


# Wilder School in Action

Spring 2020



## Finding the pulse of voters in 2020

Wilder School  
Commonwealth Poll  
gains national attention



# Table of contents

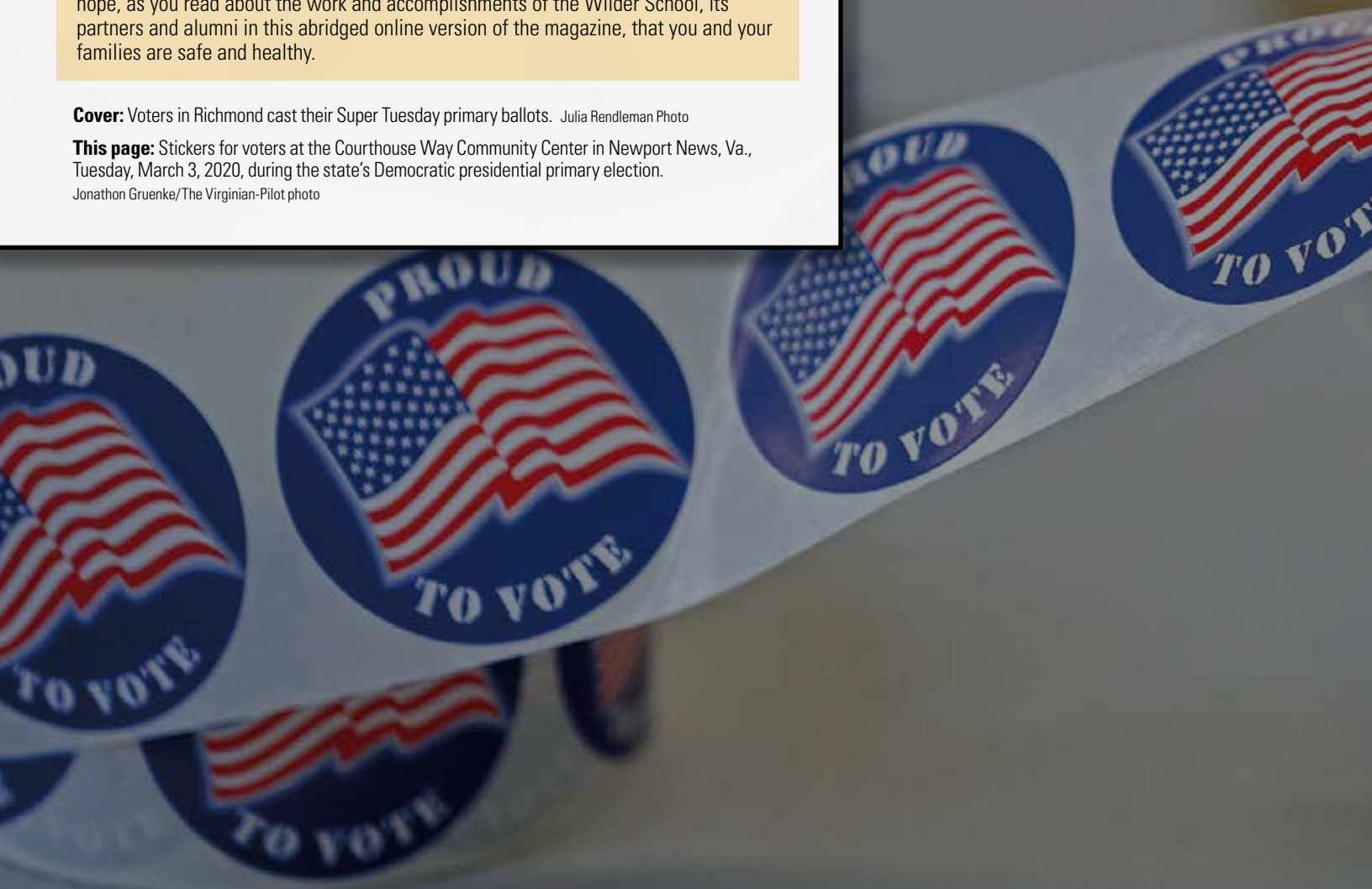
Letter from the dean's office.....	1
Reflecting on race .....	2
Thought leaders .....	3
A personal perspective .....	4-5
Poll positions.....	6-7
Continuing 30 years of history .....	8-9
Decades of state service comes to the Wilder School.....	10-11
Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute.....	12-13
Alumni spotlight: Nathan Dowdy.....	14
Celebrating excellence in government.....	15
Wilder Graduate Scholars' Fellowship program.....	16

**Editor's note:** This issue of Wilder School in Action was going to press as the COVID-19 crisis was unfolding. Noticeably absent in the stories that follow is any mention of the pandemic. We would like to acknowledge the tremendous impact the pandemic has had on the university, the Wilder School and, indeed, the world. We hope, as you read about the work and accomplishments of the Wilder School, its partners and alumni in this abridged online version of the magazine, that you and your families are safe and healthy.

**Cover:** Voters in Richmond cast their Super Tuesday primary ballots. Julia Rendleman Photo

**This page:** Stickers for voters at the Courthouse Way Community Center in Newport News, Va., Tuesday, March 3, 2020, during the state's Democratic presidential primary election.

Jonathon Gruenke/The Virginian-Pilot photo



# Letter from the dean's office

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Dear friends,

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the historic inauguration of the Honorable L. Douglas Wilder, the nation's first African-American elected governor, and our school's namesake. We look forward to celebrating his legacy with a daylong event in partnership with Virginia Union University, where the governor earned his undergraduate degree. This spring has also been an historic time in the state capital, as the 2020 legislative session included the election of the commonwealth's first female speaker of the House of Delegates and the first female clerk and keeper of the roles, Suzette Denslow (B.S., urban studies).



Our academic programs, our faculty and the work of our Center for Public Policy continue their rise in national prominence. We are proud that we are in the top 20% of graduate public affairs programs in the 2020 U.S.

News & World Report rankings. The school also ranks number 39 in public management and leadership, marking the first time the Wilder School has ranked in one of the specialty areas. This serves as a clear indicator of the Wilder School's continued momentum relative to national reputation. Our online Master of Arts in homeland security and emergency preparedness program was selected as the top program in the Southeast and ninth in the nation. Our Wilder School Commonwealth Poll has been cited by dozens of state and national media outlets as it examines the 2020 presidential race, gun control and other important policy issues.

As you'll see on the back cover, we had a record number of students working at the Capitol this session as Wilder School Capitol Semester interns. Legislators and lobbyists looked to results from the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy's winter poll as they debated several public policy issues, including gun control, education funding and unionizing government employees. Our location in the state capital offers many opportunities for our students, faculty and alumni to take their classroom knowledge and put it into action. In this edition you'll read about criminal justice professor Christina Mancini, Ph.D., and her work to improve public safety and enhance crime prevention, recent alum Nathan Dowdy's path to the Secretary of Finance office and the two decades of work by the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute.

It is my privilege to serve as interim dean of the Wilder School, where our imperative of public service in action is reflected in everything we do. As this academic year draws to a close, we feel good about our achievements, but also continually challenge ourselves to achieve our vision to be the premier resource for public policy expertise and social equity in public safety, governance, and economic and community development.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan T. Gooden".

Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D.

Interim dean

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# Reflecting on race

## Wilder symposium challenges Virginia college presidents

In a year marked by one of the most meaningful and sustained inquiries into the history of African peoples in America in recent cultural history, the 2019 Wilder Symposium provided a personal and unflinching look at race and inclusion in higher education as told from the perspective of four Virginia college presidents.

“Race in Academia” was hosted by the 66th governor of Virginia, L. Douglas Wilder, and the VCU Wilder School last September. Panelists included Makola Abdullah, Ph.D., president of Virginia State University; Ronald Crutcher, D.M.A., president of the University of Richmond; Paula Pando, Ed.D., president of Reynolds Community College; and Michael Rao, Ph.D., president of VCU. Alvin Schexnider, Ph.D., former president of Thomas Nelson Community College and former interim president of Norfolk State University, moderated.

“I really believe that higher education institutions in this country are one of the most important engines to ensure the longevity of our democracy in the United States.”

- Ronald Crutcher

“I do think it’s time in this 400 years’ observation of Africans being brought to these shores that we candidly address the impact and the effects of the descendants of those first brought here,” said Wilder in his opening remarks. “I am personally sickened by those whose simplistic



Left to right: Makola Abdullah, former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, Susan Gooden, Alvin Schexnider, Michael Rao, Paula Pando and Ronald Crutcher

solutions amount to ‘let’s have a conversation’ on one thing or another. I can tell you that the one thing that has permeated the very fabric of our society for the past 400 years has been race.”

Each panelist was challenged to explore the role of a chief educational officer in combating structural racism, as well as the cultural and institutional practices at their respective institutions that work to either reinforce or mitigate racial inequity to ensure access and educational success for minorities today.

“Higher education today continues to be largely set up the way it was 1,000 years ago in Europe and 400 years ago in this country, and that doesn’t necessarily fit all the ways in which we’ve all grown up, and it certainly does not pull the potential out of all of us,” Rao said.

The persistence of achievement gaps among minority and low-income students in K-12 education was also recognized as a significant barrier to inclusive enrollment.

“While the signs don’t exist in the same way — they don’t say ‘white’ and ‘colored’ — many of the things that we use to bring young people into the institution, by definition, those things are separated and divided by race,” Abdullah said.

Diversity and inclusion centered much of the discussion, with panelists highlighting their importance and the threat that a lack of diversity among students, faculty and staff poses to educational institutions.

“I really believe that higher education institutions in this country are one of the most important engines to ensure the longevity of our democracy in the United States, and right now, I think that is being threatened because people are in silos. People are only talking to people who agree with them, and that plays out on colleges campuses as well,” Crutcher said.

According to a study in 2016 conducted by Public Religion Research Institute and shared by Crutcher, fully three-quarters (75%) of white Americans report that the network of people with whom they discuss important matters is entirely white, with no minority presence.

“We need to create spaces where people of every race and ethnicity can speak about these issues in a candid way, where people don’t feel judged if they say the wrong thing or something that is perceived to be wrong,” Pando said.

Although dealing with a challenging topic, each panelist appeared to be united by a steadfast commitment to making progress and a willingness to challenge bias — both structural and procedural — within their own institutions. Each agreed that leadership plays a crucial role in moving the needle toward addressing and ending racism in academia now and in the imminent future.

“The reality is that there are specific things that we can do,” Rao said. “We have our voices and can use our podium, as leadership, to create change.”

# Thought leaders

## Scholars invited to Wilder School for lecture series

The Wilder School Doctoral Lecture Series in Public Policy gives doctoral students the opportunity to learn from and engage with leading scholars in a variety of fields related to public policy. Three speakers were scheduled to visit campus during the 2019-20 academic year.

"The 2019-20 lecture series exposes students to contemporary issues and research practices used by prominent scholars," said Elsie Harper-Anderson, Ph.D., director of the Wilder School's doctoral program. "We're excited to invite these thought leaders to the Wilder School."

Speaker Norma Riccucci, Ph.D., a Board of Governors Distinguished Professor in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University – Newark, kicked off the series with her discussion, "Citizens' Perceptions of Closing the Gender Pay Gap: An Experimental Study." Riccucci has published extensively in the areas of public management and social equity, including her two most recent books, "Public Administration: Traditions of Inquiry and Philosophies of Knowledge" and "Policy Drift: Shared Powers and the Making of U.S. Law and Policy."



Left to right: Lance Freeman, Callie Rennison and Norma Riccucci

Callie Rennison, Ph.D., professor and the former associate dean of faculty affairs at the University of Colorado – Denver's School of Public Affairs, followed by sharing 12 key insights on life in academia with her talk, "From Here to There, to Where? The Life Course of One Academic," which highlighted her journey from indecisive undergraduate to noted academician.

In February, Lance Freeman, Ph.D., a professor in the Urban Planning Program and the director of the doctoral program in urban planning at Columbia University in New York City, discussed his latest book, "A Haven and a Hell: The Ghetto in Black America" published by Columbia University Press. Freeman's research focuses on affordable housing, gentrification, ethnic and racial stratification in housing markets, and the relationship between the built environment and well-being. Freeman teaches courses on community development, housing policy and research methods. 🏠

## Alanazi receives NECoPA Best Student Paper Award

It was reading about women's experiences in the federal government that inspired Layla Alanazi, a doctoral candidate in public policy and administration at the VCU Wilder School, to write a paper that was awarded the Northeast Conference on Public Administration Best Student Paper Award.

Alanazi was awarded the distinction for her paper, "Does Gender Really Matter? Testing the Mediating Role of Public Service Motivation Between Gender and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Federal Agencies."

Learning how women are more likely to experience inconsistencies between their work and their identities as women to the extent that these inconsistencies can adversely affect how their work is perceived and evaluated became a passionate topic for Alanazi.

"Reading about the theory of public service motivation inspired me to look at

this silent issue in the federal government and to answer a tough question: Who is more motivated to serve the public? Men or women? If the answer is women, then how do their PSM levels, indirectly, affect their performance."

NECoPA's Best Student Paper Award is used to recognize emerging scholars in public administration while encouraging participation in NECoPA and its parent association, the American Society for Public Administration.

The award is presented to one student each year through a rigorous process that includes a blind review. Competition for the distinction is stiff and includes applicants from across the Northeast region, including 16 states and the District of Columbia.

For her part, Alanazi said she's thrilled and struck by an equal sense of gratitude and obligation.

"I feel very proud to have won such an award as it translates all the efforts I put

into this paper. I feel a sense of responsibility after winning this award as this is just the beginning, and there is a lot more that I can achieve, and there are higher pinnacles that I need to touch by continuing to invest my time and efforts in research," she said.

"The Wilder School provided me with all the tools and resources needed to achieve this distinction. I have been surrounded by great faculty and students who are always there, supporting and helping me to reach my goals."

This is the second of two research awards granted to Alanazi this year. In spring 2019, she received the Wilder School's Outstanding Doctoral Student Award as recognition for excellence in service and scholarship to the school. 🏠



Layla Alanazi

# A personal perspective

## Wilder School professor fights crime with research

Christina Mancini, Ph.D., jokingly recognizes that she was raised in a matriarchy with a single mother and her grandmother whose interest in high-profile crimes in the 1990s played a role in her becoming a criminologist. Cases such as Jacob Wetterling and Megan Kanka, involving children who were abducted and murdered by known offenders, piqued Mancini's interest in crime at a young age.

"I grew up in a time when we were starting to recognize stranger danger and sex offenders and what we can do to protect ourselves," Mancini said. "My grandma collected newspaper clippings and taught me never to go with a stranger. She didn't want me to feel vulnerable, but instead to protect myself."

Mancini's interest in how to best protect people and herself helped to form her major in college. She earned undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees in criminology from Florida State University.

While at FSU, Mancini began working on funded projects and hands-on research with esteemed mentors such as Daniel Mears, Ph.D., the Mark C. Stafford Professor of Criminology.

"I worked with Dan over six years, and it helped me to be a more confident scholar and realize that my research was important and had the ability to better society, as well as reduce crime," Mancini said.

An associate professor of criminal justice at the Wilder School, Mancini studies sexual violence, campus rape, sexual assault policy and the role of public opinion in shaping public safety. Among her classes, she teaches "Sex Crime and Society."

"I have always looked at crimes from a personal perspective. Simply being a female increases my risk of being a victim of certain crimes, but it also insulates me from a lot of crime as well," she said. "Gender does not always work in the ways we might think. It has unique effects on our chances of being a victim of crime."

### Public opinion vs. reality

Sex crime cases, and the corresponding publicity given to them, are problematic for many reasons. Contrary to what disproportionate media coverage depicts, sex crimes have been at a steep decline over the last few decades. Mancini's research explores public opinion and reactions about crime and sex offenders to disrupt these misconceptions.

"I like to say that everyone has an opinion about crime, and they are entitled to that, but I think that when we create laws and policies that affect all of us based on certain misconceptions, we are probably going to have a failure of law, and it's not going to function the way we think it should," Mancini said.

Mancini's work approach recognizes that laws have been passed for multiple reasons. From a pragmatic approach, there are laws to prevent crimes, but there are also laws that speak to how society feels about specific issues for symbolic effects.

Every year more and more people are added to the sex offender registry. However, the now-broadened term of what it means to be a registered sex offender often creates numerous misperceptions.

"Individuals listed could certainly be a violent offender, and that's probably the population we want to target, but it could also be a young person who created child pornography by taking a risqué picture of themselves and sending it," Mancini said.

Survey research has found that citizens who access the registry site typically do it one time and not consistently. Offenders

Christina Mancini's research into sex crimes helps inform public policy.

are a very mobile population, and for the registries to work, people must access them as they are being updated.

"I would love it if sex offender registries worked, but the problem is that people do not access them regularly or if they do, it's for reasons other than safety concerns. Many check to see if neighbors are on it, but not necessarily to make a behavioral change," Mancini said.

### Knowledge is power

Public perceptions and their direct and indirect ability to shape public policy concerning sex crime are a crucial part of Mancini's research due to their extreme importance and relevance in a democracy.

"So often we hear legislators say what their constituents want when it comes to certain issues and crime. The big question is how do we know that," Mancini said. "As researchers, I believe it's important that we take it upon ourselves to get the facts and inform the public. If not, it just sits in the stacks where only students and other researchers get to read it."

In 2014, Mancini, along with colleagues, founded the Sexual Offense

Policy Research Workgroup, an international nonprofit organization that serves as an educational resource for the public and policymakers concerning sexual offense prevention.

"We all have different research, but we all believe that policy creates change. The public and larger community should be given information that is not based on misperception, but evidence and data," Mancini said.

In 2017, Mancini assisted the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy Commonwealth Poll in researching Virginians' views about Title IX and related policies. She helped analyze the questions concerning the extent to which Virginians supported mandatory reporting. The poll found that a majority of Virginians (90%) were in support of it and that two-thirds felt colleges and universities should be accountable for sex crime prevention.

More recently, Mancini began researching Title IX issues and working to deploy a survey to faculty and staff to pinpoint thoughts on the policies being enforced. "Being a VCU employee with mandated Title IX policies in place,

I want to see how Title IX policies affect interactions with students," Mancini said.

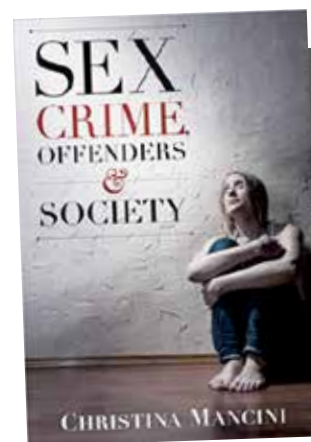
Mancini has published more than 30 studies in the areas of sex crime, victimization, campus crime, public opinion and law, and her work has been featured in numerous respected journals. She is currently working to publish the second edition of her first book, "Sex Crime Offenders and Society: A Critical Look at Sexual Offending in Policy."

"I try to be objective with my writing. I don't think my role is to create policy, but I think it is to provide information for people who are in the position to do that," Mancini said.

Now a mother, Mancini has a personal reason to continue her work in criminology and teach her daughter the best ways to protect herself.

"My daughter and I have discussed stranger danger, but we are also talking about acquaintance danger, and frankly, any situation that she may feel vulnerable or uncomfortable," Mancini said.

"Knowledge is power to better understand this complex type of crime, but what's very important is what we do with that knowledge to arm ourselves." 🧠



### A 'broad world' explained

In 2014, Danielle J.S. Bailey reviewed Christina Mancini's book "Sex Crime Offenders and Society: A Critical Look at Sexual Offending in Policy." Describing the work as "a wonderful addition to the sex crime literature," she wrote: "Mancini explores the broad world of sexual offending, including the realities about sex offenses and sex offending trends, public perceptions of sex offenses and the offenders that perpetrate them, and criminal justice policies enacted to combat sexual crime. [Her book] will promote understanding even for the casual reader."

# Poll positions

Public opinions provide important insights for policymakers

VCU poll: Virginians motivated to vote heading into 2020  
- Augusta Free Press

NEW POLL SHOWS TRUMP BEATING SANDERS, TIED WITH WARREN BUT TRAILING BIDEN IN KEY 2020 STATE  
- Newsweek

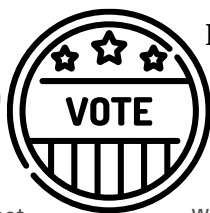
VCU Poll: Slim Majority Support Gun Restrictions - VPM NPR News

**The issues are complex and contentious: The 2020 presidential election. Stricter gun laws. Paying for education. Expanding gambling. Each year, the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy conducts four surveys of Virginians on current policy issues, providing policymakers with an up-to-date snapshot of public opinion. In addition to election preferences, past issues have included economic and workforce development, public safety, education and mental health.**

**The Commonwealth Poll has been in existence for nearly 20 years, allowing researchers to provide comparisons and track changes in public opinions using earlier polls. "We get input from policymakers, our faculty experts and members of the media when we're writing the polling questions," said Robyn McDougle, Ph.D., director of the center. "We want the polls to examine both complex, ongoing issues like education funding and current topics like election choices."**

## A Democratic legislature predicted

A poll conducted in October 2019 found that Virginia independents showed a preference for Democratic control of the General Assembly. With every seat in the Virginia General Assembly up for election in November 2019, the poll found Virginians almost evenly split when asked which party they would prefer to have control of the state legislature. However, independents showed a clearer preference for Democratic control. When voters went to the polls Nov. 5, they gave Democrats control of both the Virginia House and Senate.



## Presidential politics

The 2020 presidential election and Virginia's participation in the Super Tuesday primary in March have created broad interest in Virginia's presidential preferences. Virginia was the only Southern state that Hillary Clinton carried in 2016, and candidates and national media consider Virginia an important swing state. In each of the 2019-20 polls, voter preferences for the field of Democratic candidates have been tracked, measuring the Democrats' ability to win against the incumbent president.

"Our latest poll numbers suggest, as I have long maintained, that Virginia is a 'must watch' state," said former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder.

"The media particularly appreciate that we publish the cross-tabulations showing respondents' party affiliation, household income, geographic area and other demographics," said Farrah Stone, Ph.D., director of the polls. "Both state and national media have been very interested in our presidential election question results."

The polls are conducted by telephone using random digit dialing methodology and are then weighted to create a representative sample of all Virginians. The polls' overall margin of error is 4.8% or less. The December poll also looked at voters' inclination to go to the polls, showing an increase in those who reported they would definitely vote in the next election. In the December poll, 83% of respondents said they would definitely vote, compared to only 73% of those polled in October.



Former Governor Wilder does a live interview on WRVA radio about the latest poll results.

## Gun control debate

The December 2019 poll, released in early January as the legislature was going into session, found that a majority (53%) of Virginians believe that gun laws should be stricter today. About 30% agree that gun laws are about right, and only 17% think laws should be less strict. Additionally, large majorities support background checks, limits on those with mental illness and red flag laws. Several of the questions were similar to ones asked in a 2018 poll, allowing the data to be compared for trends.



## Funding public schools

The perennial issue of school funding was also examined in the December poll. Two-thirds of Virginians believe public schools are underfunded and the majority are willing to pay more for specific improvements. Sixty-six percent thought funding was not enough to meet public schools' needs, and more than 70% were willing to pay more in taxes to increase mental health services for students and increase teacher pay.



## Funding community colleges

A majority of those polled in December were supportive of the governor's proposal to provide tuition-free community college. Sixty-three percent favor providing tuition-free community college to Virginia students, with 44% strongly favoring the measure. Age, income, race and party affiliation significantly affected the opinion. Those under 45 years old, those making less than \$50,000 a year, minorities and Democrats were more likely to support the measure strongly.

"We appreciate being able to work with the Center for Public Policy, both to develop questions and review the results on important higher education issues," said



Robyn McDougle briefs the Virginia House Education Committee on Virginians' opinions about higher education funding.

Peter Blake, director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. "We use the findings as we develop and implement policies affecting Virginians statewide."

## Medicare for All

Virginians were nearly split when asked if they favored or opposed Medicare for All, with 51% strongly or somewhat favoring and more than 26% strongly favoring. Family income was a significant factor, with 32% of those making less than \$50,000 per year strongly favoring Medicare for All and another 38% somewhat favoring it. Seventy-one percent of minorities strongly or somewhat favored the option, with 37% strongly favoring it, compared to 39% of whites saying strongly or somewhat. The partisan divide was strong; 44% of Democrats strongly favor the measure, and 62% of Republicans strongly oppose it.



## Legalized gambling

Respondents also were asked about their views on legalized gambling. A majority of Virginians (53%) said that society would be helped because the government would be able to regulate and tax it, while 38% felt that society would be hurt by legalizing because gambling breeds crime and would create more compulsive gamblers. Younger Virginians were more likely to see legalization positively with 65% of those ages 35-44 and 62% of those 18-34 saying society would be helped. This was compared with 40% of those ages 45-64 and 51% of those 65 and older saying society would be hurt.



## Minimum wage

When asked about raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, 59% of Virginians strongly or somewhat favored the options, with 41%

strongly favoring it. Again, family income played a role in opinion, with a majority of those making less than \$50,000 a year (52%) strongly favoring raising the minimum wage, compared to 37% of those making \$50,000 to \$100,000 and 36% of those making \$100,000 or more.

## Sources of news

Virginians are more likely to often get their news online or from local networks. Respondents said they were most often getting their news from websites, apps or local TV. Almost half (46%) said they often use websites or apps, and 45% often watch the local TV news. Listening to the radio, watching cable news or watching the national evening news were less often used, with 36%, 35% and 32% saying often, respectively. Print newspapers were the least often used source, with only 22% saying they often read the paper for their news and 57% saying they hardly ever or never do. Age was significant for each source of news. Younger Virginians were more likely to use websites or apps. Sixty-one percent of those ages 18-34 and 53% of those ages 35-44 said they often use them. Respondents ages 45-64 were more likely to often listen to the news on the radio (45%).



## Looking ahead

What will the 2020-21 polling season bring?

"In addition to the presidential election, we will continue to track several of the hot-button issues, including gun control, raising the minimum wage and expanding gambling," says McDougle. "We also like to stay flexible and ask whatever Virginians are talking about and what is in the headlines."



# Continuing 30 years of history

## L. Douglas Wilder: A life of service



**1931**

Born Jan. 17 in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia



**1951**

Graduates from Virginia Union University, a private college for African Americans, with a degree in chemistry



**1959**

Graduates from Howard University School of Law and establishes law practice in Richmond



**1970-86**

Serves in the Virginia Senate, chairing many committees



**1986-90**

Serves as Virginia's lieutenant governor under Gov. Gerald Baliles



**2005-09**

Serves as Richmond's first directly elected mayor in 60 years



**1947**

Graduates from racially segregated Armstrong High School



**1952-53**

Serves in the U.S. Army; fights in the Korean War and earns the Bronze Star



**1969**

Becomes the first African American elected to the Virginia Senate since Reconstruction



**1983**

Establishes a state holiday to honor Martin Luther King Jr.



**1989-1994**

Elected Virginia's 66th governor, the first African American ever to hold that office in any state



**1995-present**

Serves as Distinguished Professor at VCU, teaching, guest lecturing and organizing symposia

**J**AN. 13, 2020, MARKED THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY of the inauguration of the Honorable L. Douglas Wilder, 66th governor of the commonwealth of Virginia and namesake of the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. A native of Richmond's historic Church Hill district, Wilder served as the commonwealth's chief executive officer from 1990 to 1994, and is the first African American to serve as governor of a U.S. state since Reconstruction, and the first elected African-American governor.

Wilder graduated from Virginia Union University and served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, where he earned a Bronze Star for heroism. After the war, he attended Howard University School of Law, establishing a legal practice in Richmond shortly thereafter.

Wilder won election to the Virginia Senate in 1969 as a member of the Democratic Party and served five terms before taking office as lieutenant governor of Virginia, becoming the first African American to hold statewide office in the commonwealth. Wilder's historic success in the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial

election made him a major and immediate influence in the U.S. political arena. He was commended for his sound fiscal management and balancing the state budget during difficult economic times. For two consecutive years under Wilder's administration, Virginia was ranked as the best-managed state in the U.S. by Financial World magazine.

Wilder returned to public office in 2005, when he became the first directly-elected mayor of Richmond in over a half century, winning every precinct. Since leaving office in 2009, he has worked as a distinguished

professor at the Wilder School, where he lectures and hosts symposia, including the most recent, Race in Academia.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the NAACP's prestigious Spingarn Medal, and 34 honorary degrees and citations of the highest order, including Veterans of Foreign Wars. He is a life member of several government and public service organizations, the author of "Son of Virginia: A Life in America's Political Arena" and a widely sought-after spokesperson on current issues at the national, state and local levels. 🏠



# Decades of state service comes to the Wilder School

**Location. Location. Location.** The Wilder School's location just blocks from the Virginia Capitol and a two-hour drive from the nation's capital allows us to tap into decades of experience from seasoned public servants who serve as adjunct faculty members, trainers and senior advisers. The two profiled below are familiar names at the state Capitol and beyond.



Paula Otto started her career in Richmond as a political reporter and anchor for WTVR-TV. She covered the debate and referendum vote on creating a state lottery in Virginia. Intrigued by what it would take to start a new state agency from scratch, Otto applied for and landed a position at the lottery. Most recently, Otto led the Virginia Lottery to record growth and profits as executive director under three governors. Otto also served as the lottery's first director of public information when the agency came into existence in the late 1980s.

Between her two stints at the lottery, Otto was a tenured professor and associate director at Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. In 2018, Otto returned to VCU as the senior director of special projects for the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs and adjunct faculty member in the Robertson School.

In her role at the Wilder School, Otto assists with the Center for Public Policy's Commonwealth Polls and oversees the

**“Her extensive experience as an agency head and a communications expert have provided a great model of public leadership.”**

- James M. Burke

annual Excellence in Virginia Government Awards program. The awards honor individuals and organizations who have made noteworthy contributions to the practice of government and the betterment of the state.

“The Excellence in Virginia Government Awards recognize outstanding work at all levels of government in Virginia and honor dedicated public service, innovative approaches and commitment to excellence,” said Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D., interim dean of the Wilder School. “Paula has been essential in

executing the event to recognize and honor recipients who have made astounding impacts for our communities and the commonwealth.”

Otto also teaches the school's Virginia Capitol Semester seminar course in the spring semester, as well as serves as a regular instructor for the Virginia Executive Institute. “As an agency head, I was always concerned about the retirement wave in public service,” Otto said. “I enjoy being back in the classroom and helping train and hopefully inspire our future public workforce.”

“It has been a privilege to have Paula Otto as part of the VEI family of presenters. Paula presented at the Virginia Executive Institute on media relations for years,” said James M. Burke, Ph.D., director of Performance Management Group. “More recently, she has delivered a thought-provoking workshop on integrity and leadership at VEI. Her extensive experience as an agency head and a communications expert have provided a great model of public leadership.” 🏛️



**Senior adviser: Bill Leighty**

A veteran in state government and the U.S. Marine Corps, William H. “Bill” Leighty serves as the senior strategic adviser to the dean of the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. Leighty, also elected a National Academy of Public Administration’s fellow in 2006, teaches public administration courses, as well as assists the dean on special projects of significance to the Wilder School.

“Bill brings a rich array of experience in state government, public administration and politics to the Wilder School,” said Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D., interim dean of the school. “He is a conduit of information who generously shares his expertise with students, faculty and staff.”

Prior to retirement and joining the Wilder School in 2018, Leighty served as chief of staff to former Govs. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine of Virginia. As chief of staff, he essentially served as chief operating officer of the commonwealth of Virginia where he instituted a statewide performance management system for all agencies.

**“I’m very pleased to be at the Wilder School as a senior adviser where I can share my experiences and a lifetime of learning.”**

- Bill Leighty

In 2014, Leighty completed a manual for the National Governors Association for newly elected governors on how to transition into power. Leighty was also asked to co-chair the transition committee for the newly elected mayor of the city of Richmond in 2016.

“I’m very pleased to be at the Wilder School as a senior adviser, where I can share my experiences and a lifetime of learning with the next generation of Virginia’s public servants,” Leighty said. “They inspire me every day and make me proud of the Wilder School.”

Leighty’s current work includes advising the Performance Management

Group at Virginia Commonwealth University on a statewide Workforce Opportunity Investment Act strategic plan for the Office of the Governor. In addition, with Leighty’s advising, PMG recently completed a comprehensive review of the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation in response to an audit by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission.

“Bill has been a great and gracious supporter of the Performance Management Group for years. The range of his experience, as well as his current and historical knowledge of state government, is without peer,” shared James M. Burke, Ph.D., director of PMG. “He is one of those wise people with whom we consult, and we are thrilled to be working with him now as we develop the most recent update of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act Combined State Plan. We value his keen mind, political insight and his fantastic sense of humor. His spirit and dedication to the public sector helps to keep us energized.” 🏛️

# Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

20 years of a continuing legacy



Participants listen intently during a GEHLI leadership workshop.

The Wilder School's Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute has impacted more than a thousand participants in its two decades of existence. The institute promotes the development of current and emerging leaders in academic institutions; other public, private and nonprofit organizations; and communities. Consistent with the mission of VCU, the institute is committed to identifying and nurturing the next generation of leaders through leadership training and public policy research.

In May 1999, Virginia Commonwealth University's Board of Visitors established the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute to commemorate Harris following her retirement as provost and vice president for academic affairs at the university. The institute is part of the Center for Public Policy at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs and is recognized as one of the most

prominent leadership development institutes in Virginia.

"While GEHLI has grown and evolved over the years, its mission, values and dedication to preserving Harris' legacy remain constant," said Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D., current director of GEHLI. "GEHLI strives to ensure that every person, regardless of race and/or gender, has equal opportunity within their organization and communities to strengthen and engage their voice and presence."

During GEHLI's earlier years, its focus was on leadership development for VCU's own faculty and administration. Now GEHLI has expanded to develop and inspire the next generation of leaders beyond campus and throughout the community.

In 2001, GEHLI started a leadership development opportunity called Women in Faith-Based Organizations and Higher

Education for women leaders in Virginia. This later evolved and became known as one of GEHLI's most recognizable programs, HIGHER Ground Women's Leadership Development Program. This five-month leadership experience is geared toward current and emerging women leaders committed to investing in themselves and their organizations.

Another GEHLI initiative was created in 2004 in collaboration with the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus and is known as the Minority Political Leadership Institute. This eight-month experience



## Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

### Mission

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### Vision

The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute will be recognized throughout the region as the premier provider of leadership development programs for its:

- Adherence to the principles of leadership exhibited by Grace E. Harris, Ph.D., based on collaboration and instituting leadership — envisioning a brighter future
- Creating a learning environment, building collaborative partnerships and strengthening the commitment to results
- Commitment to long-term relationships with clients and participants
- Promotion of action-oriented transformational leadership

“The hallmark of leadership is seen in those moments of pride and progress that come forward from inclusion of others.”

- Grace E. Harris

is designed to promote leadership development for those interested in issues relevant to minority communities such as economics, political climate, civic engagement and racial equity. In addition to collaboration and partnerships, the institute also features the concept of transformational leadership, its focus on leadership in academic and community settings, and its commitment to long-term relationships with both its participants and clients in all four of its programs.

Today, the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute has more than 20 years of experience with its programs, research, and impact on VCU, its partners and surrounding communities. Since its inception in 1999, the institute has been able to provide development opportunities for more than 1,000 leaders.

GEHLI’s work helps to promote equal representation and ensure all voices are heard. It is through this work that Harris’ legacy lives on to make a more equitable community for all. It remains a living representation of her leadership style, vision and grace. 🙌



Students don't just sit in their seats. The institute practices hands-on learning.



The late Grace Harris served as provost from 1993-1999.

## The legacy of Grace E. Harris

Grace E. Harris, Ph.D., had a love for learning. She was class valedictorian at Halifax Training School in 1950 and received a Bachelor of Science in sociology with highest honors from Hampton University, then named Hampton Institute. Shortly after graduating, she applied to the Richmond Professional Institute, present-day Virginia Commonwealth University, to pursue a master’s degree but was denied admission due to the commonwealth’s resistance to school integration. Undeterred, Harris found an opportunity to attend Boston University in 1954 and reapplied to RPI a year later, where she graduated with a Master of Social Work in 1960. She also received a Master of Arts and doctorate in sociology from the University of Virginia in 1974 and 1975.

A social worker at heart, Harris began her career in 1955 as a caseworker for the Department of Public Welfare in Hampton, Va. She went on to become a supervisor at the Department of Welfare and Institutions in Richmond, an executive director of the Friends Association for Children and a director of the Richmond Community Action Program. She later returned to VCU to become one of the first three African American faculty hired as an assistant professor for the School of Social Work in 1967. This marked the beginning of a transformative 48-year career at VCU.

Harris quickly rose within the faculty and administrative ranks. She was the director of student affairs, associate professor, associate dean of the School of Social Work, vice provost for continuing student and public service, and in 1993 was the first African American and first woman named provost and vice president for academic affairs at a four-year public university in Virginia. She was also acting president of VCU both in 1995 and 1998, becoming the highest-ranking African American and highest-ranking woman in VCU’s history.

Harris proved to be an integral part of the university’s foundation and growth over those years. Following her retirement as provost, Harris served as a distinguished professor in the Wilder School’s Center for Public Policy until 2015 and led the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute. Harris passed away in 2018 leaving behind a remarkable legacy and an institution bearing her name that is proudly continuing the work she started 20 years ago.



# Alumni spotlight: Nathan Dowdy

## A path to public service

Public service runs in Nathan Dowdy's family. His mother has worked for more than 35 years for the Virginia State Capitol Police. His father spent his career working for Henrico County. So, there wasn't much doubt in Dowdy's mind what career path he would follow. That path led him to pursue a double major at VCU — political science and, at the Wilder School, a degree in homeland security and emergency preparedness. "I considered several Virginia schools, but ultimately realized that VCU's location and many connections to both the executive and legislative branches of Virginia government made it my top choice," Dowdy said.

Dowdy interned in the Secretary of Technology's office in the McAuliffe Administration and during his senior year participated in the Wilder School's Capitol Semester. He interned with Sen. Janet Howell (D-Fairfax) during the 2019 session, gaining experience tracking legislation, talking with lobbyists and answering constituent inquiries. "Nathan was a serious, capable intern. He moved into the activities of our busy legislative office seamlessly, learned quickly and made an invaluable contribution," said Karol Straub, Sen. Howell's chief of staff. "Nate's interest and passion for public service was evident."

During the session, Straub and several others encouraged Dowdy to apply to the Governor's Fellows Program, a prestigious and competitive program that gives participants the opportunity to experience firsthand the administration of state government in the commonwealth. Dowdy was selected and worked in the Secretary of Finance office. As the fellowship wound down, he landed a full-time job as a special assistant to Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne. "Our fellows program attracts strong students with an interest in government and policy," Layne said. "When we can then hire those young people like Nathan, it's a win-win. We get motivated employees who are eager to learn, and they get real-world, hands-on experience in government administration."

"My coursework, internship and fellowship all prepared me well to understand both the process and the politics of creating policy," Dowdy noted. He hopes his next opportunity in public service will encompass his interest in public policy and state government.

Dowdy's advice to others considering public service? "Find what you really want to do, don't be afraid to speak your mind, but also remember to be nice to everyone — whatever their job or point of view may be." 🛡️

# Celebrating excellence in government

## Awards will recognize outstanding contributions

Seven honorees will be recognized at the 14th Excellence in Virginia Government Awards in 2021. The awards, a signature program of the Wilder School, honor individuals and organizations who have made noteworthy contributions to the practice of government and the betterment of the state.

### The new honorees include:



**Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award.** Scott has spent more than four decades in public service. Before being elected to Congress in 1992, he served for 15 years in Virginia's General Assembly in both the House of Delegates and state Senate. Currently the

longest-serving of Virginia's congressional delegation, Congressman Scott serves as chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor. The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual Virginian whose career represents the highest values of public service and citizenship and who has made a substantial contribution to the good of the commonwealth.



**John C. Purnell Jr. will receive the Grace E. Harris Leadership Award.** Purnell spent 40 years as executive director of the Friends Association for Children, where he worked tirelessly to ensure that at-risk children and families, primarily African-American, would grow into productive members of society. The

Grace E. Harris Leadership Award, new in 2020, recognizes an individual Virginian whose career represents the highest values of public service and citizenship and who has made a substantial contribution to the good of the commonwealth and the community.



**A.E. Dick Howard, the architect of Virginia's modern-day Constitution, will receive the Hill-Robinson Expansion of Freedom Award.** Fifty years ago, Virginia voters resoundingly endorsed a new state Constitution, one that enshrined hard-won civil rights protections and voting rights, and committed the state to educational equality.



**Cristina Ramirez will receive the Unsung Hero Award.** Ramirez is an academic, an advocate and an expert on diversity, equity and inclusion. As a librarian in Henrico County, Ramirez develops and delivers services and programs to promote literacy and writing among Latino youth.



**Department of Juvenile Justice will receive the Innovation in Government Award.** Its Transformation Plan is touching nearly every aspect of the agency's operations and has yielded dramatic gains and positive outcomes for youth and families served by DJJ.



**Virginia Housing Development Authority will receive the Public-Private Partnership Award.** VHDA is a public-private organization established by Virginia's General Assembly in

1972 to help all Virginians attain quality, affordable housing. VHDA fulfills its mission by partnering with the greater housing community to offer programs, products, services and expertise that address the evolving spectrum of homeownership, rental and supportive housing needs.



**Health Brigade, formerly known as the Fan Free Clinic, will receive the Community Enhancement Award.** Health Brigade is celebrating 50 years of providing primary medical care, mental health and wellness services, and HIV/STI testing to those least served in Richmond and 22 surrounding counties. 🏠

“These awards recognize outstanding work at all levels of government in Virginia and honor dedicated public service, innovative approaches and commitment to excellence,” said Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D., interim dean of the Wilder School. “Our recipients have made tremendous impacts in their communities and across the commonwealth.”

## Wilder Graduate Scholars' Fellowship program

The 2019 cohort of 13 Wilder Fellows is being hosted by the Virginia Department of Corrections, Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia State Board of Elections, PlanRVA, VCU RVA Eviction Lab, City of Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building, and the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy.

Fellows receive one year of tuition assistance and a generous stipend during the academic year in exchange for 20 hours of professional service at their host non-profit or government agency. Fellows are given the opportunity to learn and apply their skills in assisting with special projects and providing program support to organizations that advance the public good.

The Wilder Graduate Scholars' Fellowship program is nationally recognized and is a cornerstone of the Wilder School graduate student experience. Nearly 40 different agencies have sponsored fellowships for 100 individual Wilder Fellows. 🏛️



Left to right: Lark Washington, Gabriella Pino-Moreno, Ashley Ferguson, Matthew Whibley, Rebekah Cazares, Shajuana Isom-Payne, Jake Kline, Eric Mai, Taylor Jenkins, Amelie Rives, Dan Motta, Woody Rogers. Not photographed: Aleigh Faulk and Hillary Smalls

# Support the Wilder School

**Your gifts support our students, faculty and staff to inform and transform public policy. All donations, regardless of size, make a positive impact.**

**Make it real.**  
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There are many ways to give back while supporting tomorrow's leaders. Learn how you can help us by contacting James Wasilewski, the Wilder School's director of development, at [wasilewskijr@vcu.edu](mailto:wasilewskijr@vcu.edu) or (804) 828-6205, or Laura Pond, development coordinator, at [pondlj@vcu.edu](mailto:pondlj@vcu.edu) or (804) 828-6706. For more information, please visit us at [support.vcu.edu/give/wilder](http://support.vcu.edu/give/wilder).



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## 2020 Virginia Capitol Semester

A record 40 VCU students participated in the 2020 Virginia Capitol Semester, interning during the legislative session with members from both the Senate and House of Delegates. The Capitol Semester Program allows students to gain firsthand experience in the legislative arena while taking classes as a full-time student.