



# VCU

**L. DOUGLAS WILDER SCHOOL  
OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**QUEST 2028 STRATEGIC PLAN**

**November 2023**

Approved by the Office of the Dean

## Wilder School Strategic Plan

Executive Summary	3
About Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)	3
VCU University Goals	5
VCU Quest 2028 Themes	6
Wilder School Vision and Mission	7
Wilder School Values	7
Wilder School Strategic Planning Process	9
Wilder School Strategic Goals and Action Steps	10
Wilder School In Action	12
Wilder School Themes	13
THEME: Diversity Driving Excellence (DDE)	13
Action Plan	14
Accountability Partners	14
Evidence of Success	14
THEME: Student Success (SS)	15
Action Plan	17
Accountability Partners	17
Evidence of Success	17
THEME: Research and Innovation (R&I)	18
Action Plan	20
Accountability Partners	22
Evidence of Success	22
THEME: Thriving Communities for All People (TCAP)	23
Action Plan	24
Accountability Partners	26
Evidence of Success	26
THEME: Promoting Social Equity in Action (PSEIA)	27
Action Plan	29
Accountability Partners	29
Evidence of Success	29
For More Information	30

# Executive Summary

The L. Douglas Wilder School is founded on our guiding statements - Mission, Vision, and Values - to provide strategic direction for administrators, faculty, staff, and students who interact with our academic programs as well as our research Centers and Institutes. Over the next five years, the Wilder School Strategic Plan aligns our efforts with the VCU Quest 2028 to transform our school through social equity in action.

Our Wilder School VCU Quest 2028 themes include five strategic priorities to be advanced over the next five years: 1. Diversity Driving Excellence; 2. Student Success; 3. Research and Innovation; 4. Thriving Communities for All People; and 5. Promoting Social Equity in Action. The core elements of the strategic plan include goals and action steps that provide a blueprint of strategic initiatives to be implemented with our accountability partners over the next five years. We have shared this version of our strategic plan with Wilder School administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. To solicit comments and feedback, we have also conducted four one-hour listening sessions with our key stakeholders.

In the final stage of developing how we align and lead the school over the next five years, we adhere to a short-term, intermediate, and long-term strategy to achieve our goals across VCU Quest 2028 strategic themes. Over the short-term (AY 2023-24), intermediate (AY 2024-25 through AY 2026-27), and long-term (AY 2027-28), our goal-based strategic plan complements VCU outcomes and champions an “uncommon” approach to leading and convening during these times.

# About Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

VCU is not like the rest. In a world of the common, we are the **UNCOMMON**.

We are VCU, an inclusive public research university and health care system where accessibility combines with excellence to produce exceptional educational and healing results.

Together, we are dedicated to serving the needs of students and patients.

We impact lives through focused global partnerships and commitment to our communities. We research solutions to societal challenges and ignite transformative innovation that matters to the people who need us most.

We prove every day that different works.

We are united by purpose, devoted to inclusion and driven by impact.

## **Vision**

As a preeminent national, urban, public university and academic health center, Virginia Commonwealth University will be distinguished by its commitments to inclusion, access and excellence; innovative and transformative learning; impactful research; exceptional patient care; and beneficial community impact.

## **Values**

VCU values exhibit how we work with each other and as an organization.

*Accountability:* Commit to the efficient and transparent stewardship of our resources to achieve institutional excellence

*Achievement:* Pursue excellence in learning, research and scholarly pursuits; service; and patient care

*Collaboration:* Foster respect, collegiality and cooperation to advance learning, entrepreneurship and inquiry

*Freedom:* Strive for intellectual truth with responsibility and civility, respecting the dignity of all individuals

*Innovation:* Cultivate discovery, creativity, originality, inventiveness and talent

*Service:* Engage in the application of learning and discovery to improve the human condition and support the public good at home and abroad.

*Diversity and Inclusion:* Ensure a climate of mutual trust and respect where individuals of different cultural backgrounds, identities, abilities and life experiences are embraced, engaged and empowered to drive excellence and success.

*Integrity:* Adhere to the highest standards of honesty, respect, and professional and scholarly ethics.

# VCU University Goals

We are **UNDENIABLY strong** when our goals align. The strategic plan, Quest 2028: One VCU Together We Transform, sets the projected course for VCU for the years 2022 to 2028. Download the [university's full plan](#) for additional details and success metrics that were approved by the VCU Board of Visitors (BOV) as of June 24, 2022.

At VCU, administrative and academic division and unit strategic plans serve as the implementation plans for Quest 2028. The VCU Quest 2028 strategic plan is organized into four interconnected themes that address six focus areas identified by stakeholders, in addition to the significant issues faced by many institutions of higher education as identified in the Quest 2025 strategic plan. At the Wilder School, our fifth theme, *Promoting Social Equity in Action*, interconnects with the leading vision of Governor L. Douglas Wilder, 66th Governor of Virginia, the namesake of our school.

The key issues that VCU Quest 2028 has identified are highlighted in the text box below:

- *Growing cynicism that public higher education serves the public good and may not be worth the expense to individuals;*
- *The significant challenge of the rising cost of education and providing affordable access and support for timely degree completion regardless of students' particular demographic or group;*
- *Increased competition in public higher education for students, faculty, government and philanthropic support, and national prominence;*
- *Dependence on urban universities to lead in solving vexing societal issues, including health and economic vitality; and*
- *Recognition that resourcing the plan's strategic priorities will require an integrated, university approach and will call for hard choices around resource allocation*

# VCU Quest 2028 Themes

The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Strategic Plan is a part of VCU's strategic priorities, themes, and SMART (strategic, measurable, actionable, realistic and timely) initiatives. In alignment with the VCU mandate, our Wilder School Strategic Plan includes goals and action steps to be fully implemented by 2028.

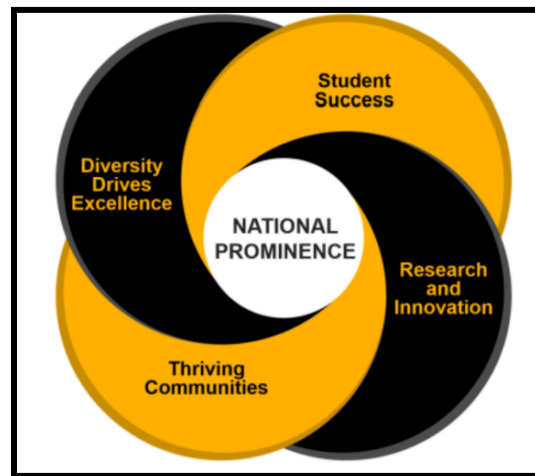


Figure 1. VCU Quest 2028 Strategic Themes

Building on the foundation of VCU's Quest 2028 plan, the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Strategic Plan aligns with and expands upon the university's four strategic themes (as illustrated above in Figure 1). Additionally, we have introduced a fifth theme uniquely tailored to our school's mission: At the Wilder School, **Promoting Social Equity in Action**, reflects our commitment to integrating social equity principles into our research, teaching, and community engagement, further solidifying our position as a leader in public affairs education and advancing our national prominence.

# Wilder School Vision and Mission

At the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, our **vision** is to be the premier resource for public policy expertise and social justice in public safety, governance, and economic and community development. Our academic excellence attracts the highest quality faculty, staff, and students, and our graduates are leaders in their professions. Our research and consulting practices have a global impact. We reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

The **mission** of the Wilder School is threefold:

1. To **engage, teach, and inspire** students and leaders to understand and solve challenges in our world
2. To **advance research** that informs public policy and decision-making to improve our communities
3. To **collaborate with communities** through innovative partnerships to enhance the quality of life

## Wilder School Values

The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs became an independent school in 2013.

Our hallmark is in executing our mission to solve challenges, improve communities, and enhance the quality of life for our students, faculty and staff. Our mission embodies the values of independent thought and public service championed by L. Douglas Wilder - the nation's first black elected governor, Virginia's first black lieutenant governor, a former state senator and the first popularly elected mayor of Richmond in decades. We envisioned our namesake's commitment to **Promoting Social Equity in Action** as a vital element of the Wilder School Strategic Plan and advancing equity is an important aspiration of our faculty, faculty, staff, and students, particularly as our collective effort aligns with VCU's efforts to achieve national prominence.

At the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, we're all about taking advantage of everything Richmond has to offer. Our students make a difference in internships across Virginia, from the General Assembly to state agencies and nonprofits. Our faculty is immersed in research — and partners with students on it, too. Our alumni (10,000 strong) are characterized by a vast Wilder School network spanning the public sector in federal, state, and local government, as well as nonprofit organizations, and private sector firms that support the public interest. At about 1,000 undergraduates and 400 graduate students strong each year, we're big enough to offer [bold opportunities](#) and small enough for individualized instruction and true faculty mentorship.

The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at the Virginia Commonwealth University has solidified its position as a leader in public affairs education, earning top rankings from the U.S. News and World Report (2024). The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs is ranked #1 in Virginia and ranked in the top 15% nationally.

In the five-year trajectory, the Wilder School has steadily climbed in the national rankings. In 2024, the school rose to No. 39 in the nation among public affairs graduate schools (from No. 56 in 2017). Within the specialty program rankings, the Wilder School Homeland Security program is ranked at No. 6 and the public management and leadership program is ranked at No. 29 (rising from No. 34 in 2022).

The Wilder School continues to execute our strategic imperatives by building on momentum that continues to innovate and refine programs, by enhancing research excellence to impact policy and practice, and by fostering strategic partnerships when expanding opportunities for students and faculty. Our strategically designed programs mean students can customize their programs of study based on their academic interests by selecting classes in:

- [Criminal justice](#)
- [Homeland security and emergency preparedness](#)
- [Public administration](#)
- [Public policy and administration](#)
- [Urban and regional studies and planning](#)

In the academic year 2024-25 and beyond, our vision maintains top-tier rankings and drives excellence in public affairs education, research and community engagement. The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs Centers and Institutes advance applied research, program evaluation, and leadership training through:

- [Center for Public Policy](#)
- [Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute](#)
- [Research Institute for Social Equity](#)



# Wilder School Strategic Planning Process

The Wilder School used a goal-based **strategic planning process** to align our strategic ideas with the recalibrated VCU Quest 2028 Strategic Plan. First, we conducted an internal and external scan of the current and desired state to examine the four dimensions of VCU’s strategic themes. Next, we created and deployed a strategic planning survey to support how we prioritize and select our strategies, themes, and goals in the first year of our action plan and subsequent years throughout VCU Quest 2028. Then we incorporated our Racial Equity Action Plan, developed in 2020, into the planned strategic initiatives. We updated our timeline for academic programs, centers & institutes, as well as shared our plans with undergraduate and graduate student affairs, at Wilder School leadership meetings like Dean’s Cabinet, All Personnel Meetings, and Academic Program Chairs meetings. We support the key strategies and metrics that align with the thematic priority areas identified in VCU Quest 2028 and will rely on them to evaluate our strategic planning initiatives in the Wilder School. Finally, we defined our strategic direction of the Wilder School over the next five years by relying on short-term, intermediate, and long-term strategies to achieve VCU Quest 2028 goals, across the short-term (AY 2023-24), intermediate-term (AY 2024-25 through AY 2026-27), and long-term (AY 2027-28) planning. Figure 2 below, “Wilder School Goal Based Strategic Planning Process,” illustrates our process for engaging key stakeholders in the strategic planning process which supports our vision for the Wilder School in Action.

## Wilder School Goal Based Strategic Planning Process

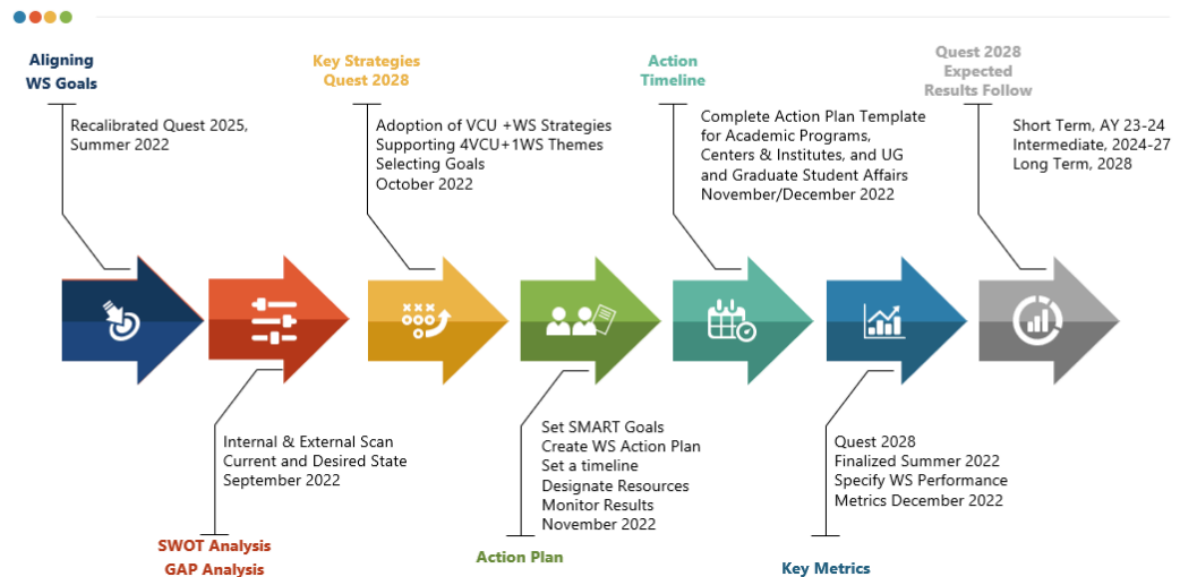


Figure 2. Wilder School Goal Based Strategic Planning Process & Timeline

# Wilder School Strategic Goals and Action Steps

The Wilder School VCU Quest 2028 themes include five strategic priorities to be advanced over the next five years, including **Diversity Driving Excellence**, **Student Success**, **Research and Innovation**, and **Thriving Communities for All People**. To fully align our efforts with the VCU mission of national prominence, the Wilder School has added the theme **Promoting Social Equity in Action** to our strategic plans for excellence and success.

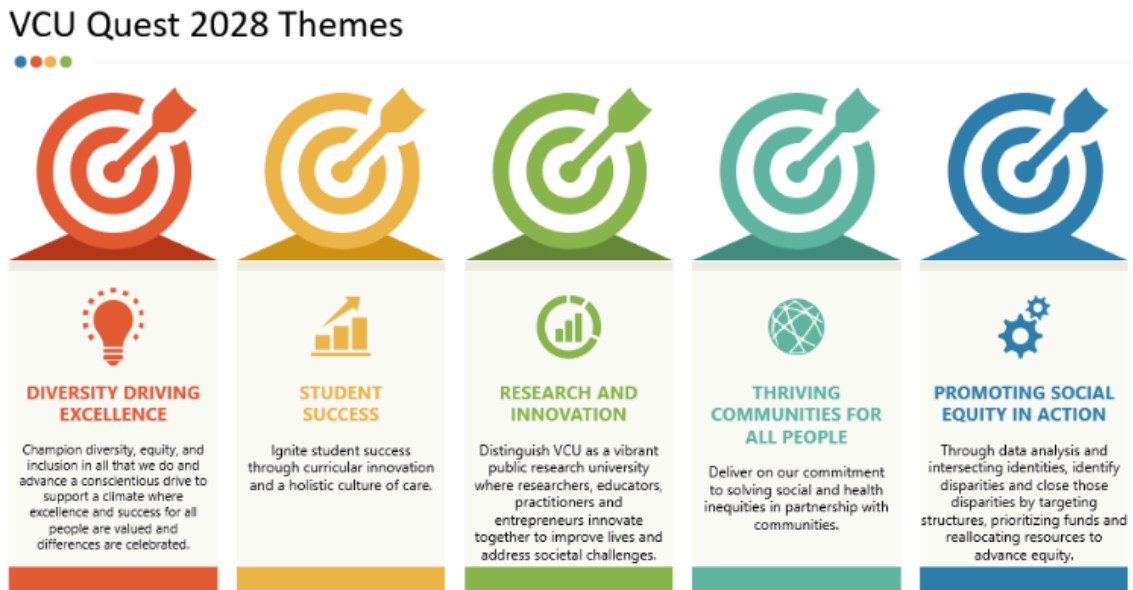


Figure 3. VCU Wilder School Quest 2028 Strategic Priorities

To ensure that the Wilder School faculty, staff, and students are working collaboratively toward the Quest 2028 priority themes, our mission and vision, and values chart the plan of action, approach, and tactics used to promote social equity in action. In alignment with our school's founding principles, **Promoting Social Equity in Action** through data analysis and intersecting identities, we work with our academic programs, Centers and Institutes, and community partners to advance equity. Our research Centers and Institutes play a critical role in the applied work that we do to partner with communities and address social challenges. As we actively demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that we do, we are committed to advancing student success in the first year (AY 2023-24) of our strategic plan.

To begin the planning process, we invited faculty and staff to select their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strategic priorities. The Strategic Planning Survey (2022) revealed that Wilder School respondents identified **Student Success**, **Promoting Social Equity in Action**, and **Thriving Communities for All People** as top priority themes, as indicated in Figure 4 below.

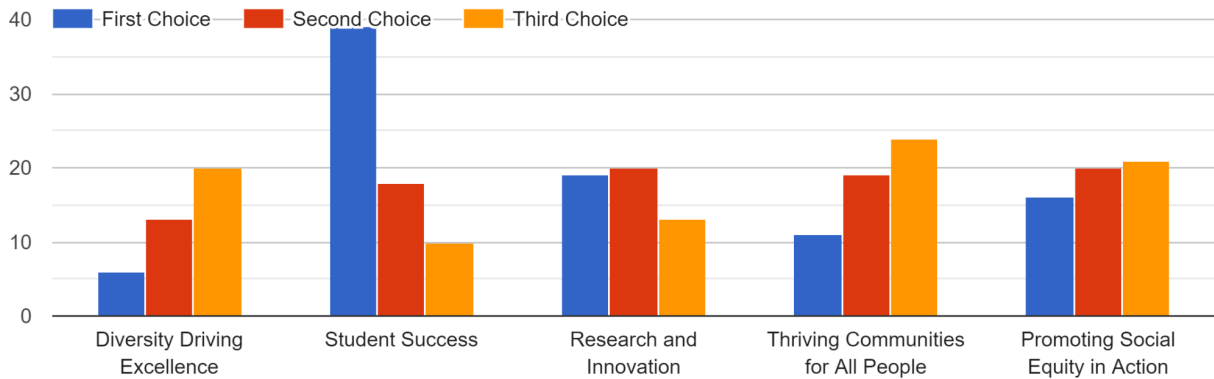


Figure 4. Wilder School Strategic Planning Priority Themes (2022)

Wilder School stakeholders include academic programs, Centers and Institutes, administrative units, faculty and staff, students and alumni, and distinguished external groups in the communities that we serve. In the Fall 2022 semester, we prioritized our strategic intentions by discussing strategies and implementation activities in our leadership meetings with the Dean’s Cabinet, All Personnel meetings, and Program Chairs meetings. Prominent on the agenda were two defining strategies: 1) What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Wilder School? 2) What are the gaps in outcomes? As we drafted the Wilder School Strategic Plan, we also conducted listening sessions to ensure that Wilder School stakeholders were aware of the strategic priority themes and to explore how faculty and staff view their role in launching VCU Quest 2028. We conducted several strategic planning listening sessions with Wilder School students and alumni (February 24, 2024; February 27 2023; April 28, 2023), cabinet-level executives (March 20, 2023) before finalizing the strategic plan. A draft of the Wilder School strategic plan was provided to all faculty and staff for review and feedback prior to submission of the final strategic plan to the Office of the Provost in June 2023.

# Wilder School In Action

At the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, our faculty, staff, students, and alumni are nationally recognized leaders in the area of social equity and justice, academic instruction, research, and service. Our school's namesake, Governor L. Douglas Wilder, is the lead of our CNN-recognized Wilder School Commonwealth Poll and we celebrate his vision as the nation's first elected African-American governor. The impact of Wilder School faculty, students, and alumni continues to advance critical thinking and innovative solutions across a comprehensive spectrum of contemporary public policy issues. These solutions embody a deep understanding of the historical and political context in which they are embedded, as well exploring and articulating the needs of marginalized communities.

Wilder School faculty are internationally renowned as thought leaders and recognized as national academy fellows. Faculty have secured National Science Foundation grant funding to fight opioids, provide policy analysis on energy and climate change regulations and planning, and conduct research on the key determinants of success for Muslim immigrants. Recent research includes a co-edited Wilder School volume, [Racial Equity. COVID-19 and Public Policy: The Triple Pandemic](#), a Department of Defense grant focusing on refugee psychology; funding from the Virginia Office of the Attorney General to reduce violent crime, and funding from the Kauffman Foundation to uplift the voices of underrepresented entrepreneurs,

We conduct cutting-edge research in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, criminal justice reform, cultural competence in emergency management, use GIS mapping public policy for urban and regional planning, and support environmental equity through collaborative community partnerships and engagement. Our Centers and Institutes examine housing stability, and historical displacement of Richmond Black communities. We create solutions for pressing socioeconomic issues, like affordable housing, workforce development, and industry cluster targeting, as well as provide leadership training and public policy research. Our students and alumni emerge as leaders across the highest level of local, state, and federal government. As alumni, these graduates support our students through scholarships, networking and other volunteer services. Many of our faculty have received teaching awards from within VCU, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and numerous professional associations, including the Outstanding Faculty Award, the highest teaching award from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV).

# Wilder School Themes

We prioritize our Wilder School themes as VCU Quest 2028 themes and school-based goals from stakeholder feedback. The elements of the strategic plan are organized across five themes and thematic components: Metrics of Success, Action Plan, Accountability Partner(s), and Evidence of Success.

## THEME: Diversity Driving Excellence (DDE)



Figure 5. VCU Quest 2028 Wilder School on Diversity Driving Excellence

As a champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Wilder School faculty, staff, and students work together intentionally to create a school climate where excellence and success for all people are valued and differences are celebrated. We see the **Diversity Driving Excellence** theme as a foundational goal for our work to adopt strategies to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that we do. In the MPA Program, for example, faculty equip students with skills in public management and policy analysis. Our graduates go on to pursue careers at nonprofits, government organizations, and public-facing for-profit organizations.

**Diversity Driving Excellence** requires nurturing an institutional culture and climate that is diverse, inclusive, equitable, and engaged. To advance **Diversity Driving Excellence** at the Wilder School, in our first year of the strategic plan, we are implementing an organizational infrastructure to support, sustain, and scale DEI initiatives that infuse a culture of care, academic curriculum, scholarship, and practice. Our faculty and staff demonstrate national and international DEI thought leadership by championing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our research, teaching, and service.

<b>L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs</b>	
<b>Quest Year</b>	<b>Diversity Driving Excellence Metrics of Success</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Increase strategies to champion diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do.
<b>2023-24 through 2027-28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives by 10% in curriculum, scholarship and practice</li> <li>• Enhance equity and broaden outreach efforts to diverse groups that engage strategies and educational practices</li> <li>• Broaden equity research and scholarship to uncover “hidden practices” that increase research translation capacity in the Wilder School</li> <li>• Enhance community and alumni engagement to promote training through partnerships, and programming that support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and First-Generation Low Income (FGLI) groups.</li> </ul> <p>The Wilder School is committed to fostering an inclusive environment that values diversity, promotes equity, and supports the well-being of all students, faculty, and staff. By the end of AY 2028, the Wilder School will adopt goals, strategies and metrics to ensure the Wilder School’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is comprehensive and actionable.</p>

**Action Plan**

Our implementation plan will act as a roadmap for bold and innovative activities that support our goal to advance **Diversity Driving Excellence** beginning in AY 2023-24.

**Accountability Partners**

The Dean’s Office will work with academic program chairs and directors of Centers and Institutes to develop a holistic approach that aligns and shares metrics of success in key areas.

**Evidence of Success**

Collectively, the Wilder School will use our specialized accreditation standards, national and international DEI thought leadership and transdisciplinary research practices to recruit, train, and retain diversity-engaged faculty and staff.

## THEME: Student Success (SS)

### VCU Quest 2028 Themes



Figure 6. VCU Quest 2028 Wilder School on Student Success

The Wilder School will catalyze student success through curricular innovation, a holistic culture of care, and an engaged and empowered workforce.

In our **Criminal Justice** programs, students work with faculty experts in areas throughout the criminal justice field to prepare for public service careers. Criminal justice students study the causes of crime, the treatment of offenders, and the management of the criminal justice system, with a focus on balancing social justice and individual rights.

Students in our **Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness** programs learn to manage the complexities of disaster planning and response – they plan for every scenario. The curriculum helps students acquire professional skills to anticipate, plan, and respond to disasters and emergencies. In the classroom, faculty and students explore topics related to the environment and sustainability as well as emergency planning, disaster mitigation, risk and vulnerability assessment, as well as the impacts of climate change and climate change adaptation.

In **Urban and Regional Studies and Planning**, our students partner with community organizations through paid internships and client-based studio work. Undergraduate students build a solid foundation in understanding emerging trends in cities and the role of planning, design and communication. Students gain marketable skills in qualitative and quantitative analysis, problem-solving and professional competence to solve current social, economic and environmental changes. In the graduate program, students gain professional grounding in the theory and methodology of planning through a curriculum that balances classroom and field experience.

Our **Master's in Public Administration** equips students with skills in public management and policy analysis and our **PhD in Public Policy and Administration** program works with faculty and students across our cross-disciplinary field to prepare them for scholarly and leadership roles in settings including government, higher education, and research organizations.

Our administrators, faculty, and staff support three key strategies to help us improve student success. We collaborate to retain and attract a diverse community of highly qualified faculty and staff that reflects a culture where everyone matters and promises to ensure the culture supports career satisfaction and growth. We continually evolve curriculum and activities so that all students engage in inquiry, discovery, innovation, experiential learning, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging. The table below illustrates our goal for **Student Success** as metrics along the VCU Quest 2028 timeline.

<b>L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs</b>	
<b>Quest Year</b>	<b>Student Success Metrics of Success</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Student Success is a priority in the Wilder School. Our <b>goal</b> is to increase undergraduate and graduate enrollments through curricular innovation, strengthening our holistic culture and care, and recruiting and retaining faculty and staff.
<b>2023-24 thru 2027-28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase new student enrollments in academic programs and curricula by 5%.</li> <li>● Improve retention and graduation rates for new and continuing students</li> <li>● Increase scholarships to support student retention</li> <li>● Strengthen access and opportunity in recruitment, retention, and graduation among vulnerable student populations (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and/or first-generation status)</li> <li>● Increase national recognition for teaching excellence</li> <li>● Increase internships and Wilder Fellowships</li> <li>● Increase tracking and visibility of alumni careers and accomplishments</li> <li>● Strengthen alumni attendance and engagement in signature initiatives and events</li> </ul> <p>The Wilder School is committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers students to achieve academic excellence and career success. By the end of AY 2028, the Wilder School will center student success, implement student-centered policies and practices, foster partnerships with alumni, employers and community organizations, and continuously assess and improve student outcomes.</p>



## Action Plan

The Wilder School will execute three strategies to achieve our **Student Success** goals. By bridging enrollment and achievement gaps, transforming the curriculum, by strengthening our culture of care, redesigning course components to ensure access to experiential learning activities and mentoring; and integrative learning perspectives across the curricula, and student-lived experiences (e.g., structure reflection writing prompts, collaborative activities, case studies, etc.).

Wilder School academic programs will reimagine [REAL Reflective Learning Communities](#) to ensure development of critical reflection activities that facilitate effective safe spaces for meaningful civil discourse. We further plan to launch new programs and credentialing initiatives to ensure that the culminating experience of a student's program of study will include a real-world experience that kindles student success through curricular transformation and innovation. Our academic advisors with the **Office of Student Success** center on providing purposeful student engagement and well-being activities. To strengthen our culture of care, the Wilder School supports programs and activities that support the mental and emotional health of our employees and stakeholders.

## Accountability Partners

Our aim is to work year-round to achieve student success goals by strengthening coordination among Wilder School academic units and student service divisions, specifically the Dean's Office Academic Program Chairs, Offices of Graduate Student Services Administration (GSSA), Undergraduate Student Services Administration (USSA), Office of Student Success (OSS), and Undergraduate Admissions.

## Evidence of Success

In pursuit of strategic goals of Student Success through the end of 2028, we will employ metrics to demonstrate t to strengthen one-year retention rates, graduation rates, post-graduation outcomes, increased enrollment and professional opportunities for faculty and staff who serve our students.

## THEME: Research and Innovation (R&I)

### VCU Quest 2028 Themes



Figure 7. VCU Quest 2028 Wilder School on Research and Innovation

**Research and Innovation** distinguish VCU as a vibrant public research university. Our **Office of Research and Outreach** enhances, promotes, and celebrates the research outcomes of Wilder School faculty and students. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of Wilder School faculty, our Centers and Institutes provide diverse services like leadership development and training, economic and policy impact analysis, survey insights, and program evaluation for clients across state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and the general public in Virginia and beyond.

To increase student enrollment and meet unique workforce needs, the Wilder School is focusing on the development of new local government training programs. The Wilder School is uniquely positioned to leverage our nationally recognized faculty, professional consultation of our Centers and Institutes to help meet current and emerging local government workforce needs.

The Wilder School has a long history of providing training superficially aimed at government officials across the commonwealth and surrounding states:

- The Land Use Education Program (LUEP) provides planning commissioners, board of zoning appeals members, professional planners, and more, from across Virginia with the skills needed to make decisions that are legal, fact-based, community-oriented, and equitable.
- The Virginia Executive Institute (VEI) provides a dynamic forum for leaders of today and tomorrow to be part of an impressive network of state executives who

have committed to developing their leadership strengths and becoming change agents for Virginia's future.

- The Commonwealth Management Institute (CMI) supports experienced managers in Virginia's state government as they work to increase their ability to effectively design, implement, and evaluate public programs and policies.

In addition, the Wilder School has nationally recognized faculty and accredited programs in Public Administration and Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. As a result, the Wilder School is uniquely qualified to create and sustain training programs in emergency management for locally elected and appointed officials across the Commonwealth.

In the table below is our **Research & Innovation** goal and metrics for success.

<b>L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs</b>	
<b>Quest Year</b>	<b>Research &amp; Innovation Metrics of Success</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Strengthening <b>Research and Innovation</b> across academic programs and Centers and Institutes is a strategic priority for the Wilder School. Our goal is to increase the impact of the Wilder School Research Enterprise.
<b>2023-24 thru 2027-28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To align our efforts with VCU Quest 2028, we will annually increase research expenditures by 5%</li> <li>● Annually increase research proposals and professional recognition and research awards by 10%</li> <li>● Annually increase cross-disciplinary proposals submitted or awarded to faculty and staff by 5%</li> <li>● Expand emergency management training for elected and appointed officials to examine cybersecurity and artificial intelligence trends</li> </ul> <p>By the end of AY 2028, we will demonstrate the continued improvement of the impacts of our research enterprise by aligning Wilder School efforts with funding priorities and research opportunities.</p>

## Action Plan

To ensure we meet our research and innovation goals, we will enhance our infrastructure to support the Wilder School's research enterprise by creating pre-award processes including grant package preparation and submission and post-award principal investigator and fiscal project reporting support. We will continue to conduct faculty development seminars on research enterprise resources offered by the Associate Dean of Research and Outreach and research administration team. We will also increase awareness of viable research opportunities and potential collaborations through the development of a research opportunities newsletter emailed to all Wilder School faculty.

The Wilder School is the only school in the commonwealth with Centers and Institutes infrastructure that allows for efficient and effective community training programs and faculty expertise. These training initiatives will also demonstrate how our faculty experts in the fields of local government management and homeland security and emergency preparedness provide yet another avenue for Wilder School researchers to lead to real-world change.

The training program includes a robust research component aimed at continuous improvement. Participants will undergo a pre- and post-training assessment to measure knowledge acquisition, application, and program effectiveness in their respective roles. The data will be analyzed and synthesized to identify trends, successful strategies, and areas for improvement. This research component will enhance training but also support an academic publication, disseminating best practices and valuable insights to the wider communities.

### Course Descriptions

- **Introduction to Emergency Management for Elected and Appointed Officials:** The course offers elected and appointed officials a comprehensive introduction to the field of emergency management. Designed to equip officials with essential knowledge and skills, this program covers key principles, strategies, and best practices. Participants will explore topics such as risk assessment, planning, response, recovery, and mitigation, to effectively lead and support emergency management efforts in their communities. The course emphasizes collaboration with stakeholders to enhance disaster preparedness and response. Through an examination of roles and responsibilities, relevant legislation, phases of emergency management, state and federal programs, and effective communication strategies, officials will gain the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of emergency management and fulfill their responsibilities to protect and serve their constituents.
- **Hazard Mitigation and Resilience Building:** The course provides a comprehensive understanding of the critical concepts and strategies involved in mitigating hazards and building resilience within their communities. Participants will gain insight into the importance of proactive planning and risk assessment to identify and address potential hazards, such as natural disasters, climate change impacts, and human-created threats. Through a combination of case studies, best practices, and practical exercises, officials will develop the skills necessary to implement effective mitigation measures and foster community resilience,

especially through a lens of equity and support for historically marginalized populations. The course will explore key topics such as hazard identification and analysis, risk management, infrastructure protection, community engagement, and the integration of hazard mitigation into local planning and decision-making processes. By the end of the program, elected and appointed officials will be equipped to lead their communities in building resilience, reducing vulnerability, and ensuring a safer and more sustainable future.

- **Decision-Making During Crisis:** The course is a comprehensive program designed to equip individuals with the essential skills and knowledge needed to make effective decisions in high-pressure and rapidly evolving situations. Through a combination of theoretical frameworks, case studies, and immersive simulations, participants will develop the ability to think critically, assess risks, and make timely and informed decisions during crises. The course will cover topics such as crisis management models, decision-making biases, information gathering and analysis, ethical considerations, and communication strategies. By honing decision-making abilities and learning from real-world examples, participants will emerge from the course with enhanced confidence and proficiency in navigating complex crises and ensuring the best possible outcomes for individuals, organizations, and communities.
- **Long-term Recovery (Billion-Dollar Disasters):** This course is specifically designed to provide elected and appointed officials with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in managing the aftermath of billion-dollar disasters. Participants will gain insights into the unique complexities associated with long-term recovery efforts, including resource allocation, community engagement, infrastructure restoration, economic revitalization, and policy development. Through in-depth case studies and practical exercises, officials will learn effective approaches to support their communities in rebuilding and achieving resilience in the face of immense financial and logistical challenges. The course will also address funding mechanisms, public-private partnerships, and best practices in coordination with federal, state, and local agencies. By the end of the program, elected and appointed officials will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to lead successful long-term recovery efforts and ensure a sustainable future for their communities following billion-dollar disasters.
- **Disaster Laws and Supporting and Underserved Individuals and Communities:** The course provides a comprehensive understanding of the legal frameworks and mechanisms that guide disaster response and recovery efforts. Participants will explore the laws, regulations, and policies that govern disaster management, including those pertaining to emergency declarations, resource allocation, evacuation procedures, and public health measures. The course will delve into the legal rights and protections of individuals and communities affected by providing essential support services to ensure access to resources for those in need. Through case studies and interactive discussions, officials will gain the knowledge and skills to effectively interpret and apply disaster laws, support disaster-affected individuals and communities, and ensure a just and resilient recovery process.
- **Social Equity in Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence:** This course provides local elected officials with the information they need to be champions for social equity in the cybersecurity field. Participants will explore cybersecurity and artificial intelligence through an equity-based lens to identify where inequities exist, develop equitable human resource management practices, learn how to build inclusive teams and identify ways of implementing equitable recruitment and promotion practices.

Finally, graduates of these trainings will be encouraged to apply for one of the Wilder School's online degree programs (e.g., Master of Public Administration or Master of Science in Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness). Training graduates will receive support from our advisors and faculty throughout the application and orientation process. In addition, they will enrich virtual classrooms by sharing their own real-world experiences with their fellow students and instructors.

Through this expansion of our local training programs into emergency management and homeland security fields, we will be able to leverage and grow our infrastructure and expertise, meet the most pressing needs of the commonwealth, and provide a direct pipeline to our academic programs — all while improving our communities and expanding the Wilder School's reach.

## **Accountability Partners**

As we work to annually grow the Wilder School research enterprise and increase our impact, our accountability partners are Wilder School faculty leaders as well as the Associate Dean of Research and Outreach, Director of Research Promotion and Engagement, Research Administrator, Pre-Award/Grant Writer, and Post-Award Team Member. Also, our Center and Institute directors in the Center for Public Policy including the Performance Management Group (PMG) and Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory (SERL) as well as the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute (GEHLI), Research Institute for Social Equity, and RVA Eviction Lab continue to enhance, promote, and advance Wilder School faculty and student research.

As we expand training capacities targeted at locally elected and senior appointed offices, including mayors, city council members, and county and city administrators, our outreach efforts will coordinate with the Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia Municipal League, and Virginia Planning District Commissions.

## **Evidence of Success**

To successfully meet the strategic goals for Research and Innovation by the end of 2028, we rely on our faculty and researchers in Centers and Institutes to increase research expenditures, grant submissions, and awards and strengthen cross-disciplinary collaborations.

In AY 2023-24, we will kick-start our local government leadership planning initiative using post-COVID-19 Public Assistance recovery funds allocated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to the state through the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. With FEMA's Public Assistance program, our proposed training initiative supports the long-term resilience of the commonwealth and, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributes to the overall restoration and revitalization of communities.

# THEME: Thriving Communities for All People (TCAP)

## VCU Quest 2028 Themes



Figure 8. VCU Quest 2028 Wilder School on Thriving Communities for All People

The Wilder School joins VCU to deliver on its commitment to solving social and health inequities by partnering with communities. As a key strategy, the Wilder School seeks to build an adaptive infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of VCU and community leaders. Our goal is to help inspire authentic advances in health, education, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity. Our strategic plan creates and leverages pathways that demonstrate how our academic goals and innovations benefit and complement the objectives of our community partners. Across our academic programs and research enterprise, we actively seek community partners and opportunities to elevate awareness and collaborative action between VCU and communities.

<b>L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs</b>	
<b>Quest Year</b>	<b>Thriving Communities for All People Metrics of Success</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Thriving Communities for All People underscores our commitment to solving social and health inequities in partnership with communities. For more than three decades, the Commonwealth Poll has been a vital bellwether for policymakers and journalists who are interested in electoral politics and potential midterm wedge issues. We will conduct annual public policy polls in areas such as public safety, economic development, education, mental health, and housing.
<b>2023-24 thru 2027-28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Share data with policymakers and advocacy groups to better understand their constituencies through racial socioeconomic and demographics</li> <li>● Increase procurement opportunities for women and minority-owned businesses and diversify our community partnerships by 5%</li> <li>● Increase training opportunities to meet the needs of VCU and communities by 5%</li> <li>● Strengthen community engagement through our academic programs and research Centers and Institutes</li> </ul> <p>By the end of AY 2028, we will continue to seek new opportunities and partnerships with local, state, and regional groups and organizations to solve complex social and health inequities for all people and, the Wilder School will deliver on our commitments.</p>

**Action Plan**

Our action plan will collaborate with community-based organizations and groups to create and leverage pathways that demonstrate our commitment to solving social and health inequities in our communities.



The Wilder School Centers and Institutes aim to advance research and training that informs public policy and decision-making. These Centers and Institutes provide fresh insight, proven tools and techniques, and the skilled staff needed to meet individual and organizational objectives through a wide array of customized consulting services to assist organizations in the development of strategies and practical action plans for enhanced performance. The Centers and Institutes are comprised of the following units:

- The **Center for Public Policy (CPP)** serves as the applied research and consulting services division of the Wilder School. The CPP advances research that informs public policy and decision-making to improve our communities. Drawing on the wide-ranging expertise of Wilder School faculty, the CPP provides diverse public-facing services in economic and policy impact analysis, survey insights, and program evaluation to clients in state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and the general public, across Virginia and beyond.
- The **Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute (GEHLI)** is a premier executive leadership training and development program that focuses on the development of current and emerging leaders in state and local government, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, the business sector, and communities. The Institute is committed to identifying and nurturing the next generation of leaders by building an adaptive infrastructure that meets the evolving needs of the commonwealth and VCU.
- The **Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE)** serves as a vehicle to advance racial equity and social equity through multidisciplinary scholarship, research, training, and engagement. The goal of RISE is to be the national leader in advancing social equity through informing public policy, governance, and practice to improve conditions for marginalized voices within our society, including communities of color, LGBTQIA individuals, people with disabilities, incarcerated populations, survivors of domestic violence, and women. Under RISE, the RVA Eviction Lab focuses on meeting eviction data and research needs and supporting the work of local government, community-based organizations, elected officials, and other advocates. The RVA Eviction Lab takes the necessary deeper dives into the qualitative and quantitative aspects of evictions. Because this problem and the associated research questions will continue to shift both regionally and locally, we make data public, reliable, and responsive to the needs of the community, region, and state.

## **Accountability Partners**

Wilder School faculty and staff in academic programs and our centers and institutes are key accountability partners to lead these strategic initiatives. The Centers and Institute Directors, Associate Dean of Research and Outreach, and Director of Finance are key strategic partners to bridge the gap between the Wilder School and its surrounding communities.

## **Evidence of Success**

To successfully meet the strategic goals for Thriving Communities for All People by the end of 2028, we rely on our action plan metrics of success to increase procurement expenditures with minority-owned businesses, diversify community partnerships, improve faculty and staff community-engagement activities, and increase our training standards of excellence.

# THEME: Promoting Social Equity in Action (PSEIA)

## VCU Quest 2028 Themes



Figure 9. VCU Quest 2028 Wilder School on Promoting Social Equity in Action

As we work to promote social equity in action, the Wilder School acknowledges our commitment to work to be part of solutions. The Wilder School and the Center for Public Policy have a long history of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within our community and across Virginia.

Our faculty, staff, students, and alumni promote the democratic values of our nation. As such, our abiding commitment to equality and justice includes the elimination of structural racism. The Wilder School has a history of devoting resources to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues and programs. Our ongoing work complements and enhances the school's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) and the full implementation of our WS Strategic Plan. It further encompasses a broader group of faculty, staff, students, and alumni working on behalf of public sector employees and leaders. By the end of 2028, the Wilder School will advance social justice to fully inform public policy, governance, and practices that improve conditions for marginalized voices within our society, including communities of color, LGBTQIA individuals, people with disabilities, economically disadvantaged and rural communities, incarcerated populations, and survivors of domestic violence for all genders.

<b>L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs</b>	
<b>Quest Year</b>	<b>Promoting Social Equity In Action Metrics of Success</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Promoting Social Equity in Action focuses on the use of evidence-based approaches to identify disparities and close gaps by targeting structures, prioritizing funds, and reallocating resources to advance equity.
<b>2023-24 thru 2027-28</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase the number of equity-focused service agreements in the Centers and Institutes by 5%.</li> <li>● Increase high-quality, equity-focused grant submissions by Wilder School faculty and staff by 5%.</li> <li>● Increase promotional efforts of equity-based research originating from the Wilder School by 10%.</li> </ul> <p>By the end of AY 2028, the Wilder School will advance equity and social justice by identifying and addressing disparities in government and public affairs through research, education, and community engagement. The Wilder School will close gaps in access, opportunities, and outcomes for historically marginalized populations. The Wilder School will foster inclusive policies and practices that promote social equity and justice.</p>

The Wilder School is committed to leading the way in social justice initiatives. The Research Institute in Social Equity (RISE) contributes to the overall research portfolio of the Wilder School as well as the translational narrative of research. RISE engages graduate and undergraduate students in community research for applied research experiences and collaborates to solidify its position as an ally, resource, and subject matter expert for equity work. As we center equity research to elevate the Wilder School’s national identity as a change agent, our research Centers and Institutes will continue to support our internal the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) and broaden external opportunities to increase participation for Wilder School faculty, staff and students.

The Wilder School has a long history of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community and across Virginia. Through offerings in research, training, and leadership, we leverage the expertise of our faculty and researchers as we work with state and local governments, as well as businesses and nonprofits, to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive commonwealth. Promoting social equity in action focuses on the use of evidence-based approaches to identify disparities and close those disparities by targeting structures, prioritizing funds, and reallocating resources to advance equity.

In the first year of Quest 2028, we will refine our strategies across research Centers and Institutes, engage faculty and students in equity-centered research, and collect and utilize data analysis to examine gaps among intersecting identities and underrepresented groups.

In partnership with Virginia Union University, RISE will establish the L. Douglas Wilder Digital Library and Digital Collections to serve as a repository of historical artifacts for public reference and research. The digital exhibition will be hosted by RISE and feature rotating exhibits showcasing various tenures of Governor Wilder's continuing career, as well as a virtual tour of the [VUU](#) L. Douglas Wilder Library and Learning Resource Center. RISE is working to establish an annual legislative equity review to examine how legislation reflects the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging to better understand legislative impacts on public service within the Commonwealth of Virginia. RISE is also developing a web-based biannual social equity report generator and website to serve as a public repository database of social and health equity-related data. This is part of an evidence-building strategy to assess policy and monitor equity outcomes across gender, race/ethnicity, mental health, English as a second language (ESL), and sexual orientation.

## **Action Plan**

The Wilder School works across academic program areas as well as research Centers and Institutes to fully implement strategies that center the school as thought-leaders in the advancement of social justice. The Wilder School will increase awareness of viable social equity research opportunities through the development of a Research Opportunities Newsletter created by the Research Administration team and disseminated to all Wilder School faculty.

At the Wilder School, we will accelerate our DEI journey through thought leadership and diversity training on unconscious and implicit biases. Our main focus in diversity training is to help Wilder School faculty and staff identify and deal with real-world issues that reduce workplace discrimination, eliminate factors impeding career growth, and support cultural responsiveness in the classroom.

## **Accountability Partners**

Our aim is to reach diversity, equity, and inclusivity goals by collaborating across administrative units and by partnering with Wilder School Academic Program Chairs and Directors of Centers and Institutes.

## **Evidence of Success**

We will increase equity research through collaborations and engagement, ensure completion of diversity training for any faculty or staff member who joins the Wilder School in July 2023 or after; and improve metrics toward organizational culture and climate.

## For More Information

To learn more about the VCU Wilder School Quest 2028 Strategic Plan or to provide feedback, please visit L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs webpage, <https://wilder.vcu.edu/>. We value your input and look forward to engaging with you as we shape the future of the L. Douglas Wilder School.



Prepared by:

RaJade M. Berry-James, PhD  
Senior Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
700 West Grace Street  
Email: [berryjamesr@vcu.edu](mailto:berryjamesr@vcu.edu)