The VCU Holmes Scholars Program provides students interested in pursuing a Ph.D. with resources and professional development opportunities to best position them for tenure-track faculty positions. The program is part of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Holmes Scholars Program, which supports students from historically underrepresented communities enrolled in doctoral programs in education. I am excited that the Holmes Scholars Program at VCU focuses on preparing our scholars for academic positions at high (R2) and very high (R1) research academic institutions. Students who apply to VCU’s program are selected based on their active research agenda and excellent academic standing in their doctoral program.

The VCU Holmes Scholars Program benefits the university in many ways, including:

- By promoting the diversity of the professional community and preparing educators who can serve diverse learners;
- By incorporating the benefits of a national program on the VCU campus, such as recruiting more effectively, connecting students with a national peer network, boosting graduation rates; and
- By joining a growing national community of administrators, faculty, and students who are dedicated to diversifying the field of education.

Since being named dean of the VCU School of Education a little over five years ago, I have been committed to strengthening the school’s support for the Holmes Scholars Program. I am very proud of the fact that membership in the VCU Holmes Scholars Program has more than doubled in the last four years – from five members in 2017 to 13 members today. These Holmes Scholars are part of a supportive national network of peers, all of whom have access to unique professional experiences that will help lead to their overall success in academia.

The AACTE 74th Annual Meeting was held in person in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was an excellent opportunity for our scholars to present their research and receive feedback in an open, supportive setting. It was great seeing everyone there!
MEET THE SCHOLARS

Learn more about our Scholars: their research, scholarship, recent wins, and overall greatness!

Ejana Bennett (She/Her)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Curriculum, Culture, and Change, Ant. Spring 2023

Brief Bio: Current president of the VCU Holmes Scholars Program. Ejana also works as a graduate research assistant with the VCU Department of Teaching and Learning. Examines the impact teacher racial identity development and teacher critical racial consciousness have on student outcomes such as student critical consciousness, student-teacher relationships, and student belonging.

Recent Wins: January 2022, National Holmes Scholar of the Month.

La-Neka Brown (She/Her/Hers)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Educational Leadership, Policy and Justice, Ant. Spring 2025

Brief Bio: Research interests include the retention and professional development of k-12 classroom teachers in public education, system change, microlearning, and teacher leadership.

Recent Wins: I participated in a team led by Dr. David Naff that submitted the following paper, "How Schools Provide Access to Advanced Courses: An Analysis of Federal, State, and District Policies," for consideration at the 2022 AERA Annual Meeting. The paper was reviewed and accepted by a panel constituted by the Division H - Research, Evaluation, and Assessment in Schools/Division H - Section 1: Applied Research in Schools.

Bisola Duyile (She/Her/Hers)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision, Ant. Spring 2023

Brief Bio: Graduate research assistant with the VCU Department of Teaching and Learning. Focus on lived experiences of persons with disabilities and how that impacts counselors and counselor educators.

Recent Wins: First author on a submitted chapter manuscript highlighting mental health professionals' collaboration in supporting Black students with disabilities in K-12 settings.

Michelle Hicks (She/Her/Y’all)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Special Education and Disability Policy, Ant. Spring 2024

Brief Bio: Holds her teaching certifications in the areas of specific learning disabilities, specific emotional disabilities. She worked as a special education teacher in public schools in Maryland and Virginia for 25 years.

Recent Wins: Second author on a submitted manuscript about retention of special education teachers.

Vivian Medina-Messner (She/Her)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Art Education, Ant. Winter 2023

Brief Bio: An Assistant Professor of Journalism at the Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture at Virginia Commonwealth University. The co-chair of the Diversity Committee at the Robertson School.

Recent Wins: I hosted a panel about educational opportunities in the Latino/Latinx communities. Supporting Academic Success in Latino/Latinx Communities. You can watch it via YouTube.
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Isaiah Moore (He/Him)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Educational Policy, Leadership, and Justice, Ant. Spring 2024

Brief Bio: Most interested in Black male achievement in K-12 settings, the structure and efficacy of community schools, school integration, civically engaging pedagogy, social justice education, and the efficacy of Black male teachers.

Recent Wins: I successfully completed the first year of my doctoral program and obtained a research internship with the Learning Policy Institute for the summer.

Korinthia (Kori) Nicolai (She/Her)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Educational Psychology, Ant. Spring Spring 2023

Brief Bio: Serves as the Virginia Commonwealth University Holmes Scholars Program president-elect and the Junior Co-chair for Graduate Student Committee for AERA Motivation Special Interest Group. Interested in the cultural effects on psychology and the unique experiences historically underrepresented minorities have in the United States.

Recent Wins: First first author submission accepted to AERA!

Ashley Pointer (She/Her/Hers)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision, Ant. Spring 2023

Brief Bio: Assistant Project Director for the Center for Urban Education and Family supporting its initiatives for family wellness, educational excellence, and economic mobility for Black and Latino families.

Recent Wins: Third author on a recent publication!

Christine Powell (She/Her/Hers)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Education, Special Education, and Disability Leadership, Ant. Spring 2022

Brief Bio: Chair for the SOE Student Leadership Council, a program assistant with MERC, and a graduate research assistant for the Department of Counseling and Special Education.

Recent Wins: I passed my comps!

Waleed Sami (He/Him)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision, Ant. Spring 2022

Brief Bio: Past clinical experiences involve acute care settings, locked residential facilities, group homes, and correctional settings for adolescents and their families. Interested in looking at how inequality and the political economy impact mental health.

Recent Wins: Currently completing my dissertation and have started interviewing. Was fortunate to have two first-authored publications last year in two journals. I was also invited to a conference to speak on a panel on the Political Economy of Health and Mental Health.
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Martinique Sealy (She/Her/Hers)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Educational Psychology, Ant. Spring 2023

Brief Bio: Research interests include PK-12 grades, minoritized youth, and the integration of culturally-relevant pedagogy. Current research focuses on students’ funds of knowledge [specifically identity, culture, and language] and creating asset-based classroom contexts to foster student academic achievement.

Recent Wins: I am proud of my participation in an array of publications since my doctoral journey began, and I continue to work towards a multitude of research projects and publications (Publications include: Sealy et. al., 2021; Bae, et. al., 2021; Acar, et. al., 2021; Eum. et. al., 2021; & Eum et. al., 2020).

Brooke Taylor (They/Them)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Curriculum, Culture, and Change, Ant. Spring 2024

Brief Bio: Co-Chair for the “Intersections in the Lives of LGBTQIA+ Communities” iCubed core; adjunct professor within VCU’s the department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies. Research interests include: Carceral studies, Black queer adolescence, and the intersection of school discipline, race, and gender.

Recent Wins: Beginning the process of writing my first academic article for journal submission. Surviving the first year madness of doctoral work!

Christina A. Tillery (She/Her/Y’all)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision, Ant. Spring 2024

Brief Bio: Serves as a practicing high school counselor and researches Black girlhood and sisterhood. Passionate about collaboration between practitioners and counselor education researchers to develop equitable school counseling services for all students.

Recent Wins: Virginia's School Counselor of the Year - 2022 and writing dope material with talented researchers for Black girls and practicing school counselors!

Tanya Wineland (She/Her)
Degree Program: Ph.D. Educational Psychology, Ant. Spring 2025

Brief Bio: Research centers on multicultural undergraduate transfer students’ sense of belonging. Installed as an undergraduate academic advisor at VCU School of Business where the transfer student population has a substantial presence.

Recent Wins: Submitting a pre-conference proposal and meeting more critical milestones in my first year.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SCHOLARS' SCHOLARSHIP & LINE OF RESEARCH BY VISITING OUR WEBSITE!
In March 2022, the Holmes Scholars attended the 74th American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Holmes Scholars participated in the annual business meeting and presented their research through roundtable discussions and poster presentations.

Click [HERE](#) for additional photos.

Learn More about the VCU Holmes Scholars:

Twitter: @VCUHolmes

#VCUHolmesScholar

Questions? Email us at holmesscholar@vcu.edu