

# From the Dean



### Dear Friends,

At the VCU School of Education, we are committed to meeting the needs of the communities that we serve in a way that is meaningful and engaging to our students. One of the ways that we do that is by opening up opportunities for

research and study that our students are looking for. In recognition of that, we had a record-breaking year in FY20, with nearly \$32 million in external awards. That's a \$3 million increase over last year!

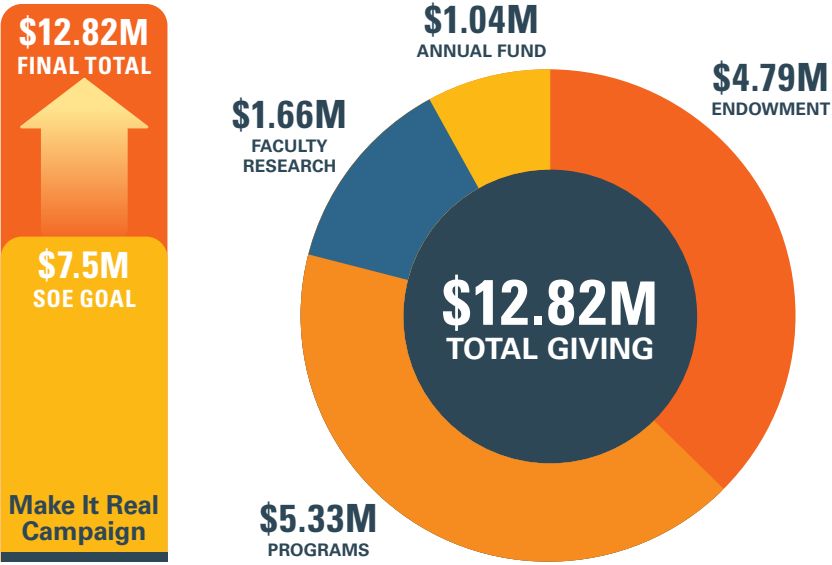
Our school has seen a consistent increase in external awards over the last decade, winning grants from the likes of the U.S. Department of Education, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Science Foundation just to name a few. We are also extremely grant-productive, with an average of \$745,000 per faculty member in external funding in FY19, which puts us 9<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. in this metric.

But we're about more than just numbers. We also demonstrate our quality and leadership as a school of education by driving meaningful change in how we prepare educators and other professionals. This year, we expressed our continued solidarity with anti-racist protests and efforts to eradicate structural and systemic racism. As a leader, we support this movement not just with words, but with actions.

As we continue to face the uncertainties of a global pandemic, it's been heartwarming to see how our faculty, staff and students have responded to this challenge by pulling together and renewing our commitment to each other and to those we serve. Thank you for your support in all our efforts.

**Andrew P. Daire, Ph.D.**  
*Dean, VCU School of Education*

## Make It Real Campaign for School of Education Exceeds Expectations



The Make It Real Campaign for the School for Education closed June 30. Because of your generosity, we exceeded our \$7.5 million goal by 171%. Thank you for stretching the boundaries and investing in the future of education by giving \$12,821,232!

Your generosity is already transforming and elevating the lives of future educators and those in the community. We have awarded more scholarship funds than ever before. Due to professorships and other endowments, we have attracted extraordinary faculty. We have provided faculty with support for start-up research ideas, reached out to the community with new initiatives, and provided students with purposeful learning and living experiences.

Your gifts of \$4,787,768 to our school's endowment represents 37% of the total raised, and it will increase our endowment by nearly five times. Of endowment dollars given, \$3,900,031, or 30% of the total given, supports students with scholarships and other opportunities. Expendable giving for programs topped \$5,338,999, faculty research giving came in at \$1,656,256, and student support and faculty support, typically known as the Annual Fund, was \$1,038,209.

More than 3,350 donors made this impact. We promise to continue to use your gifts wisely and will always share with you the impact you are making on enriching the lives of others. We encourage you to look for future Momentums, e-newsletters (please send us your email address), and visit our new website to stay connected and to learn about your impact as it happens. We thank you and hope you will continue to share your generosity with our students, our faculty, and all they serve in the community.

**Edward G. Kardos**, Executive Director of Development, Alumni and Student Engagement

## Dr. Katie Brendli: Supporting greater outcomes for people with disabilities

Dr. Katie Brendli is a data associate for the Yang Tan Institute (YTI) on Employment and Disability in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. At the YTI, she supports the Autism Transition to Adulthood Initiative (ATTAIN) to explore factors that predict successful transitions to adulthood for young people with autism. She received her Ph.D. in Education, with a concentration in Special Education and Disability Policy/Leadership from the VCU School of Education in September 2020.



### What drew you to the field of education?

I volunteered often in high school, where I provided direct support to my peers with autism and severe disabilities receiving the majority of their instruction in a self-contained setting. I especially bonded with one of my peers, to whom I would read stories aloud every morning. She had difficulty with long-term memory and could never remember my name, until one of my last days volunteering in the classroom before my graduation. She has a special place in my heart, as do the rest of the seven students who received instruction in Mrs. Fera's class. Mrs. Fera was the special education teacher and along with the two instructional assistants, were incredibly supportive of their students' individualized strengths, preferences and interests, and sought ways to help their students feel included and accepted by their peers without disabilities.

However, I also observed that the students were often not included. I questioned whether this was because of misconceptions and stigma, a lack of awareness, perhaps the school culture, something else, or all of the above. Even as a high school student, I witnessed so many barriers to inclusion and the need to better understand how we as a society can change our perceptions from only seeing people's deficits to valuing

the unique contributions we all bring to the community.

### Why VCU SOE for your Ph.D.?

I chose VCU SOE for many reasons, including its core values and mission to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. VCU is also an R1 university that not only produces high quality research, but strives to bridge the gaps between research, policy and practice in order to foster greater PK-12 experiences and outcomes for diverse youth. Thirdly, VCU SOE is comprised of a very knowledgeable and passionate faculty, staff, and student body, including several experts in one of my main research interests and passions, which is

supporting greater postsecondary transitions and outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### What impressed you most about your program?

Going to VCU for my Ph.D. program was one of the best decisions of my life. I have learned so much from my former instructors, have made lifelong friends, have a network of research collaborators, and have a support system of faculty and students who all want the best for one another. VCU SOE has exemplary faculty and staff, who are both supportive and willing to provide opportunities for collaboration in their research projects. During my doctoral program, I also received exceptional advising from Dr. LaRon Scott, who encouraged and challenged me both professionally and personally.

### How did your Ph.D. program help prepare you for your current job at Cornell?

VCU provided me with extensive well-rounded experiences and opportunities for growth and collaboration. I was able to be involved in multiple research projects, provide service to the community, engage in internships that aligned with my preferences and interests, and take on leadership roles from the local to the international level.

## TOP 6 WAYS for SOE alumni to stay engaged

- Volunteer to be a speaker at an upcoming event
  - Participate in mentorship opportunities
  - Register for one of our upcoming programs and events
  - Join our Alumni Council
  - Download the VCU Alumni app to stay in touch with all the ways to engage
  - Update your information **TODAY** to receive our next **momentum** newsletter
- Learn more @ [go.vcu.edu/soealum](https://go.vcu.edu/soealum)**

## Christine Powell: "Find your passion, pursue your dream"

Christine Powell is a second-year doctoral student in the VCU School of Education's Ph.D. in Education, Concentration in Special Education and Disability Leadership program (which transitioned to Ph.D. in Special Education in fall 2020) with an estimated May 2022 graduation. Originally from Emporia, Virginia, Powell earned her undergraduate psychology degree and her Master of Teaching degree from VCU. She currently works as a program assistant in the Minority Educator Center, a center affiliated with SOE, and serves as a co-chair of the Student Leadership Council.



### What has impressed you most about your program so far?

For me, the VCU motto "make it real" has really come to life. My professors and peers have been super-supportive of me and my research initiatives. I've been in my doctoral program for only one year, and I've already had so many opportunities. I attended two national conferences, as well as a state-level conference where I presented. I co-authored several manuscripts and co-authored a book chapter with my advisor, Dr. LaRon Scott, who is awesome! I've been very impressed with all of these experiences, and I know that the overall experience will help to prepare me to achieve my goals.

### What would be your dream job?

My dream job would be to combine all of my VCU degrees into a powerful policy to practice role in special education. First, I want to be a tenure track professor at an R1 university [R1 institutions like VCU have numerous resources

for research, as well as many people conducting research]. Second, I want to be a consultant who works with special education teachers. I taught for three years after earning my

master's degree, and I'm still a licensed special education teacher. I want my work as a professor and researcher to make a positive impact on special education teachers, and I want to help those teachers realize that what they do matters. They need that support in order to succeed.

### Any tips for students considering study in your program at VCU SOE?

Find your passion, and pursue your dream — remember why you chose to pursue it, and know that it's worth pursuing. Build relationships with your advisor, your professors, and with an overall community of supporters, and remember that you are never alone. I'm very fortunate. I have supporters who rally around me, checking in to see that I'm okay, and making sure that I'm staying the course.

### What drew you to the Student Leadership Council?

I was inspired to join because faculty and staff actively participate in council-sponsored events like Dean Daire's Town Hall Meetings with students. There are also opportunities to engage with peers, build strong connections with school administration and professors, collaborate with alumni, and engage in community activities. As co-chair of the council along with Amber Brown, we hope to use this platform to represent student voices and impact change within the School of Education for current and future students.

## Momentum | Fall 2020

Owen Wachter, Editor Michael Lay, Designer

### Education Alumni Council Representatives

Andrew P. Daire, Dean

Edward G. Kardos, Executive Director, Office of Development, Alumni & Student Engagement

Jasmine Carter, Alumni & Student Engagement Coordinator, [carterja4@vcu.edu](mailto:carterja4@vcu.edu)

Jared Crist, B.A. '14, M.Ed. '18 (President, Education Alumni Council)

The SOE Education Alumni Council welcomes its newest members: Kevin Bruny, Robin Liesfeld, Julia Baily. To view the complete Education Alumni Council roster visit:

[go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](https://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)

*Momentum* is a biannual publication of the VCU School of Education Office of Development, Alumni & Student Engagement.

## SHARE YOUR WHY!



## Your story inspires.

We want to create a movement starting with your "Why" story.

Why did you choose this field? Why do you commit yourself to your craft every day?

Inspire future educators. Help us share your story.



[facebook.com/vcusoe/](https://facebook.com/vcusoe/)

Like our Facebook page, tag 2 potential future educators, and use the #soeshareyourwhy to enter to win an SOE swag bag!





Visit us at [soe.vcu.edu](http://soe.vcu.edu)

- COVID-19 Rapid Research Grants
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# momentum

Fall 2020

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## Spotlight on SOE faculty research

### Drs. Cormier, Xu and Gomez awarded COVID-19 rapid research grants

Studies provide resources for PreK-12 students, support systems for international students from China, and address needs of English language learners



Dwayne Ray Cormier, Ph.D.



Yaoying Xu, Ph.D.



Rachel F. Gomez, Ph.D.



Andrene J. Castro, Ph.D.

Three VCU School of Education faculty members and their teams were recently awarded COVID-19 rapid research grants by the university to help better understand the pandemic and to combat it.

Dwayne Ray Cormier, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Foundations of Education and visiting iCubed scholar, and Yaoying Xu, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Counseling and Special Education, received news of their awards in April. Rachel F. Gomez, Ph.D., iCubed visiting faculty scholar in the Department of Teaching and Learning, received news of her award in May. Gomez's team in the iCubed Urban Education and Family Transdisciplinary Core includes co-principal investigators Andrene J. Castro, Ph.D., visiting iCubed scholar and assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, and Cormier.

Cormier's study will explore pandemic preparedness and response within PreK-12 public school systems located within the Greater Richmond area. Findings from the research will have an immediate impact, providing PreK-12 school systems with a preparedness checklist and resource guides as they prepare for future pandemics and the reopening of schools post-COVID-19.

Xu's study will begin with a focus group interview of 6-8 international students from China on their experiences and perceptions during the COVID-19 outbreak. Following that, Xu's team will develop and implement a series of culturally responsive support systems to help international students from China cope with this world crisis.

Gomez is principal investigator in her study, which is aimed at meeting the educational needs of Spanish speaking, K-12 English language learners and their families in the midst of the pandemic. Her study will draw from an existing research project with a local iCubed partner, the Richmond Region League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Ms. Vilma Seymour, Richmond Region LULAC president, is a co-principal investigator in the study.

The COVID-19 rapid research funding opportunity is offered by the VCU Office of Research and Innovation, with support of VCU's Wright Center for Clinical and Translational Research. The primary goal of the grants is to advance projects that are ready for rapid development and deployment, that will enhance real time decision making and implementation within the health system and in the local community.

### Child Development Center receives \$1.26M DoEd grant

Grant to provide child care for low-income VCU students, lead to establishment of Urban Education and Family Center.



The U.S. Department of Education awarded the VCU Child Development Center a four-year \$1.26 million grant to provide child care services for the children of low-income undergraduate students at VCU.

The grant was awarded through the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program, which supports the participation of low-income parents in postsecondary education through campus-based child care services.

"The [Child Development Center] staff was very excited to get the news," said Thomas H. Beatty, Ed.D., director of the center. "They are a top-notch group of teachers and they know that this funding will allow them to increase their capacity to provide support to even more children."

"Absent the grant, many undergraduate students would not have been able to afford the monthly tuition," Beatty said. "Further,

the grant will also help increase the retention rate of many undergraduate students and support their persistence to graduation. Finding affordable quality child care is often a barrier for many undergraduate students so the funding this grant provides will remove that barrier."

The center, which is the brainchild of School of Education Dean Andrew Daire, Ph.D., will address individual and contextual stressors that are exacerbated by poverty. It will provide services to families in Richmond's Gilpin Court and Carver communities.

"These services include workforce development, as well as individual and family counseling," Beatty said. "While the tuition support will be for up to 25 children of VCU undergraduate students who receive Pell Grants, the services that will be provided through the Urban Education and Family Center will be far-reaching."

## Transform lives. Join our community.

A message from the Education Alumni Council

Dear Fellow Alumni,

As we all know, the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education is not only a top-rated public school of education and a powerhouse of transformation for the local area, but is primarily a vibrant community of educators, researchers, leaders, and counselors. That community does not stop at the doors of Oliver Hall. We, the alumni, are the mission of the school in action. As president of the Education Alumni Council, I invite you to stay connected with this community.

Recently relaunched and refocused, the Education Alumni Council is enthusiastically pursuing opportunities for alumni to:

- Engage with current School of Education students
- Provide and receive professional development
- Connect with other alumni
- Provide service to the school and to our local communities
- And so much more

These efforts, for alumni and by alumni, are elevated by all of those who participate. Do you have a heart for helping students develop as professionals or for connecting with other educators and counselors? Do you want to play a role in helping all of our neighbors move forward together? Are you looking for new opportunities to learn and grow? Do you have great ideas for supporting and enriching the School of Education community? Then I encourage you to keep in touch with the Education Alumni Council and consider attending, planning, or volunteering for a future program.

Yours in service,  
**Jared Crist, M.Ed. '18**  
President, School of Education Alumni Council

To learn more about SOE alumni engagement opportunities, visit [go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)

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