

momentum

Increasing SOE's Scholarship Endowment

It's about students, faculty and those they support in the community. The Make It Real Campaign for the VCU School of Education transforms your generosity into something bigger than all of us.

"We talk about making an investment, or a financial gift to the school, so that we may impact the lives of those learning in our classrooms to be well prepared to impact the next generation in new and exciting ways," said Ed Kardos, the school's senior director of development. "We are on our way to becoming THE leader in urban education and we need many donors and friends to join us on this journey."

Building our scholarship endowment is one way to move us closer to our goal.

Nearly 70 percent of the school's endowment is designated for student scholarships. That is a big number for a very small scholarship endowment of \$1,525,000. Our entire endowment is close to \$2.3M. Last school year, our donors, who over the years established

the 48 endowment funds, awarded 66 students nearly \$68,515.

"Ten percent of our student body received a scholarship award from our endowment and we would like to see that number grow," Kardos said. Students with promising careers in education, at times, must put their education on hold due to the skyrocketing costs we all face in addition to tuition. "Our school receives far less from the state as compared to a generation ago," Kardos added.

We would like to double our scholarship endowment and substantially increase the opportunity for our students. Campaigns allow us to shine a light on our need for more scholarship funds. If you would like to support students by providing scholarship support, please contact Ed Kardos, senior director of development at egkardos@vcu.edu. If interested in giving to existing scholarships, please go to www.soe.vcu.edu/transformations for a list and description of our endowed scholarships. ■

Dear alumni and friends,



At the end of August, we welcomed 156 new students to the School of Education and 425 returning students who are one step closer to graduation. We also welcomed to our VCU family several new faculty and staff members across SOE and our centers.

VCU is a premier urban research university and as its School of Education we have a responsibility to address the multifaceted challenges that impact our schools and our children. When we focus on the data, talk about school

improvement and district initiatives, and discuss benchmarks and metrics, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that we are talking about the lives and futures of children. The challenges impacting them are not average and won't be fixed with average thinking or average efforts. We have to be boldly aspirational and extraordinary in our intentions, in our work, in our outcomes and in our impact.

We must run to the fire like first responders with a sense of urgency to help the children, to help their futures and to help their lives. This academic year, I challenged our students, faculty and staff to think deeply about how we can change the trajectory for children, particularly our children of promise who are struggling in difficult environments.

I would like to ask each and every one of you to think deeply and introspectively about how you can support this mission. In this edition of *Momentum*, we are highlighting just a few of your stories of impact.

In the words of Richmond mayor Levar Stoney, who spoke at our convocation, "the challenge before us is within our grasp, but we have to approach it thoughtfully and strategically. When public education works, everything is possible."

Thank you for your continued support.

Andrew P. Daire

Dean, VCU School of Education

SOE

HIGHLIGHTING NEW FACULTY

What excites you about being part of the SOE family?



"What excites me about VCU's SOE is the commitment from the faculty, staff and dean to not only embrace the urban education mantra, but to proactively go out and have an impact; here, there, everywhere."

Jeffery L. Wilson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership



"What excites me about being at VCU SOE is the passion that faculty and staff have to create meaningful change in our local, national and international communities. That passion is evident in how VCU SOE's culture is welcoming and encouraging of new, innovative ideas."

Tomika Ferguson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership



"I am excited to join a team of professionals who share my passion for community-engaged research and are driven to affect change in the surrounding community. VCU has the vision, resources and commitment to make an impact and I'm happy to be a part of that."

Naomi Wheeler, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Counselor Education, Department of Counseling and Special Education



"What excites me the most about working in the VCU SOE is the opportunity to innovate. Education is not stagnant, but a lifelong learning journey. I am thrilled to be part of a team of innovators that play such a critical and thoughtful role in advancing innovative ways to educate, engage and ignite future and current thought leaders."

Risha R. Berry, Ph.D.
iCubed Visiting Scholar, Office of the Dean

Make it real.
CAMPAIGN FOR VCU

Five alumni stories – Choosing edu

The science and art of teaching

Audrey Claravall on a life of meaning

Many college grads don't land their "dream job" right out of the gate. They might have one or two jobs — maybe more — before they discover the right fit.

For **Audrey Claravall** (M.Ed. '12), the "right fit" involved a career shift toward a more meaningful life.

After earning her undergraduate degree in communications at Virginia Tech, Claravall worked for a while at The Goddard School in Henrico County, Va. She liked working with children, but she decided to try sales. While she succeeded in her new position, she found that something was missing.

"Sales wasn't fun. It wasn't meaningful. I couldn't see doing that myself," she said. "Then I thought back to The Goddard School. That's when I was the happiest — when I was working with kids."

As that became clear, she decided to pursue a master's degree in education. She considered several master's programs, but one was at the top of her list from the beginning: Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education (VCU SOE).

"The reputation of VCU's teacher preparation programs was amazing, so I was primarily interested in going there," she said. Once classes started, one of the first things that struck her was the quality of the professors.

"They taught us in ways that showed us how we should be teaching our kids," she said. "If you want your students to be engaged, you need to make it interesting. You need to make it hands-on. It wasn't even like I was in school anymore. It was fun!"

After earning her Master of Teaching in Early and Elementary Education, Claravall began teaching at Sandston Elementary School in Henrico County. She taught second grade for two years, and then moved to first grade. She kept in touch with her friends who attended other schools. Comparing the differences, Claravall said, has led to a greater appreciation of her VCU experience.

"Talking to some of them, I think that VCU prepared me a lot better," she said. That preparation included lots of time spent in elementary school classrooms from the very beginning of the program. So much so, that when she finally started student teaching, Claravall already felt comfortable with it.



"I had already been in the classroom. I had worked with kids from different schools, in a lot of different populations. It made it easier to make the transition to full-time teacher," she said.

Today, she applies what she learned at VCU to the way she teaches her students.

"I give them the responsibility to be accountable for what they're learning," she said. For example, when her students show an interest in the environment, she doesn't tell them to start a recycling program. Instead, she asks them, "If we want to take care

of our environment, what can we do at our school?" She encourages them to answer the question themselves, making learning more fun while making an impact on the world.

Claravall and other teachers at Sandston Elementary have found more ways to connect with their students and keep them engaged. One is the daily morning meeting, where the teacher sets time aside with students to help them set goals for the day, as well as solve problems, share exciting news and really get to know each other.

Claravall noticed that once she started spending time getting to know her students, their performance improved overall and teaching got a little easier. Students began to realize that she cared about them as people, and cared about what they were going through at home.

"VCU does a really good job of teaching you the technical side of teaching — the reading methods and theories," Claravall said. "But I had the greatest professors at VCU who also told us about their experiences as teachers. The stories they shared taught us to never forget that our students are people. They are still children. And sometimes, they just need a cheerleader in their corner." ■

Looking back with gratitude

Jim Jenkins on VCU SOE's lasting impact

When **Jim Jenkins** (M.Ed. '79) started attending the VCU SOE in 1973, he knew pretty quickly that it was going to be a uniquely rewarding experience.

"One of my first impressions was how quickly the school began providing hands-on experience for students," he said. "At other schools, students might get three years into the program before being exposed to any practical experience. By then, they might not even want to go into that field anymore. It could be three years wasted."

"At VCU, it was hands-on almost immediately. We were put in the fire early, which paid off tremendously," said Jenkins.

The teachers with whom he worked in the schools quickly made an impression on Jenkins as well. One of his fondest memories is working as an undergraduate with Dr. Stanley Baker, a student teaching advisor at George



Mason Elementary in Richmond. The lessons Dr. Baker taught him have stuck with Jenkins throughout his teaching career.

"Dr. Baker taught me that it isn't possible to tell where a good teacher's influence begins and where it ends," said Jenkins. "Dr. Baker wasn't wedded to procedures or protocols. He insisted

that teachers be decision-makers who constantly work for the betterment of students. That philosophy has served me well."

After earning his bachelor's degree in education from VCU SOE in 1976, Jenkins moved to Fredericksburg, Va. He pursued his master's degree at the school by commuting back to Richmond. He earned his master's degree in education from VCU SOE in 1979, with a concentration in curriculum and instruction.

Jenkins had always wanted to work in outdoor education, so after graduation, he began working at For Love of Children Wilderness School in Harpers Ferry, W.Va. There, he worked with at-risk boys who had been court-ordered to leave the inner-city environment of Washington, D.C., for a short time to live and learn in the Blue Ridge Mountains. For Jenkins, the job was 24 hours a day, five days a week, and it was challenging.

"I credit my time at VCU with giving me the strength and wisdom to be as successful as possible at that job," he said.

Jenkins has now been a teacher for 43 years. During his teaching career, he's been recognized for his accomplishments many times, including Teacher of the Year in both Jefferson County, W.Va., and Loudoun County, Va., as well as receiving the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Teaching in 1994.

Jenkins' mother and sister were also teachers, and both attended VCU SOE. Jenkins' son is now a senior in high school, and VCU is his top choice of colleges to attend next fall.

Jenkins and his son have had mini season tickets to VCU basketball games for many years. Last season, they tried to schedule a campus visit at VCU during a trip to Richmond to see the Rams play. "There were no open spots for the tour that day," Jenkins said. "A call to the VCU alumni office resulted in a staffer taking her own time to take my son on a tour, which is quite unusual. It's also typical of the environment of VCU. The tour lasted over two hours and was superbly done."

"It's reassuring to know that such a large school can still be so personal," he said. ■

A second career in education

Sondra Snidow passes her love of VCU on to her students

Sondra Snidow (M.Ed. '06) worked for 21 years as a nutrition educator and program coordinator. She loved her job, but after she and her husband had two children, she found that job-related travel was taking her away from her family too much.

As a result, she left her job in 1997 and went to work part-time for Henrico County Public Schools in the family and

consumer sciences field. "At the time, I really didn't know what the future would bring for me," she said.

Not long after that, the Commonwealth of Virginia began a pilot for what is known today as Teachers for Tomorrow, a program where high school juniors and seniors interested in a career in education are exposed to a curriculum and hands-on experience that focus on teaching. When the pilot began, Snidow was one of only a handful of teachers in Henrico County chosen to participate.

She soon began taking her high school students in the program on field trips



to VCU. Activities included guided tours of the campus and presentations from Dr. Diane Simon in the School of Education. Snidow recalls that students were impressed with the program, the presentations ... and with VCU.

"We did a survey at the end of each school year asking students in the program what their favorite activity was, and the VCU trip always came out on top," she said. "For many of them, the Teachers for Tomorrow program taught them more about how to handle the college experience than any advanced placement class ever could."

Education and impacting communities

The people we meet along the way

Amy Taloma combines counseling with higher ed

Often, it's the people you meet along the way who help determine the path you take in life.

Amy Taloma (M.Ed. '10) has experienced this many times in her life, including once while pursuing her undergraduate degree in political science at Lynchburg College.

"I fell in love with higher education in general when I was there," she said. "Lynchburg College had a wonderful dean of students, and I shadowed him. I asked him what I needed to do to get into higher ed, and he said to get a master's degree and work my way up from there."

"It's interesting," Taloma said, "when someone influential tells you that you can do something in life, you often believe them."

After graduating, Taloma and her fiancé got married and settled back in their hometown of Richmond, Va. "I remember, I was working at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart across

from Monroe Park at the time," she said. "I signed up for the master's program in education at a university outside of Richmond and was all set to start."

It was then that Taloma's path was unexpectedly influenced by two people. First, a church member at Sacred Heart told her about a master's program in counseling with an emphasis on higher education. It was within walking distance, at the VCU SOE.

Counseling had been a consistent theme in Taloma's career since graduation. At Sacred Heart, she had counseled the poor through door-to-door ministry and helped church members plan funerals. Prior to that, she had offered support to parents of premature babies while she was community director for the March of Dimes.

Taloma made an appointment with the school's Mary A. Hermann, J.D., Ph.D., who is now an associate professor in Counseling and Special Education. As they discussed Taloma's career goals and what options the school could offer, Taloma could feel her path being influenced by Dr. Hermann — toward VCU.

"I had clearly identified with counseling



in my career, and I had been interested in higher ed ever since Lynchburg College," said Taloma. "I just never put the two together until talking with Dr. Hermann. She assured me that I could achieve my career goals through the school's higher ed track.

"It turned out to be a perfect fit."

Taloma earned her master's degree from VCU SOE in December 2010. Today, she's assistant director for Programs and Partnerships at VCU's Division for Health Sciences Diversity, which helps students from a wide

variety of backgrounds become health professionals through summer enrichment programs and career exploration.

One of the division's programs, VCU Acceleration, is a comprehensive year-long program offered to incoming VCU freshmen. It includes a living-learning community with high levels of student interaction and increased interaction with faculty outside the classroom. Taloma said that her SOE practicum and internship experiences helped to prepare her for working with students in the program.

"My practicum with the Office of Judicial Affairs and Academic Integrity included an in-service project where I worked with Residential Life & Housing on conflict resolution," she said. "My internship with VCU University Student Commons and Activities included working with student interns on things like time management, budgeting money and setting goals."

"Both of these things feed into my work now with students in the Acceleration program," she said. ■

Well prepared for a rewarding career

Holly Whistler impressed by VCU SOE's practical experience, interdisciplinary approach

There wasn't one big "Aha!" moment in **Holly Whistler's** (M.Ed. '05) life that told her she should become a teacher.

"For me, it was more a series of smaller moments," she said. As a child growing up in Dinwiddie County, Va., she remembers playing school with her younger sisters and cousins. "I was always the teacher. I was the one assigning vocabulary words and giving tests."

She also has vivid memories of reading to her great-grandfather when she was five years old and having him tell her how well she was reading. She later developed a love of writing, and after spending two years at Richard Bland College in Petersburg, Va., she went on to earn her bachelor's degree in English from Longwood College in 2001.



She had lots of friends at VCU at the time, and she had made many trips to Richmond to visit them. "There was so much creativity and innovation in Richmond. There was something new and different to do every day," she said. The attraction was so strong that she enrolled at VCU in 2001 to pursue her master's degree in literature, hoping to become a professional writer.

Soon after enrolling, Whistler took a job as a teacher and found that she enjoyed it.

As a result, before she had even finished her master's degree in literature, she was already pursuing a second master's in special education at the VCU SOE.

One of her earliest memories of VCU SOE was how quickly she was exposed to hands-on practical experience that would benefit her later in her career.

"I'm amazed at all the opportunities we had," she said. One of those opportunities was a class she took on how to effectively teach students with autism. Whistler recalls that it wasn't taught in a VCU SOE classroom on campus.

"It was taught at a school for students with autism. We saw the students there every day when we went to class. When you think about it, the approach makes perfect sense. We needed to understand people with autism. There was no better place to do it."

Whistler also benefited from the interdisciplinary teaching approach of the school.

"Experts from a variety of disciplines — such as school counselors, school psychologists, educators from other

areas of the university — came to our classrooms and talked to us," she said. "This cross-curricular approach was really helpful, especially when you consider that many universities tend to isolate their student populations."

"At VCU, we even worked on projects together with students in other curricula, which gave us even more exposure to other perspectives that would help us later on in our jobs."

Today, Whistler works at a community college in Wilmington, N.C., teaching English and counseling special needs students. She's also a doctoral candidate in Education Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington. Her family moved there eight years ago when her husband had a career opportunity. She's still a strong supporter of VCU SOE.

"Some of my students from North Carolina end up going to VCU because I tell them that it's so amazing," she said. "Richmond is so supportive of VCU SOE's culture, and VCU SOE is so supportive of the Richmond area. It really is a happy marriage." ■

Teaching the program had another benefit — it made Snidow realize that she needed to refresh her professional skills as well. "I had considered obtaining my master's degree in education, and Henrico County had recently begun their laptop initiative. When I learned that the School of Education offered a master's degree with a specialty in instructional technology, it really appealed to me. The timing was perfect. It all felt like it was meant to be," she said.

Snidow enrolled in the master's program at VCU SOE and quickly began to see the benefits, particularly from her research projects.

"I was teaching at Hermitage High School in Henrico County while pursuing my master's degree. I was having a behavioral issue with one of my students, so one of my research projects was to examine several techniques for dealing with that particular type of behavior, apply each technique in the classroom, and then report the results," she recalled. "It really helped me with classroom management at the time and still does to this day."

Snidow is now officially retired from teaching, but she still substitutes about 28 days a year in Henrico County Public

Schools. She also hears occasionally from some of her students she taught years ago. One former student was an officer in the Future Educators Association at Hermitage, which supports students who are interested in education-related careers. She majored in nursing when she started at VCU, but soon found it wasn't the right fit.

"She called me to tell me she had switched to an education major. She was so excited, she just couldn't wait to tell me," Snidow said. ■

Are you interested in impacting students' lives beyond the classroom? Contact the VCU SOE to learn how. Call (804) 827-2670 or email soessc@vcu.edu.



School of Education

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momentum

At VCU, public school education deans brainstorm ways to address Virginia's K-12 teacher shortage

Deans of public schools and colleges of education from across Virginia gathered at the VCU School of Education on Aug. 9 to explore ideas about how to best address Virginia's critical shortage of K-12 teachers.

"Virginia is experiencing a statewide shortage of teachers that is strongly impacting Richmond and Petersburg schools," said VCU School of Education Dean Andrew Daire, Ph.D. "We're discussing strategies on how colleges and schools of education can address this challenge, including the viability of bringing education majors back to schools and colleges of education."

"As a school of education in a premier urban research university, it is important

for us to meaningfully address the issues faced in our state," he said.

Among the group were representatives of education schools and departments at the University of Virginia, Old Dominion University, Virginia State University, Longwood University, George Mason University, Radford University and the College of William and Mary.

Also in attendance were superintendents of local schools, including James F. Lane, Ed.D., of Chesterfield County Public Schools, and Eric Jones, Ph.D., of Powhatan County Public Schools.

Virginia Secretary of Education Dietra Trent, Ph.D., also participated in the

working session, saying that there are few issues more critical facing Virginia than addressing the teacher shortage.

"Last year by the end of October, there were over 800 classrooms across the commonwealth without a permanent teacher. And by early estimations, it appears we're going to be on a similar track this year," she said.

"What you are doing today is more meaningful to the commonwealth than you can ever imagine," she added. "The teacher shortage in Virginia is at a critical state. But I have faith in the convening of this group that you will help see us through."

The deans met a day after a state task force focused on diversifying Virginia's educator pipeline presented its recommendations to Gov. Terry McAuliffe, the Board of Education and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

The task force of educators, superintendents, human resource professionals, higher education teacher preparation program administrators — including Daire — and state-level policy staff made a variety of policy recommendations. Those recommendations included steps to diversify the teacher applicant pool, create strong professional pathways to licensure and employment, and support the retention of teachers of color, particularly African Americans and Hispanics, in the K-12 education workforce. ■



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