

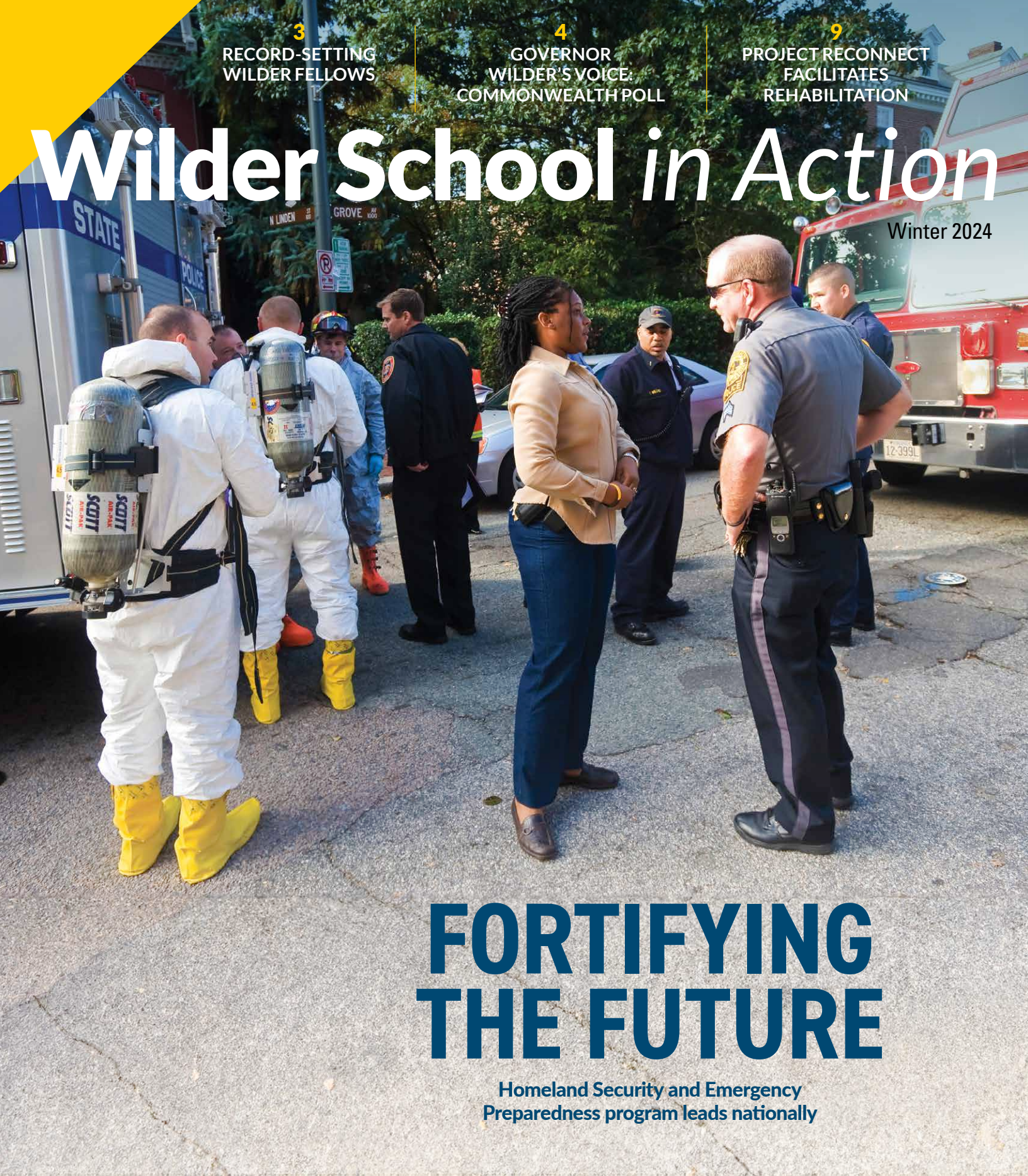
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# Wilder School *in Action*

Winter 2024



## FORTIFYING THE FUTURE

Homeland Security and Emergency  
Preparedness program leads nationally



**VCU** L. Douglas Wilder School of  
Government and Public Affairs



# Wilder School *in Action*

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## Support our students

All donations, regardless of size, help students, faculty and staff to inform and transform public policy.

Learn about ways you can give back while supporting tomorrow’s leaders. Contact Stevan Dozier, the Wilder School’s senior director of development, at doziers2@vcu.edu or (804) 828-6205.

For more information, please visit us at [bit.ly/givewilder](https://bit.ly/givewilder)



## Letter from the dean

*Dear Friends,*

Welcome to the latest edition of Wilder School in Action, which unfolds a panorama of innovation, impact and the extraordinary endeavors that define our community.

In this issue, we highlight our **Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness program**, which has been at the forefront of disaster management and crisis response for nearly two decades. Our cover story navigates the turbulent waters of natural disasters and the escalating threats of cybersecurity, showcasing how our faculty, students and alumni are crafting solutions that resonate on both national and global stages.

We hosted an insightful and nuanced analysis of Election 2024 for our annual **Wilder Symposium**. Inside, you’ll find a QR code to view the entire presentation on our YouTube channel. Hosted by distinguished professor **Governor L. Douglas Wilder** and deftly moderated by **Bob Holsworth, Ph.D.**, and **Larry Sabato, Ph.D.**, the event was a profound exploration of the theme “Elections 2024: The Importance of Listening to the People.” Our coverage doesn’t stop at the discussions; it includes a pivotal conversation with Governor Wilder about the **VCU Wilder School Commonwealth Poll’s** meticulous methodology, a fundamental element of its long-standing credibility and national recognition.

This season, we also spotlight **Project ReConnect**. This initiative, a collaborative effort led by our faculty with local agencies, bridges the gap for individuals transitioning from incarceration back into society. It’s a vital learning platform for students pursuing careers in criminal justice and social work.



And there’s more. We proudly present our largest-ever cohort of the **Wilder Graduate Scholars Fellowship**. These 24 ambitious students are ready to leave their marks on the realms of public policy and administration, embodying our vision to nurture leaders capable of navigating tomorrow’s challenges.

Finally, we shine a light on alumna **Yolanda Crewe (PPAD ’20)**, whose accomplishments in workforce development are both innovative and transformational for Virginia’s strategy to advance career readiness and employment.

Each of these narratives and insights underscores our pivotal role as a catalyst for change in public affairs education. We are more than participants in the public service arena — we are architects, continuously pushing the boundaries to forge a more equitable and just society.

Thank you for your steadfast support and engagement. As we move forward together through these dynamic times, your partnership is invaluable. Here’s to another season of profound learning and meaningful impacts. 🏛️

Warm regards,

**Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D.**  
 Dean  
 L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Stay up to date with the Wilder School at our news page at: [bit.ly/wilderschoolnews](https://bit.ly/wilderschoolnews)



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# Unveiling inequities in philanthropy

Calling for an end to racially charged restrictions on public and nonprofit organizations' funding

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON

Philanthropy offers a powerful means to support causes that significantly improve the lives of the less fortunate or to provide essential opportunities. However, some benefactors provide this crucial funding with specific and sometimes racially unjust conditions, according to new research.

Wilder School assistant professor **Charity Scott, Ph.D.**, experienced the ups and downs of benefactors with philanthropic educational priorities during her career as a K-12 teacher in Indianapolis, Indiana; a city that in 2015 adopted an academic strategy to improve failing schools and boost enrollment via philanthropic partnerships. Many charter schools were established with significant funding but were not sustainable long-term, forcing some to close due to dwindling finances. The strategy gained further national attention and sparked controversy when the large urban district began to create "Innovation Schools," converting neighborhood schools to nonprofits to be managed

by outside organizations, mostly charter schools.

"My research revealed that while many foundations claimed to support marginalized communities, their methodologies and priorities often perpetuated the very inequalities they sought to address," she says. Scott shares that, "This backdrop sparked my curiosity about the power of philanthropy to fundamentally reshape the experiences of low-income and largely racially

minoritized students and their families."

Scott's co-authored research, "Unveiling whiteness: an approach to expand equity and deepen public administration's racial analysis," published in *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, addresses the frustrations shared by scholars and practitioners in the fields of public administration, nonprofit management and philanthropy regarding the racialized dynamics within these organizations.

Scott analyzed various philanthropic organizations, which,

intentionally or not, are known for their exclusionary practices, such as the Gates Foundation and the City Fund. She was stunned to find how often vulnerable groups were sidelined from decision-making opportunities. The study offers suggestions to philanthropists for practical applications that could improve methodology and practices.

"The concepts and frameworks from my research can be practically applied in policy-making and administrative decision-making to address racial inequities," says Scott. This encourages policymakers to "adopt these insights to ensure more inclusive and equitable practices in grantmaking, public services and resource distribution."

Scott's research encourages philanthropic organizations to engage in honest conversations about historical inequities and reassess their methods to create more just practices. They should evaluate grantmaking processes, priorities and collaborations through an awareness of exclusionary practices.

Scott encourages minority- and women-owned nonprofits to consider how exclusionary practices might still apply: "Emphasizing community involvement and transparency in their proposals can better align with more equitable philanthropic practices." 🏢



Charity Scott



## Record cohort of Wilder Fellows set to shape public policy and administration

This year, 24 full-time graduate students are set to transform public policy and administration through the esteemed Wilder Graduate Scholars Fellowship.

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON

The program, established in 2006 by then-professor Dean Susan T. Gooden, has been pivotal in retaining top talent by offering substantial financial and professional support. Each fellow in this record-setting cohort will receive full-time, in-state tuition and a stipend totaling \$32,752, summing up a significant \$786,058 investment in direct student support for the academic year. In exchange, fellows provide 20 hours of service a week for the full academic year.

This year's cohort showcases a remarkable diversity of talent. With impressive GPAs and a significant percentage of out-of-state students, the group underscores the program's

national appeal and stringent academic standards. These fellows, hailing from academic backgrounds in criminal justice, homeland security and emergency preparedness, public administration, urban and regional planning, and sociology, are matched with host employers across Virginia, ensuring a rich blend of academic theory and practical application.

This year's fellows are collaborating with 18 influential organizations, reflecting the program's broad reach and the fellows' diverse interests. Host organizations play a crucial role in providing real-world experiences that complement the fellows' academic pursuits, preparing them for careers in public service. This year's agency hosts include:

### Bent Ear Solutions:

*Lydia Schauss, (MURP)*

### Capital Region Airport Commission:

*Jada Whitley (MPA), Ashley Van Buskirk (MURP) and Ky Pulliam (MPA)*

### Chesterfield County Planning

Department: *Dagny Oakley (MURP)*

### Greater Richmond Transit Authority:

*Nate Joyner (MPA) and Derrick Watkins, Jr. (MPA)*

### Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME)

of Virginia: *Tarnika Edmunds (MURP)*

### Locus: *Sarah Miller (MPA)*

Race Forward: *Daniel Cantrell (MPA)*

Virginia CDFI Coalition: *Emma Tilley (MURP)*

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation: *Eleanor Plisko (MURP)*

Division of Legislative Services (Legislative Fellow): *Faith Holmes (MPA)*

Joint Legislative Audit and Review

Commission (Legislative Fellow):

*Sofia Simmons (MPA)*

Virginia State Crime Commission (Legislative

Fellow): *Sha'keila Bond (CJ)*

### Center for Public Policy:

*Sofia Tortolero Calnache (MPA)*

Ceasefire Project, Center for Public Policy:

*Kayla Howard (CJ) and Jordan Brooks (HSEP)*

Survey and Evaluation, Center for Public

Policy: *Destiny Brown (MURP)*

Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute:

*Armando Somoza (CJ)*

Research Institute for Social Equity:

*Cameron Williams (MPA), Emily Schreer*

*(MURP) and Mariam Al-khafaji (MPA)*

RVA Eviction Lab: *Cameron Hart (MPA)*

## A LEGACY OF SUCCESS AND SUPPORT

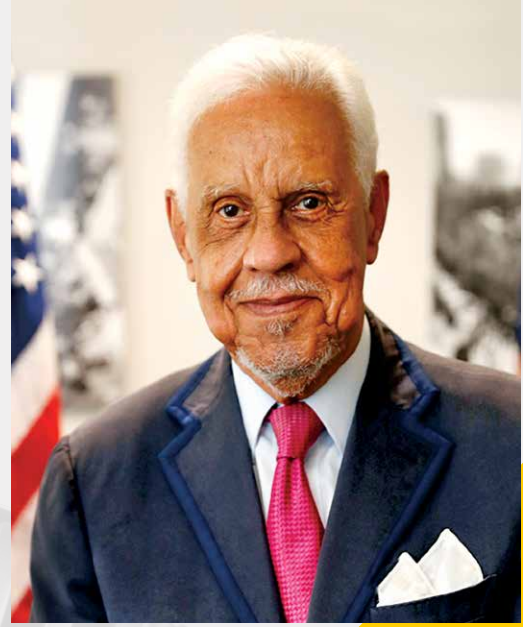
The Wilder Graduate Scholars Fellowship consistently opens doors for students by connecting them with opportunities to apply their knowledge in professional environments. Over the years, the fellowship has provided substantial support, totaling millions in scholarships and stipends, enabling students to focus fully on their studies and professional development without the burden of financial stress.

As we celebrate the achievements and potential of this year's cohort, the Wilder School remains committed to fostering the next generation of public leaders and policymakers. The extensive support and opportunities provided by the Wilder Graduate Scholars Fellowship helps to ensure that these aspiring professionals are well-equipped to tackle the complex challenges facing our society today. 🏛️

# Governor's voice

In search of leadership

Multiple times a year, the VCU Wilder School Commonwealth Poll provides policymakers with an up-to-date snapshot of public opinion on current policy issues in the commonwealth. Elevating the voice of Virginians, the poll was selected as a Presidential Election Poll by CNN Politics, solidifying the Commonwealth Poll among the nation's top polls. We sat down with our namesake, Governor L. Douglas Wilder, to discuss the poll's impacts.



**Q** Many polls talk about the importance of methodology. What makes the methodology of the Commonwealth Poll so rigorous?

**A** We only collect data through real conversations, with a person speaking to a person. Nothing is automated. It is important to ensure that the questions are clear and understood, and this allows us to explain the question, if necessary. We also call both cell and landlines, and we make certain that the people we call actually live in the areas we are polling. These methods create what is called a double verification. It's more resource intensive, but it's more exacting, and you get more truth.

The strong methodology of the Commonwealth Poll is also embraced by the Virginia state government as well. The Virginia General Assembly trusts the Wilder School year in and year out to conduct a strong poll, evidenced by the fact that funding for the Commonwealth Poll is in their biennial budget.

**Q** This year, the Commonwealth Poll has achieved record-setting news and media coverage. What other qualities or attributes distinguish the Commonwealth Poll?

**A** There is no better way to listen than speaking person to person. You can explain a question or follow up with a question that isn't posed in the initial question; most polls just punctuate static answers with no follow-ups. The reliability comes from letting people know that you're talking to that person who really is affected by the issue, who really feels the impact, and who really understands what is going on.

**“***The strong methodology of the Commonwealth Poll is also embraced by the Virginia state government as well. The Virginia General Assembly trusts the Wilder School year in and year out.***”**

**Q** What do insights from our recent polls tell you about how Virginians view their elected and appointed leaders?

**A** If you don't listen to the people, you can't speak for them because you didn't hear them. We have a poll that is what I would call not just justified and practical, but verified over and over and over. That provides comfort to participants and makes certain that the people are a part of government. That's what elections are about. That's what polls are about.

**Q** What do you see when you look between the lines of the poll data, beyond just the pure data? How can these insights inform us beyond the numbers?

**A** The reliability of the poll speaks for itself. When you see what we have said and predicted, when you see the results, when we make known the voices of the people that we're polling, when the data comes within a percentage error, on a regular, reliable and measured basis, that gives a poll the credibility people look for. Virginia is so pivotal, located a stone's throw from the nation's capital. To the extent the poll can predict with some degree of reliability what's affecting Virginia, it's also affecting the nation.

## Wilder Symposium 2024: The fragile state of democracy and the role of leadership

The annual symposium tackles key topics, with this year's theme exploring the importance of strengthening people-first democracy

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON

**A**t this year's Wilder Symposium, one question echoed throughout the evening: Is American democracy in trouble?

L. Douglas Wilder, the nation's first elected African American governor and the event's namesake, wasted no time in setting the tone. The theme, "Elections 2024: The Importance of Listening to the People," felt particularly urgent in light of the current political climate. The symposium was a sobering reflection on leadership, electoral integrity, and the deep divisions in the country.

Governor Wilder opened with his characteristic frankness. "Politicians do what is demanded of them, not asked," Wilder said. "If they don't listen, they should be voted out."

As the evening unfolded, the

distinguished panel of speakers, including **Dr. Bob Holworth**, founding director of the Wilder School and a renowned political analyst, and **Dr. Larry Sabato**, a nationally respected political commentator and founder of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, added their voices to Wilder's pointed critiques. **Dr. Susan Gooden**, dean of the Wilder School, and **Dr. Robyn McDougle**, director of the Commonwealth Poll, provided crucial insights into the electorate's concerns, grounding the discussion in both historical context and recent data.

Gooden, an expert on public policy and equity, zeroed in on the mechanics of voting — something often overlooked in discussions about democracy.

"To listen to the people, we must first

ensure their votes are counted," Gooden warned. She detailed the growing number of voting restrictions in battleground states like Georgia and North Carolina, where new rules are making it harder for people — especially in marginalized communities — to vote.

"These changes are not about ensuring fairness," Gooden noted. "They're about restricting access."



From left to right, Dean Susan Gooden, Governor Wilder, Dr. Larry Sabato, Dr. Robyn McDougle and Dr. Bob Holworth



[bit.ly/ws24yt](https://bit.ly/ws24yt)

Watch the complete  
2024 Wilder  
Symposium on  
YouTube



IN MEMORIAM

## Kevin Allen Walters

*Kevin Allen Walters (MURP '06) passed away peacefully on October 1, 2023, in Tucson, Arizona, of complications from Parkinson's disease.*

**A** native of Roanoke, Virginia, he received his bachelor's degree from the College of William & Mary and went on to successful careers as a buyer for Best Products and later as manager of inventory for Owens and Minor.

He enrolled late in life in the master of urban and regional planning program as a part-time student while he continued full-time work. His goal was not to make a career change but to see how his deep belief in the principles of feng shui might be applied to the planning field. Simply put, feng shui is the ancient Taoist practice of arranging living spaces to create balance with the natural world.

He worked closely with Wilder School professors **John Accordino, Ph.D., Meghan Gough, Ph.D.** and **Gary Johnson, Ph.D.** (retired), all of whom became convinced that Kevin had a unique and valuable perspective to share with the planning field.

Even after receiving his degree, Kevin kept returning to VCU to audit planning classes. He made an annual financial award to the student who wrote the top paper in Dr. Johnson's housing seminar.

Kevin also generously volunteered his time and expertise in helping incorporate feng shui principles at Better Housing Coalition's Beckstoffer's Mill in Church Hill. He was able to educate staff about the advantages of great design and the ability of feng shui to enhance the beauty and sense of well-being in the built environment.

After retiring from Owens & Minor in 2014, he relocated to Tucson. There he found a willing partner in Habitat for Humanity to apply his feng shui principles to that organization's work. A plaque in his honor hangs in the Habitat for Humanity offices, summarizing his philosophy of life:



**"People don't always think about energy, but everything you do leaves an imprint. You want to be sure it's the best imprint you can possibly leave."**

In recognition of his time at VCU, Kevin left a generous bequest to the John J. Accordino Scholarship Fund. Through this gift, he leaves an imprint that will ease the financial burden of graduate study for planning students for many years to come.

—from John and Anne-Marie Accordino

## Alumni changemaker: A journey in workforce development

*Yolanda Macklin Crewe champions an innovative and inclusive path to shape Virginia's approach to workforce readiness*

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON



Local Workforce boards and over 50 Virginia Career Works centers that directly impacted adults, dislocated workers and youth initiatives statewide.

In July 2023, Crewe was appointed the career education and workforce programs operations director. She now supports innovative workforce programs like FastForward, marking a new chapter in her mission to align education with Virginia's workforce needs.

"Collaborating with partners like the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy has been crucial. It allows us to blend academic insights with practical applications, enriching our strategies and outcomes in workforce development," says Crewe.

Crewe's advice is grounded in her experience: "Persistence, discipline, and the willingness to seek out and offer help are key. It's about being committed and strategic in your approach, not just being the smartest person in the room."

**T**he career trajectory of Yolanda Macklin Crewe, who earned a doctorate in public policy and administration in 2020, exemplifies tenacious commitment to bridging the gap between education and employment.

Raised in a family where public service was not just valued but lived, Crewe's early experiences in the tight-knit, rural community of Emporia, Virginia, laid a robust foundation for her future endeavors. Her father, the owner of the only Black pharmacy in the area, and her mother, a steadfast supporter of the business and a community service advocate, instilled a profound sense of duty to serve others in Crewe and her two siblings. This upbringing, enriched with activities like Girl Scouts and voter engagement on behalf of the local NAACP, shaped her worldview and sparked an early interest in creating positive community impacts.

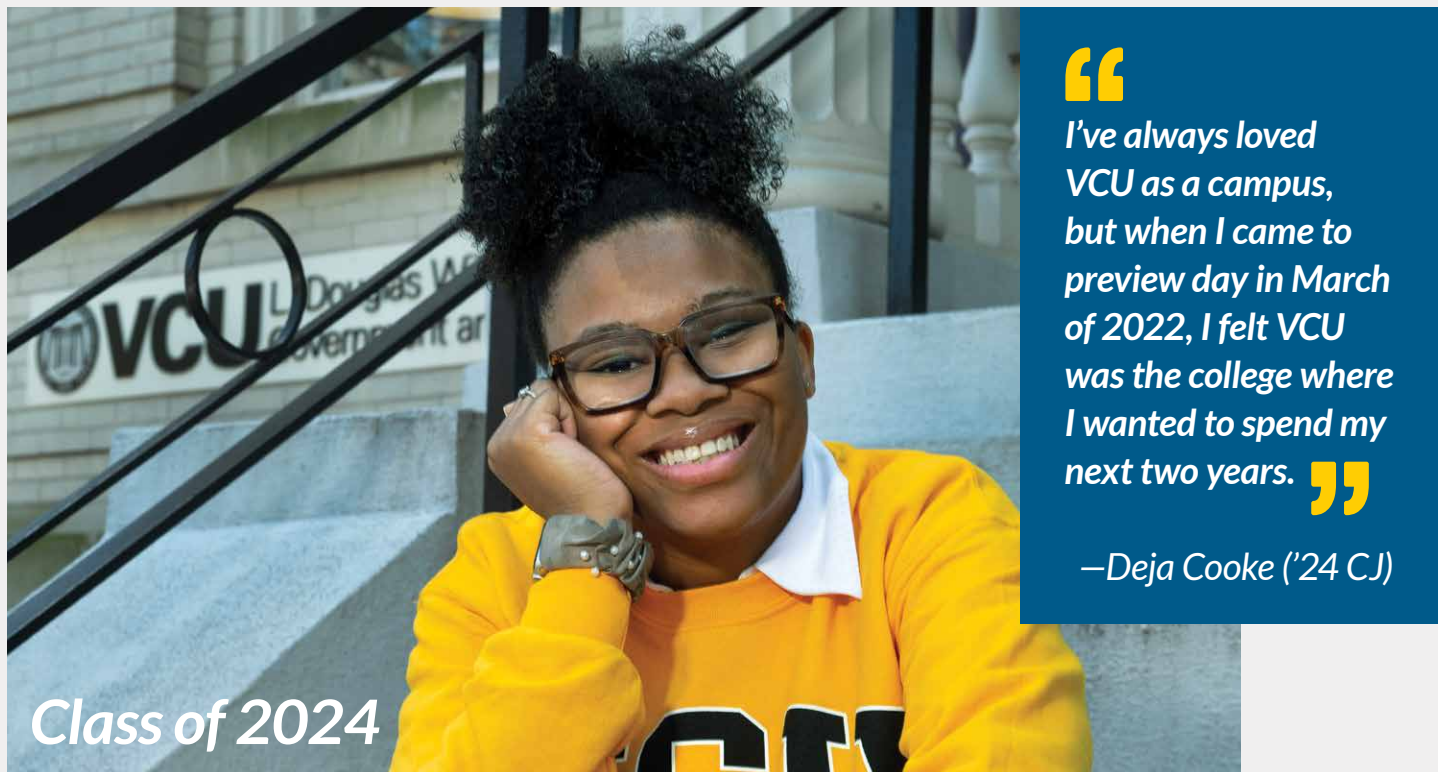
After graduating from Hampton University with a degree in accounting, she ventured into the corporate world but soon realized that her true calling lay beyond the confines of ledgers and balance sheets. She made a daring shift to education and development to help foster career opportunities for others.

In the intervening years, Crewe held positions of progressive responsibility, including the associate director of employer relations at the University of Richmond and the director of career services at Virginia State University.

Crewe transitioned to the Virginia Community College System in 2015 as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs director. For eight years, she provided statewide administration, leadership and coordination. She developed policies, strategic partnerships and program administration in support of Virginia's 14

**"FastForward is a pioneering initiative designed to quickly upskill individuals for in-demand jobs, ensuring participants are invested in their success through a shared funding model."**

—Yolanda Macklin Crewe, Ph.D. (PPAD '20)



“  
I’ve always loved VCU as a campus, but when I came to preview day in March of 2022, I felt VCU was the college where I wanted to spend my next two years.”  
—Deja Cooke ('24 CJ)

Class of 2024

## Deja Cooke blends criminal justice and emergency preparedness with employment at VCU Health

BY BRIAN MCNEIL

After graduating high school in 2015, **Deja Cooke ('24 CJ)** found her path through classes at Reynolds Community College, but was forced to put her academic dreams on hold while working two jobs at a grocery store and hotel to make ends meet.

In 2019, Cooke made a transition after securing a job at VCU Health as a patient access representative in outpatient services. Her team lead at work, as well as her mother, encouraged her to consider returning to school.

“I’ll never forget [how they] wanted me to go back and finish what I started so I could go into the career field of my choice,” Cooke says.

While working full time with VCU Health, Cooke became a student at Brightpoint Community College studying criminal justice. After graduating in 2022 with an associate degree with honors, she

transferred to the Wilder School to pursue a degree in criminal justice.

“The Wilder School made me feel like I was home, and I enjoyed hearing about the different things they had in store for me as a student,” she recalls.

Cooke held two internships — first with Henrico County Community Corrections and then Chesterfield County’s Probation and Parole District 27. She has continued to volunteer with Community Corrections, staffing the front desk on Fridays and providing additional support.

She served as a Wilder School ambassador, representing the school at events such as preview day, as well as participating in the school’s transfer student forum.

Throughout her time at VCU, Cooke has continued working at VCU Health. After working in outpatient services for two years and one year at the Short Pump

Pavilion, she began working the night shift as a unit secretary for VCU Health’s Emergency Department.

“I loved working in the ED. It taught me a lot, especially for my job now as a program support assistant in the OR” at night, she shares. “I am the one who works side by side with charge nurses, especially when it comes to emergency surgeries and other important needs to the OR.”

Following graduation, Cooke began a position with the Virginia Department of Corrections in Henrico’s Probation and Parole District 32, serving as a drug court probation officer.

“The best thing about being at VCU is being a Wilder School student, meeting new people [and] building relationships ... [and] being at this school on this campus as a whole,” Cooke says. “I’ve had wonderful experiences.”



## Project ReConnect

A \$2 million SAMHSA grant will provide services for inmate rehabilitation and create internships for criminal justice and social work students

BY DAVID SLIPHER

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has awarded a five-year, \$2 million grant to a Virginia Commonwealth University-led project that will provide a range of services, including drug treatment, employment, housing, case management and peer support for people with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental illnesses who are involved in the criminal justice system and soon to be released.



Nancy Morris

Work interim dean and associate dean for research; **Nancy A. Morris, Ph.D.**, associate professor and Wilder School criminal justice program chair; **Amy Cook, Ph.D.**, acting assistant dean of student services and associate professor; and **Melodie Fearnow-Kenney, Ph.D.**, School of Education project evaluator.



Amy Cook

Project ReConnect will establish a multidisciplinary criminal justice/social work student internship program, preparing VCU students for social work, substance use treatment and criminal justice careers. “I’m very excited about involving students in this research,” says Cook. “We recognize the interdisciplinary nature of these problems, so our grant is ideal to help provide academic and experiential opportunities for our students.”

Previous research has shown that individuals who have co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders are at a higher risk of

recidivism and returning to drug use post-release from incarceration.

“The heightened risk is largely because the post-release reentry process is often hindered by their complex trauma histories and lack of treatment and resources, which exacerbate difficulties obtaining housing, employment, social support, and medical and mental health services,” says Morris.

Additionally, formerly incarcerated individuals with substance use disorders are at an increased risk of a drug-related overdose post-release during the first several weeks after release.

The increases in opioid- and/or fentanyl-related fatal overdoses are prompting corrections-based reentry programs to make substance use prevention and treatment essential components to recovery services. Project ReConnect will supplement and enhance existing programs during incarceration and up to 12 months post-release.

# FORTIFYING THE FUTURE

WILDER SCHOOL  
HOMELAND  
SECURITY AND  
EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT  
PROGRAMS  
RANKS NO. 6  
IN THE NATION

Launched as the nation's first homeland security and emergency preparedness program in 2005, the Wilder School is a national leader in managing the complexities of disaster planning and response. Both graduate and undergraduate degree offerings bolster top career opportunities for graduates.

BY DAVID SLIPHER



Internships with the Henrico County Division of Police, Virginia State Police and the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency prepared Hirsh to launch a career in intelligence.

As natural and environmental disasters like hurricanes, wildfires and floods have intensified in frequency, the effects of these impacts are felt more than ever. Rising cyber attacks and other threats to domestic security also demand robust crisis planning and response.

Ranked as the No. 6 program in the nation of its kind by *U.S.*

*News & World Report*, faculty, staff and alumni of the Wilder School's Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness program are rushing in to meet these challenges head-on.

That's something **Evan Hirsh** ('22 HSEP) learned firsthand during his three internships. With the Virginia State Police Unsolved Violent Crimes and Cold Cases unit, Hirsh dived into cold case homicide investigations, honing his research, investigative and analytical skills. As a student, he tackled terrorism, political extremism, cybersecurity, human

trafficking and more.

But it was an internship with the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Intelligence Agency that ultimately paved the way for his current job as an intelligence analyst with Booz Allen Hamilton — secured before he graduated. Hirsh's education at the Wilder School laid the foundation for his success in real-world crisis management, connecting his classroom learning to critical on-the-job skills.

"It was through this internship that I met so many people that would have a real impact on where I could go in my career, and I still talk with them today," Hirsh says. "They still have an interest in where I end up in life, which is really powerful. The networking opportunities and security clearance set me up for a successful interview."

Professor **Will Pelfrey, Ph.D.**, a leading voice in the HSEP program, emphasizes the diverse backgrounds that students bring to the table.

"Our students have tremendous experience, drawn from work in public safety, fire, policing, emergency management, public health and other fields," Pelfrey notes. "Our graduate students are thrust into crisis settings and work with people from



FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell, the first woman to lead the agency, participates in a fireside chat with students.

## ONLINE MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM

From emergence as the nation's first Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (HSEP) program in 2005, after nearly 20 years, the program continues to evolve, adapt and explore new innovations.

The program equips leaders with the theoretical and practical knowledge to meet ever-evolving threats from natural disasters, terrorist threats, cyber attacks and more. Students cultivate these principles to lead organizational, social, political, ethical and economic advancements in disaster studies and homeland security.

The 36-credit curriculum, which can be completed entirely online, develops a thorough understanding of all aspects of homeland security, including emergency management, cybersecurity, intelligence and critical infrastructure protection. Combining traditional emergency preparedness and national security programs creates stronger opportunities for alumni as they emerge ready for dozens of career fields. Classes showcase interactive elements, learning tools, resources and case studies. Each class is regularly updated and reviewed by online learning experts as well as faculty instructors.

The program's online flexibility and expert faculty cultivate the skills and experience to elevate careers, with a personalized curriculum designed around their key interests and focus areas. Combined with a physical presence in Richmond, Virginia, and proximity to Washington, D.C., students benefit from unique access to industry expertise and internship opportunities in the national epicenter of policy and action.

APPLY FOR  
AN HSEP  
MASTER'S  
DEGREE



[bit.ly/wshsep](https://bit.ly/wshsep)

other disciplines. It is imperative that our graduates speak the language of disciplines other than their own. We cultivate student-driven, cross-disciplinary learning intentionally.”

Students in the HSEP program don't just gain knowledge; they build a network of relationships that endure well past graduation.

Faculty have established internship and employment opportunities with the nation's most prominent organizations. A short list of top employers includes the FBI, the CIA, the NSA, the Secret Service, the Federal Reserve, the U.S. Armed Forces intelligence divisions, FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, Capital One, Dominion Energy and more. Richmond's proximity to state and national agencies ensures that students stay where the action is. Later on, graduates regularly reach out to their former classmates to discuss job



Eta Lambda Sigma, the professional Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Fraternity, is on a mission to greatly enhance students' educational and professional development through networking, practical experience, mentoring and organizing community service events.

opportunities and cross-disciplinary issues and changes, and secure resources.

In addition to an incredible array of internship opportunities, HSEP undergraduate students have other unique opportunities. Many students are members of Eta Lambda Sigma, the nation's first professional Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

fraternity. Its members visit leading employers, hear from experts in the field, and engage in a variety of social activities. Additionally, each year, the HSEP program brings a keynote speaker to address students. Recent speakers have included FEMA head **Deanne Criswell**; **Kathi Lynn Austin**, a global arms trafficking investigator; and

**Shannon Foley Martinez**, a deradicalized former neo-Nazi. Additionally, the HSEP program has a unique exchange program with the Abu Dhabi-based university the Rabdan Academy.

The HSEP program coursework is not only comprehensive but continues to evolve to meet emerging challenges, with a forward-leaning approach to keep students at the leading edge of their fields. Faculty, many of whom hold active roles in the public and private sectors, bring a wealth of experience to each class. For example, **Larry Prokop, M.S.**, conducts intelligence analysis for the FBI and integrates real-world scenarios into his teaching, giving students an insider's perspective on the complexities of national security.

Among the diverse and evolving coursework offered in the HSEP

program is the impactful Human Trafficking 375 course, led by associate professor **Maureen Moslow-Benway, M.A.**, the HSEP program chair. This course leverages Richmond's history and current geography to invite students to grapple with real-world challenges and solutions. Moslow-Benway, deeply committed to empowering her students, explains: "After all, we are educating students and inspiring them to combat the exploitation of some of society's most vulnerable and marginalized people."

As a national leader, the HSEP program isn't resting on its laurels. From continual introduction of new courses in response to emergent topics to acclaimed research of vital influence for policymakers to top internships and employment for students, we're ensuring safety and readiness to find solutions to the most dire challenges of our world. 🇺🇸

## VITAL RESEARCH FOR CRITICAL ISSUES

Wilder School HSEP faculty produce key insights to facilitate awareness and transform outcomes at the intersection of academia and applied practice. In addition to authoring extensive research, they serve as key experts to influence policy and best practices. A current project with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management provides education for locally elected and appointed officials to help flatten the emergency management learning curve of new mayors, city council members and county leaders. From consulting across all levels of government to supporting initiatives with nonprofits and private-sector organizations, their work is transforming our world.

Associate professor **Hans Louis-Charles, Ph.D.**, is dedicated to enhancing community resilience, focusing on the most vulnerable. His work addresses the nexus of physical, built and human environments. Recently, he presented his findings to the Congressional Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus at the U.S. Capitol, advocating for funding and capacity building in low-resource, high-vulnerability areas, aiming to shift disaster management toward prioritizing human security.

Assistant professor **Brie Haupt, Ph.D.**, trains emergency management leaders through a lens of cultural competency. Through her work, she's aimed at rerouting disconnects in communication during crises, for both educators and practitioners. She also serves as the co-chair of the Emergency Management and Homeland Security section of NASPAA. This summer, Haupt was honored with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award at the Federal Emergency Management Agency Higher Education Symposium.

On the homeland security front, associate professor **David Webber, Ph.D.**, is dedicated

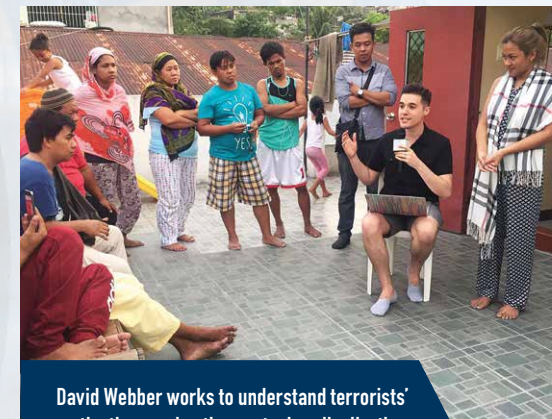


Mari Wadsworth, Amie Fuller, Maureen Moslow-Benway, Brie Haupt, Amidu Kalokoh and Omar Glaze after attending FEMA Higher Education Symposium.

to understanding the motivations of terrorist and extremist ideologies. His work is helping deradicalize former extremists by understanding the social motives that influence their actions and beliefs. Webber has extensively researched the motivations of terrorist groups including German neo-Nazis, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, and Islamist fundamentalism and extremism in the Philippines, Mali and Indonesia.

Associate professor **Christopher Whyte, Ph.D.**, is a leader in international cybersecurity and serves as a top voice in exploring ways to prepare policymakers to better understand and make informed decisions about cyber threats, both domestically and abroad. Whyte's work seeks to confront popular myths and misconceptions – including "cyber doom" in the media, a delicate balancing act to dispel fear while anticipating threats.

"Our HSEP faculty research creates tremendous outcomes that directly impact our trifold mission of academic excellence, student education, and policy and community impacts," says Wilder School Dean **Susan T. Gooden**. "Across so many critical areas, they demonstrate their influence, relationships and expertise to develop and catalyze solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our times."



David Webber works to understand terrorists' motivations and pathways to deradicalization.



As a top employer, the Department of Homeland Security is home to more than **260,000 EMPLOYEES.**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TERRORISM** is projected to expand as key threats facing the U.S. grow, in both severity and size.

Source: Homeland Threat Assessment 2024, Department of Homeland Security



In 2023, the percentage of Americans who assembled or updated supplies to prepare for disasters and emergencies **ROSE FROM 33% TO 48%.**

Source: U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency



Between 1980 and 2023, the U.S. sustained **376 WEATHER AND CLIMATE DISASTERS** with the overall damage costs reaching or exceeding \$1 billion, with a cumulative cost exceeding \$2.66 trillion.

Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



**CYBERSECURITY** is the fastest-growing job family with forecasted growth by 32% through 2032.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

**NEARLY 60% OF ONLINE USERS** in the United States have experienced a cyber attack, ranking No. 3 worldwide by share of cybercrime.

Source: Harris Poll; Gen Digital



# Faculty/alumni achievements

The Wilder School creates transformative impacts through leadership and service — locally and nationally

## ▲ Joe Damico ('97 MPA, '00 MPH)

was named the chief administrative officer of the Virginia State Corporation Commission. He oversees administrative divisions responsible for the SCC's budget, human resources, computer technology, data security, public relations, procurement and facilities management. He recently served as the deputy director of the Richmond Department of Public Works as well as 21 years at the Virginia Department of General Services, including six years as director.



▲ The Center for Public Policy facilitated monthly working group sessions for Travis A. Voyles, secretary of Natural and Historic Resources and chief resilience officer. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation convened the Resilience Coordination Working Group, an administrative working group charged with developing a set of recommendations to improve strategies for interagency and intergovernmental coordination and maximize funding to plan for and implement flood resilience throughout Virginia.

## ▲ Doctoral student Amidu Kalokoh

was named a 2024 Public Administration Theory Fellow by the PA Theory Network. He also participated as a Summer Scholar with the University of Delaware Disaster Research Center Coastal Hazards, Equity, Economic Prosperity and Resilience (CHEER) Hub. Kalokoh was nationally selected for a 2024 Equity & Inclusion Fellowship by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM).



▲ Developed by the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, the Commonwealth Leadership Academy facilitated agency leaders with knowledge and resources to develop and maintain a high-performing workforce. In collaboration with the secretary of administration and the Department of Human Resource Management, its program topics included talent management, work culture, change management, stakeholder engagement, performance management, IT and more. Participants learned from Wilder School facilitators, participants and guest speakers from state agencies and institutions of higher education.

of its 50th anniversary, MURP faculty, students and alumni gathered to honor the program's legacy and took a collective look forward to the next 50 years. MURP faculty stake the driving attributes of the program's continuing success on academic excellence, innovation and real-world experiences.

In the words of the late Professor Emeritus John Moeser, Ph.D., a founding member of MURP, "This department has done exactly ... the goal of any university that defines professional service as a central mission — which is 'to bring knowledge into intimate relationships with the small, daily problems of real people and real neighborhoods.'"

The celebration coincided with the annual Plan-Off! Competition. Each year, MURP students compete for a prize by pitching their solution to a real-world planning, public policy or management problem before a panel of expert judges. Out of 17 presentations, the grand prize champion was Daniel Rafferty ('24 MURP) for his presentation "Richmond Watts for Families." Best Overall Plan went to Callie Houghland ('24 MURP) for "Best Practices for Community Outreach for the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot."



## Celebrating 50 Years of MURP

In the fall of 1973, the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program emerged at VCU. A year later, the Urban and Regional Planning Department was founded. Located within an urban campus in Virginia's capital, its faculty recognized and seized the opportunity to develop a graduate program. In celebration

▲ This spring, Hans Louis Charles, Ph.D., an associate professor of homeland security and emergency management, presented his findings to the Congressional Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus at the U.S. Capitol. He emphasized the need for more funding and capacity building in low-resource, high-vulnerability areas to prioritize human security in disaster management.



▲ Virginia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services contracted with the Center for Public Policy to develop and implement a statewide needs assessment for LGBTQ+ Virginians who seek behavioral health services from the public sector (including Medicaid, Medicare, Tricare) and the uninsured, emphasizing clients who utilize community services boards, behavioral health authorities and state mental health hospitals.



▲ Doctoral student Mary Strawderman was awarded a Public Administration, Public Policy and Public Affairs Scholarship by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) to participate in the 2024 Summer Program in Quantitative Methods. In addition to her studies, she works as the research development

administrator for the Division of Research Development within the VCU Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation.



▲ Participants from the Wilder School Virginia Executive Institute helped turn a group project on the importance of Narcan, an opioid overdose drug, into new legislation. The group was invited to present their project, nicknamed "The Fighting First" at the attorney general's office and again for the Opioid Abatement Authority. Thanks to the support of group members

## NASPAA Presidency

Senior associate dean of faculty and academic affairs RaJade "Jade" Berry-James, Ph.D., concludes her impactful term as president of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) this October. Her presidency, known for advancing public affairs education, will culminate with a national conference themed "Leading by Convening" in Washington, emphasizing the importance of dialogue across diverse sectors.

Additionally, Berry-James co-authored an insightful chapter in the "Handbook on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Public Administration." She explores the psychosocial impacts of homelessness, highlighting the barriers that criminal records, disabilities and unemployment create against accessing housing services, and advocates for equity-focused policies to assist marginalized communities, especially Black Americans.

Earlier this year, she also contributed her expertise at the "Social Equity in Public Policy" roundtable at the American University in Cairo, showcasing her global influence in public policy discussions.



Zacc Allen, Mike Alston, Allen Blair and Tiffany Yacomeni, Virginia House Bill 342 provides guidelines for state agencies to possess and administer naloxone and similar drugs that block the effects of opioids in the brain.

▲ Christopher Whyte, Ph.D., an associate professor of homeland security and emergency preparedness, recently released "Subversion 2.0: Leaderlessness, the Internet, and the Fringes of Global Society," published by Oxford University Press. A study of subversive social movements in the age of the internet, the book sets out to explain why fringe narratives, conspiracy theories and direct acts of antagonism seem so much more visible in the 21st century.

# Governor’s Fellows Program empowers Wilder Students to shape policy and make an impact

The historic and prestigious Virginia Governor’s Fellows Program offers college seniors and graduate students hands-on learning opportunities within the Governor’s Office and across executive branch agencies.

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON



Within the bustling corridors of Virginia’s state agencies, two standout students from Virginia Commonwealth University’s L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs made notable impacts through the prestigious Governor’s Fellowship Program this summer. Sofia Tortolero Calanche and Nathan Joyner, both Master of Public Administration students distinguished by their academic prowess and drive to effect change, immersed themselves in the intricacies of state governance, contributing to policies with far-reaching implications.

## Sofia Tortolero Calanche bridges health policy with practical impact

Tortolero spent her summer embedded in the secretary of health and human resources office, focusing on synthesizing complex health data and policy implications to support initiatives aimed at enhancing maternal health and reforming foster care — areas critical to the state’s human services framework.

“Working within the healthcare system, my goal was to turn detailed health directives into clear, actionable policies that effectively meet community needs and manage resources wisely,” Tortolero explains. Her efforts during the eight-week fellowship not only supported ongoing health reforms but also allowed her to influence new policy directions directly.

## Nathan Joyner seeks to reform criminal justice through a lens of compassion

Similarly, Joyner’s placement in the Office of Transformation placed him at the forefront of criminal justice reform, particularly focusing on prison reentry strategies. His summer project centered on developing programs to support the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals, emphasizing familial bonds and social support pre-release.

“I focused on ensuring that our reentry strategies offer more than just integration; they should instill hope and provide a real pathway back into society,” says Joyner. His contribution of research for the development of an executive act on prison reentry showcases a proactive approach to criminal justice, aiming to position Virginia as a leader in innovative and humane correctional practices.

## A fellowship experience rooted in real-world applications

Both Tortolero and Joyner view the Governor’s Fellowship as a transformative stage in their careers, offering them unprecedented access to

the inner workings of state government and the opportunity to apply their academic knowledge in meaningful ways. They engaged with policy leaders, contributed to high-stakes projects, and developed solutions that resonate with the realities of everyday Virginians.

“The fellowship not only allowed me to contribute to important policy decisions but also refined my skills in research, analysis and strategic thinking,” says Joyner.

Tortolero also notes the significant impact of her experience: “The real-world exposure to health policy challenges and the mentorship from seasoned policymakers have been crucial in shaping my approach to public service.”

As they concluded the Governor’s Fellows Program experience, both Tortolero and Joyner expressed that they were poised to continue their journey in public service, armed with deep insights and enhanced capabilities gained through their intensive engagements with Virginia’s state agencies. They plan to leverage their fellowship experiences in future roles, aiming to impact policy at higher levels and continue their commitment to public service.

“The Governor’s Fellowship has been a cornerstone of my professional development, providing me with the tools and confidence to pursue a career that aligns closely with my values and aspirations in public health,” Tortolero says.

# Alumni changemaker: Sean Sukol’s journey from policy to public service

Sean Sukol never imagined the winding path that would lead him to become a champion of public service and an advocate for education reform.

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON



Sean Sukol’s passion for public service was sparked by his father, who devoted his career to the federal Social Security Administration and later worked as an attorney for the Office of the Law Revision Counsel, drafting the United States Code. Sukol says his father exemplified “a deep commitment to public service. I was taught to value both the extraordinary power of our government systems to enhance and improve the lives of our neighbors and the awesome responsibility of those who ensure these systems function effectively.”

After overcoming academic challenges in high school, Sukol leveraged the Virginia Community College System to earn an associate of science in business administration from Northern Virginia Community College and later a Bachelor

of Arts in public policy from the College of William & Mary.

Sukol then pursued a Master of Public Administration degree at the Wilder School. He gained inspiration from dedicated faculty members like Saltanat Liebert, Ph.D., Myung Jin, Ph.D., and I-Shian “Ivan” Suen, Ph.D., for their instruction in data analysis and quantitative research skills that “expanded my career horizons” and laid the foundation for Sukol’s future pursuits.

His hard work and persistence earned him the Wilder School’s Public Administration Outstanding Public Service Award, and on May 12, he was awarded a master’s degree in public administration.

From teaching English in China, Spain and the United States to working as a field organizer and consultant for election

campaigns nationwide, Sukol’s experiences have not only shaped his perspective but also fueled his drive to effect positive change, inspiring those around him.

As a Virginia Management Fellow, Sukol gained critical insights into state government operations, at the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Government and Regulatory Affairs and the Department of the Treasury’s Cash Management and Investments division.

Last fall, Sukol took a bold step and joined Data Science 4 Everyone as a data and policy analyst. This nonprofit organization advocates for data science and data literacy in K-12 education.

For Sukol, “the Wilder School was an obvious choice. I appreciated the strong connections between the school, Virginia’s policymakers and civil service.”

“Embrace a wide range of knowledge, and never think ‘learning this is not part of my job.’ Our society has never been more expansive or complex, and the public administration has evolved with it.”

— Sean Sukol (’24 MPA)



**Virginia Commonwealth University**  
**L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs**

700 W. Grace Street  
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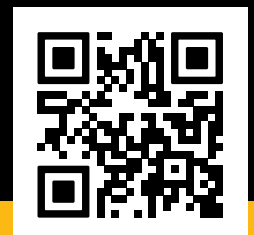


# EXCELLENCE IN VIRGINIA GOVERNMENT AWARDS

The 17th Excellence in Virginia Government Awards and luncheon will take place on **Tuesday, April 8, 2025**, from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. at the Omni Richmond Hotel.

The ceremony will celebrate Virginians who have made exemplary contributions to advance excellence in government and our communities.

Nominate an  
outstanding  
Virginian



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