directors Meeting) in the Animal Health and Production and Animal Products division.



Rachel Sperry (Chemistry), Nicole Jones (Biology), TyKirah Bonner (Biology), and Joy Foster (Chemistry) shown above and Chanel Randall (not pictured, Biology) were inducted into [Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor Society](#).



Members of the VSU Chemistry Club/[American Chemical Society \(ACS\) student affiliate](#) volunteered at the Science Museum of Virginia to participate in the “Glow” event on Saturday, February 3. The chemistry at the event focused on fun ways to demonstrate the science of fluorescence, phosphorescence, and chemiluminescence. The experiments included a chemiluminescent oxidation-reduction demo and a fluorescent dye experiment that explored the concepts of absorption and emission of light. The students also participated in a fun glow-in-the-dark dance party.

The Club members Keena Small and Nakiah Hunter (psychology major) also participated in the campus clean up led by [the SI:PASS team](#) on April 30th.

Seniors Troianna A Cofield Rowe (Chemistry) and Jianna Smith (Biology) with Faculty Dr. Witiak, and Dr. Whalen conducted a prescribed burn successfully eliminating two patches of understory, which has set the stage for additional prescribed burning taking place this calendar year. Students who complete the training are certified wildland firefighters who can work for environmental agencies assisting with controlled burns for land management and help respond to uncontrolled wildland fires. This work aligns with Dr. Whalen’s Ecology course (BIOL324), in which students learn about ecological disturbances, including fire.



OPEN HOUSE 2024

During the open house, Dr. Xie led a tour of the Center for Biotechnology, Genomics, and Bioinformatics (CeBiGeBi) core facility. Several visitors, including students and family members, learned about DNA sequencing, real-time PCR underlying COVID diagnostic tests, various instruments used for DNA processing and assessments, and different types of research at the Center. The visitors showed great interest, and some students specifically expressed an interest in studying biotechnology at VSU and in summer research internships at the Center.



In addition to two different presentations in Jones Dining Hall, the Psychology department conducted three informational sessions in Hunter McDaniel- explaining the degrees offered in psychology and the various tracks. Chair Dr. Shedrick McCall expressed pride in describing the contribution of Ms. Kaaleah Jones, an honor senior psychology major, who answered questions from visiting students and parents.

The Chemistry Club/ACS student affiliate provided some great demonstrations of chemistry in room 230/232 of Hunter McDaniel. The student presenters from the Chemistry Club included Joy Foster, Nyasia James, Tayona Hurley-Burgess, Trinity Allen, Robert Lomax (top left to right), Alani Horton, and Keena Small (bottom). These students reported 30- 40 visitors to the chemistry labs.



The Office of Pre-Health Services & Career Strategy staff gave two short oral presentations at Jones Dining Hall and a one-hour tabling session in the Hunter McDaniel lobby. Director William Burke spoke with several families about the Pre-Health Tracks, the various support systems for Pre-Health students, and the VSU P.R.I.M.E. initiative.

Significant student and parent interactions were accomplished by the Biology department with the incorporation of hands-on activities. Dr. Brian Sayre, Chair of Biology, reported that two tables were set up in the lobby of Hunter McDaniel, where undergraduate biology majors had visitors look under microscopes at samples to pose the question, "Would you eat that?". Graduate students set up a display focusing on antibiotic resistance.

IN THE NEWS

Makayla Reese was featured on NBC 12 News. Makayla Reese, Biology Junior and Honors College student was featured on NBC 12 news 10/11/2023. She is a recipient of a GRASP scholarship. "GREAT Aspirations Scholarship Program, Inc. (GRASP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable, college-access organization that assists Virginia's students and families in reaching their educational goals for after high school" <https://grasp4va.org/scholarships>.

Antoine Craig was featured in Virginia Public Media News (A platform for PBS and NPR). Antoine Craig, a doctoral student in the clinical health psychology program, was recently featured for his achievements and volunteerism with the visually impaired in the article entitled "Focal Point: A blind soccer star who guides others" <https://www.vpm.org/news/2023-09-01/antoine-craig-paralympic-soccer-athlete-olympics-virginia>

AWARDS



Jenille Jade Llorico accepted the commendable award for VSU American Chemical Society (ACS) Student Affiliate (Chemistry Club). The award was presented at the Spring ACS National Meeting in New Orleans.



Thomas Patterson, chemistry major, was awarded the Outstanding Leadership Excellence Award at Honors Convocation April 1st.

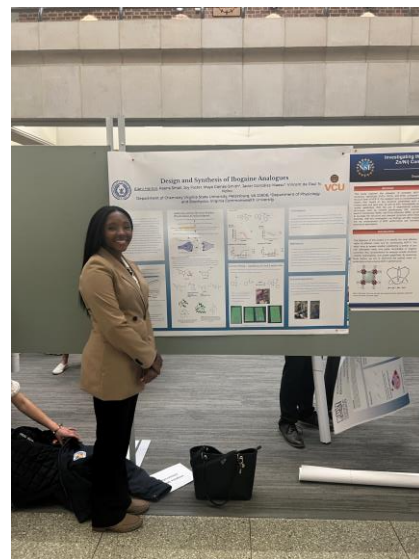
CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE



Students from Chemistry with mentor Dr. Thomas Redpath attend the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChe) continuing an initiative started by Dr. Colleen Taylor for NOBCChe presence. Dr. Redpath also accompanied five students, Jalen Felix (mechanical engineering), Isaiah Leonard (electrical engineering), Raven Mott (computer science), Jaylen Rasberry (chemistry), and Sarah Timothy (biology) to the INSIGHT workshop at the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB), Michigan State University campus April 18–19th.

OUTSTANDING STUDENTS

The outstanding American Chemical Society VA section senior chemistry award was presented to Alani Horton, a senior dual chemistry/biology major, at the annual Spring ACS meeting at the [UVA](#) on April 5th. Dr. Karl Jackson accompanied Alani Horton and Robert Lomax. Alani and Robert presented their research conducted for Dr. Vincent Nziko, and Dr. Karl Jackson, respectively. The research abstract presented at the meeting is published in the Local Section ACS bulletin which is available on the [local section website](#). Outstanding seniors receive a plaque and society membership. Alani Horton is respected by faculty across the college. She plans to attend medical school in NC.



Psychology Doctoral Student Chelsey Cooper-McGill Receives a \$91,298 National Cancer Institute Diversity Supplement Award to conduct studies related to Colorectal Cancer in Southside Virginia. Colorectal cancer affects Black men disproportionately.

STAFF RECOGNITION: RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The VSU Annual Research Conference/Symposia held annually in spring allows undergraduate and graduate students of all majors (expanded from just STEM in 2016) across the state and beyond to discuss their research in oral or poster format. The conference is organized yearly by Ms. Amber Dollete, who manages multiple aspects, from editing the program, having that printed, recruiting judges, printing posters, and more. The program that VSU, HBCU-UP, and WBHR-LSAMP fund would not be a success and would not have contributed to the culture of research now engrained in our Science Majors without Ms. Dollete's contributions for almost two decades. The conference began with just a few schools, a group of faculty members, and Dr. Ali Ansari and is now expanded as part of the overall operation of the [Trojan Center for Undergraduate Applied Research \(TCUAR\)](#).



UNDERGRADUATES TITLES



Dr. Vernessa Clark has been helping with the research conference at VSU from the initiation of the program funding in 2006 and the first conference in 2007. She is present every year as a judge, organizer and contributor of student researchers. This year her students presented the following:

Jasmyn Walker: "The Ability of Coping Strategies to Predict Stress, Anxiety, and Depression."

Keyera Reese: "The Ability of Parental Anxiety and Stress to Predict Anxiety, Stress, and Depression on an Offspring"

Nizjae Averett: "The Ability of Parental Stress to Predict Susceptibility to Illness in Offspring"

"Effect of the Fall Zone Transition on the Benthic Diatom Communities in the Appomattox River."
J'Twan Hardy and Nikki Craig;
Advisor: Dr. Matthew Whalen

"Sleep Disturbances and the Increased Risk of Type 2 Diabetes in African Americans".
Alexes Ford-Johnson (Senior below) presented; Advisor Dr. Kathryn Shows



BIOLOGY STUDENTS

"Pattern Polymorphism in Slevin's Bunchgrass Lizard, *Sceloporus slevini*" Wilnijah Chapman, and Javione Banks; Mentor: Dr. Christian D'Orgeix

"Novel Therapeutic Approach with Dandelion Phytochemicals In Breast Cancer Treatment" Angel Champion Mentor: Dr. Sadia Kanwal, Agriculture

"Outstanding Child Researcher Competition Stephenardo Rolle II, John Poitier Jr., Brinika Burrows; Mentor: Dr. Aurelia Donald, Management

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

"Unveiling Misogynoir in Mass Media: Understanding Intersectional Discrimination Against Black Women" Dana Summerford; Mentor: Dr. Krystle Dandridge

"Black Feminism and Family Unity in Pan Africanism" Jannah Flowers, Corey Poarch; Mentor: Dr. Christin Haynes

"Exploring the Correlation Between Attachment Styles and Psychopathy Traits: A Review of Literature" Zaria Hall. Mentor: Dr. Samuel West

"Testing a Measure of Aggression for Anti-Black Racial Bias" Amaya Woods
Mentor: Dr. Samuel West

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

In his message to undergraduates, Dr. M. Omar Faison, Associate Vice Provost, Research & Economic Development, Interim Dean, College of Graduate Studies, describes the undergraduate research experience as an essential component of the students' growth and, ultimately, as professionals, providing technical expertise and crucial cognitive skills, including critical thinking. The College of Natural and Health Sciences makes up the majority of majors at the University and the majority of presenters at the Undergraduate Research Conference. We celebrate the contributions of all undergraduates. We especially thank faculty mentors whose guidance is invaluable in this process and all the judges who volunteered at the conference.

CHEMISTRY STUDENTS

"Counting Gamma-Rays to Measure the Ba-137m Half-Life"

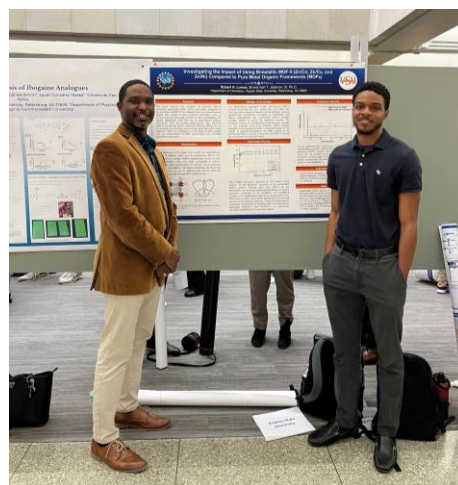
Trinity Allen

Mentor: Dr. Thomas Redpath

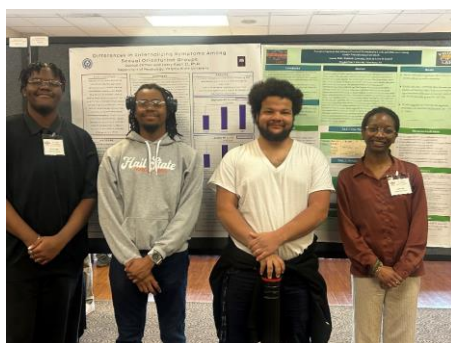
"Investigating the Impact of Using Bimetallic MOF-5 (Zn/Co, Zn/Cu, and Zn/Ni) Compared to Pure Metal Organic Frameworks (MOFs)".

Robert Lomaz Junior

Mentor: Dr. Karl Jackson. (Right at UVA – same poster)



SPOTLIGHT



From left to right: Davian Clifton (Sophomore-Psychology), Sean Cooper II (Freshman- Biology), Justin Williams (Psychology- Freshman), and Ayanna Bryant- Reid (Senior- Psychology) working for Dr. Larry Keen II.



Two undergraduate students working with Dr. Paul Kaseloo (Biology) made presentations at the Emerging Researchers National Conference in STEM in Washington D.C. and at the VSU Undergraduate Research Conference. Amira Turner (Senior- Biology,) presented "Average Resting Metabolic Rate (RMR) in Neonatal Pond Turtles" and LeVar Akerson (Senior-Biology) presented "The Effect of Temperature on Metabolic Rates in Juvenile Pond Turtles" (Right) Both received support through the NSF HBCU-UP Summer Research Internship.



Dr. Larry Keen mentored four psychology majors:

"Differences in Internalizing Symptoms Among Sexual Orientation Groups"

Davian Clifton, Sophomore (left)

"Association between Immediate memory and Cannabis Use Throughout the Week in Undergraduates"

Manuelene Deigh, Senior

"A Study on the Association Between Panic Disorder and Cannabis Use Disorder in Young Adult HBCU Undergraduates"

Kaya Brady, Junior

"Executive Functions that Influence Perceived Discrimination Levels and Differences

Among Gender Nonconforming Individuals"

Ayanna Reid, Senior (right)

FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

Dr. Karl Jackson, chemistry associate professor, alumnus, chemistry 2006, and special assistant to the Dean received a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award from the U. S. Department of State to travel to Ghana for the 2023-2024 academic year. He wrapped up his trip in the Fall of 2023 returning to campus for Spring 2024. He taught Organometallic Chemistry at the graduate level and undergraduate level at the University of Ghana and was able to make valuable connections. Dr. Jackson continues his research on campus studying metal-organic **frameworks** (MOFs) applications such as water purification.



FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr Katrina Walker is the new President Elect for the [Virginia Association for Psychological Science](#). As per their website, "VAPS" is dedicated to advancing psychology as a science, enhancing the teaching of psychology, and fostering high standards of ethics and training by providing the opportunity for the exchange of experience and research among psychologists through discussions, presentations, and publications as well as by educating the public about the purposes and goals of the science of psychology."



COMMUNITY



Dr. Kenneth W. Lewis engaged in significant public service during Black History Month presenting: "[When We Were Young, Gifted & Black: An OURstoric Perspective of Peabody High School \(1870 1970+\)](#)" at Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church Men's Club.



Dr. Lewis also received an Innovation Award Program (IAP) Grant to restore and provide a written record of the "Women's Trail" of the Petersburg Historic Legends Park and Nature Sanctuary. This project is being conducted with the [Willcox Watershed Conservancy](#), Virginia State University, and the City of Petersburg.



Psychology professor Dr. Cheryl Talley was invited to join the Advisory Committee of the National Science Foundation Directorate of STEM Education for a three-year term. According to the Chair of the Committee NSF, Assistant Director Dr. James Moore III, she was recommended by an NSF Program Director who cited her work with the HBCU STEM-US Center. Her association with Apple Computing through the Propel Foundation (with the VSU Computer Science Department) and her work in the K-12 space (through Petersburg City Public Schools) also supported her nomination.

Dr. Cheryl Talley recently wrapped up her findings in two white papers from her HBCU STEM-US Community on research findings associated with the Analytic Hub.

Former Department Chair Dr. Reginald Hopkins continues the legacy of K12 intervention spearheaded by the late Dr. Oliver Hill with the Algebra Project with a newly funded three-year 2.9-million-dollar National Science Foundation grant focusing on improving Jackson Mississippi public schools' performance in mathematics by establishing The Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Center for Math Education and Research



Dr Vincent Nziko, a new organic chemistry faculty member, co-authors the publication entitled "Phytochemical Studies of *Alstonia scholaris*, Chemical Transformation and Biological Evaluation against a Breast Cancer Line" in *The Natural Products Journal*.

FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Larry Keen, 2022 Toppin-W.E.B. Dubois Award winner, is the Director of the Psychoneuroimmunology of Risk and Disease lab that includes 12 students and two junior faculty members and the principal investigator on two NIH-funded projects (Cannabis Nexus Initiative: 3 years/\$430,014 & NCI: Pilot Project 2: 3 years/\$249,671). He is the site lead on the Regional Wright Center's Clinical and Translational Science Award (7 years/\$1,227,695). Two NIH-funded diversity supplements were awarded to Dr. Keen, from which he supports a post-baccalaureate and a PhD student. Dr. Keen is the founding Director of the Center for Outreach and Treatment Through Education and Research (Ce. OTTER), which focuses on community engagement, medical service, and health education. Dr. Keen serves on the Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council for Virginia.



AWARDS



Dr. Sarah Melissa Witiak received the 2023 Edgar Toppin - W. E. B. Dubois Award for outstanding research contributions to the CNHS. Dr. Witiak is collaborating with USDA researchers, VT, and VSU graduate students to understand the ecology and gene expression of insect galls from Idaho's sagebrush steppe. With her recent \$245,950.00 grant award she is also working with the Virginia Department of Forestry, several Virginia colleges, VSU undergraduates and colleagues, the city of Petersburg, and city residents to improve tree cover and reduce urban heat islands.

Pictured above, Dr. Witiak also has served in planning the [Plant Gall Symposium](#).



Dr. Thomas Redpath was awarded three grants in Fall 2023, two from the DoE in which he is the primary investigator. These two grants, DE-SC0022037, \$332,000, and DE-SC0024697, \$480,000, make nuclear science and AI research accessible to our students. The first nuclear science research training at Virginia State University makes VSU as member of the MoNA Collaboration. Dr. Redpath is also a Co-Pi on NSF Collaborative Research Equipment, award no. 2320401, \$460,000 for the development of a Next Generation Neutron Detector.

Dr. Bryan Sayre co-authors papers from The African Goat Improvement Network (AGIN) including "The African Goat Improvement Network: a scientific group empowering smallholder farmers" and "Using the community-based breeding program (CBBP) model as a collaborative platform to develop the African Goat Improvement Network—Image collection protocol (AGIN-ICP) with mobile technology for data collection and management of livestock phenotypes" in the *Frontiers of Genetics*.



Dr. Whalen, Kyra Alston, and Jazlyn Howell (left to right) prepare a snail specimen for identification, DNA barcoding, and a museum voucher.

Dr. Matthew Whalen obtained a Provost's Innovation Award to study aquatic ecology and biodiversity on the Appomattox River. He engages in research focused on local ecology and ecosystems services in collaboration with his colleague, Dr. Witiak. He is currently on a biodiversity research expedition in British Columbia, Canada, with two biology majors, Kyra Alston and Jazlyn Howell. The VSU Provost Office, VSU Honors College, and the [Hakai Institute](#) (Canada) sponsor this work. They are visiting for two weeks, contributing to an intense biodiversity survey. During their time, they are supporting efforts to document marine biodiversity on Quadra Island.

INITIATIVES

Dr. Whiteman wrapped up the five-year NSF STAR, which involved a writing retreat for 15 faculty at the Process Education Conference held at VSU in May of 2022 who had performed course interventions. The program has led to the institutional implementation of an SI-PASS program now run by Dr. Taneisha Brown and a greater connection to the Process Education Organization and Pacific Crest as recognized in 2023 conference of Process Educators as an outstanding contributing partner. A half-day conference “VSU Student Success: A Decade of Progress” was held on Feb 7th 2024 highlighting projects that contribute to the Science of Teaching and Learning at VSU

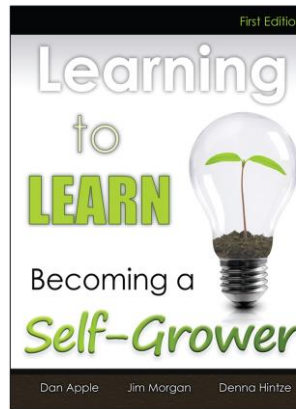


TECHNOLOGY



Wanda Velez launches BIOL116 fully in Canvas for the Spring term. Dr. Velez is dedication to using technology to scaffold learning experiences for students and improve student outcomes. She has been involved in student interventions in her course work for several years. She is currently furthering her education in the intersection of pedagogy working on her Ph.D. in Education with a Instructional Design c and Technology concentration from ODU.

Dr. Colleen Taylor, Director of Digital Marketing and Technology Liaison, leads CANVAS training for the college and conducts a second midterm to winter break 12-week online restart cohort intervention in General Chemistry I helping with retention.

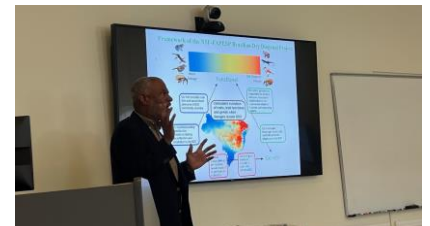


LEARNING TO LEARN

Dr. Brian Sayre and seven other dedicated faculty lead the first one-week, “[Learning-to-Learn for Success Bootcamp](#)” to help at-risk students succeed. The workshop with 22 students was held between January 8th and 13th. Ten additional faculty interacted with students by participating in interviews. The student's success will be tracked as a part of this initiative, and Dr. Aurelia M. Donald will lead the effort to recruit and train 40 faculty members for the Learning-Learn training planned for this summer.

CEBIGEBI CENTER

Dr. Xianfa Xie and staff members at the VSU Center for Biotechnology, Genomics, and Bioinformatics (CeBiGeBi) organized and hosted the International Symposium on Brazilian Biodiversity, celebrating Earth Day on April 22, 2024. Research was presented on the incredible biodiversity in Brazil, funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), Brazil's largest state funding agency. Speakers from Harvard University, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Campinas (Brazil), the Federal University of Sao Carlos (Brazil), and Virginia State University presented cutting-edge research on birds, frogs, spiders, cacti, and bioluminescent fungi from Brazil. Many students attended and benefited from the event.



VSUTEACH

The [VSUTEACH Scholars program](#) is a collaborative partnership between The National UTEACH Organization and VSU to recruit Agriculture, Biology, Chemistry, and Math majors into the field of teaching to address the teacher shortage in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There are 35 active members from the College of Natural Health Sciences and from the beginning of the VSUTEACH Scholars Program 85 students from the College of Natural Health Sciences have applied and been accepted as members. Almost 80% of the VSUTEACH Scholars are students in the College of Natural Health Sciences. This is due in large part to the work of Mr. William Burke; who actively recruits students through his Pre-Health Professionals Program within the College.

ALUMNUS TO DRIVE COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS

VSU Chemistry Alumnus Dr. Kathy Goodson, 2005, joins VSU as the Director of the Pharmaceutical Engineering Pathways Project. The project is part of a federal government grant to which Dr. Grace Ndip, Chemistry Department Chair, has contributed significantly. Dr. Goodson will oversee collaborative initiatives between Virginia State University and several strategic partners from Central Virginia's Advanced Pharmaceutical Manufacturing and R&D Cluster (Pharma Cluster Coalition). One of the most impactful aspects for the college is the establishment of two pathways for students to obtain VSU/VCU joint degrees. Starting in Fall 24, the first track is a 3+2 option where chemistry students will transfer into chemical engineering at VCU and graduate with two bachelor's degrees. The second track is a proposed 4+1 accelerated master's program. Students in chemistry from VSU will enter the master's in chemical engineering program at VCU in their senior year, graduating with their VSU BS and VCU Master's degrees. Industry partners will provide opportunities for internships and jobs for our graduates and grow the Chemistry Program. The project initiative includes two other significant outreach activities this summer, which will serve as recruiting and retention tools for the college. More details will be provided in the summer



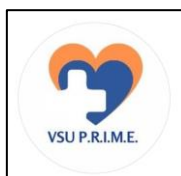
William Burke, MS -Senior Director leads The Office of Pre-Health Services & Career Strategy with a large footprint for its first full year of activities, social media and engagement. Eight (8) Pre-Professional Health Tracks were launched and as of April 1st there are 79 students on the following tracks: 29 Pre Medicine, 15 Pre Dental, 13 Pre Physician Assistant, 13 Pre Physical Therapy, 8 Pre Pharmacy, 1 Occupational Therapy. 132 students were served by appointment 87 in workshops and 107 students are members of [VSU P.R.I.M.E.](#) As an example of activities. The director accompanied pre-med and pre-physician assistant students to Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS) on March 28th, for a campus tour and Q&A Session with the Dean of Admissions.

PRE-HEALTH INITIATIVES AND RECOGNITION

Virginia State University received \$250K from Sentara Healthcare to fund the Sentara Scholars program at VSU. The scholarship program is designed to increase retention by assisting students interested in the healthcare or healthcare-related fields. About 200K is being used for scholarships and 50K is being used for emergency funding which could address any monetary impediment that may come up to prevent student success. Dean Scott is specifically targeting monetary obstacles that often lead to attrition of our students. The students helped so far have led to 100% being retained. As part of this initiative Dean Scott is also sending a group of future healthcare in-state student to a workshop in Florida held by [Future Physicians of America](#) which will be handled by Director William Burke.

Mrs. Myra Phillips, Director of Financial Aid, has assisted Dean Scott with student retention efforts through the Sentara Scholars program and by finding assistance for at-risk students who do not qualify under those program guidelines. The Dean awarded Mrs. Phillips the **Oliver W. Hill Distinguished Service Award** on May 1 during the College Honors Ceremony in recognition of this work.

Mrs. Phillips is known for her exceptional service to the University at the highest level. Her assistance is particularly noteworthy in a year where the new FAFSA form and delays have been very challenging for that office. Despite these challenges, the office is progressing in its offers and rolling out a new personalized [video](#) to welcome our new students.



VSU [P.R.I.M.E.](#) (Pre-Health & Related Interests Mentoring Experiences) was launched this year. Director William Burke leads this networking and mentorship platform.

PSYCHOLOGY INITIATIVE

Dr. Jessica Brooks initiates a new accelerated bachelor's-to-master's program in Psychology to allow academically qualified students to earn both degrees in a minimum of five years by taking approved graduate-level courses during the senior year of their undergraduate program. The program is expected to be approved in Fall 24.

PHI COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Public Health Institute (PHI) partnered with Bon Secours' Southside Medical Center by hosting a "Pink Party" to ensure VSU employees receive breast cancer awareness education, mammograms, and dialogue with experts from oncology, radiology, and gynecology. This event is part of their Community Engagement galvanizing the Partnership for Petersburg. PHI also hosted learning experience including various topics on diabetes, prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, and coping with stress during the holidays. The PHI also hosted on-campus and community-based flu clinics for IVNA (Instructive Visiting Nurse Association) of Bon Secours.



BIOPHARM

Diversify your talent pipelines by engaging biopharma-savvy university community colleges, and non-profits.

U.S. BIOPHARMA WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE

APRIL 17 - 18, 2024
BOSTON, MA

NIIMBL The National Institute for Innovation in Manufacturing Biopharmaceuticals www.NIIMBL.org/eve

Dean Scott attends the National Institute for Innovation in Manufacturing Biopharmaceuticals (NIIMBL) Inaugural U.S. [Biopharma Workforce Partnership Conference](#) April 17-18, 2024 in Boston, Massachusetts. The conference provided an opportunity to create partnerships and identify future funding to expand upon the current initiatives through to the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC), formed in order to create US self-reliance in the pharmaceutical manufacturing arena.

EMERGENCY SPURS ACTION

On Wednesday, January 24th, one of our students experienced a medical emergency in Hunter McDaniel that rendered them unconscious and unresponsive. As luck would have it, Dr. Scott was meeting with Dr. Sibena Samuel-Harris when help was requested. Dr. Samuel-Harris took over revival efforts and cleared the student's airway while inducing coughing fits to help the student breathe. By the time emergency personnel arrived, Dr. Samuel-Harris had stabilized the student, leading to a better outcome. The student was transported to the hospital and recovered at home. Dean Scott thanked Dr. Samuel-Harris publicly for her outstanding work, as she truly lived up to her Nursing credentials.

As a result of this incident, Drs. Samuel-Harris and Scott initiated awareness with a medical emergency steps flyer, which will be posted in all classrooms and common areas in Hunter McDaniel. 2-hour PHI REVIVE!! training was provided educating attendees on how to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose emergency using naloxone. The third leg is providing 4-hour First Aid/CPR/AED Training sessions being held in May in the Hunter McDaniel building providing basic skills in first aid, such as stopping bleeding, lay-responder CPR, and AED.

NURSING ACCREDITATION

Under the leadership of Dr. Sibena Samuel-Harris the online RN to BSN program has doubled its enrollment numbers from spring 2022 to spring 2023 and had five graduates in May of 2023. The Commission Collegiate Nursing Education site visit on Oct. 30 - Nov. 1, 2023, was very successful and received a glowing preliminary report from the three evaluators with only two compliance issues, which have been resolved, and one key recommendation to hire an administrative assistant. The college is confident the Department of Nursing will be fully accredited when the decision expected any day now.

OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE USDA

The USDA Liaison, Herbert Brown of the 1890 Universities Foundation accompanied 10 students from each school to the National Harbor in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (USDA, NRCS) to identify and prepare students for career opportunities with the Federal Government. The 1890 Universities Foundation Career Development Conference, was hosted at the Hyatt Place National Harbor, 123 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, MD, 20745 on March 26 - 28, 2024.

PHI EDUCATION OUTREACH

Tara L. Dickerson, Executive Director of the Public Health Institute, has led many public health initiatives with her staff. In the education arena, the Public Health Institute led an interactive opportunity entitled Delicious Next Generation for youth ages 6-11. The event allowed the youths to learn about healthy meal preparation and nutrition. The participants made modified recipe tacos with no sodium, turkey meat, and healthy topics, including homemade guacamole. Each child received a “home kit” to continue the effort for improved health outcomes. Students from VSU’s Psychology and Social Work departments served as Wellness Ambassadors for the day.



PRE-HEALTH

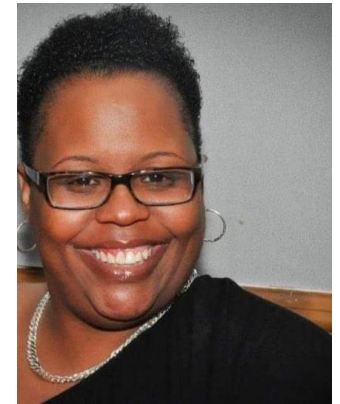


On Thursday, April 4, 2024 Dr. Lance Okeke, MD, MPH of Duke University returned to our campus and met with student leaders from VSU P.R.I.M.E. and other health related organizations for an Evidence 2 Practice Workshop. As an Infectious Disease Specialist and Associate Director for Duke Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) Clinical Core, Dr. Okeke is passionate about serving his patients and community in a matter that not only improves health and wellness today, but also for future generations. He is also dedicated to sharing his knowledge with HBCU students pursuing healthcare professions.

Article contribution: Ayanna Thompson Special Programs Coordinator Office of Pre-Health Services and Career Strategy

STAFF MEMBER DEDICATED TO SELF-GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Mrs. Fran Thomas, Dean's Executive Assistant and Assistant for Chemistry, and Chair of Staff Senate, is pursuing her [Masters in Advanced Economics through the Department of Mathematics and Economics](#). She graduated last May with her Engineering degree, which she shared was an epic moment. She was the first to graduate from college in her family and had pictures of her mother and grandmother on her hat when she walked across the stage. Mrs. Thomas has been mentored along the way. Dr. Keith Williamson, former Dean of Engineering, convinced her to pursue a degree in engineering that she never thought she would consider. Dr. Vilchiz, the former Chair of Chemistry, kept her going even when he left the institution. Dr. Grace Ndip, supported her as chair during her time in classes. She is especially grateful for the chemistry students who motivated her along the way.



Mrs. Thomas was empowered by attending [the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute at VCU 2019](#). She and Ms. Kimberly Drummond are part of a large group of staff participating in the [Tuition waiver program](#) which covers two courses per semester. Ms. Kimberly Drummond, administrative assistant in psychology is taking courses towards her bachelor's degree in individualized studies. Mrs. Thomas is responsible for spreading the word through the staff senate, with ten staff members taking undergraduate coursework and five in graduate programs. Mrs. Thomas is known across the college for her ability to assist with many needs and we join her in celebrating her achievements to date.

SIGNATURE SERIES

The Office of Pre-Health Services and Career Strategy held spring semester events in their signature series. These events facilitate personal connections between our students and our partners including: Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine, Merck, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, VCU College of Health Professions, VCU Massey Cancer Center, Duke University School of Medicine, Eastern Virginia Medical School, PPD Thermo Fisher Scientific, VCU School of Dentistry, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. The Office of Pre-health Services and Career Strategy hosted Chelsea Gary- Director of Recruitment & Student Programs for the College of Health Professions at VCU on Tuesday, April 2 for their Signature Series event.