VCU School of Nursing held a vesting ceremony in spring 2019 for the traditional B.S. class of 2021 welcoming students to their start in the nursing profession. The ceremony was held in the auditorium of the Hermes A. Kontos Medical Sciences Building on the MCV Campus.
Hello Alumni and Friends.

We are capping off another year of exciting activities and accomplishments for our school. In reflecting on all that has happened since last July, I’m reminded that it’s the end of my sixth year here at VCU. How quickly the time has passed, and I find myself more inspired today than when I first joined this team of highly talented faculty and staff! We’ve achieved a lot together relatively quickly and have no plans to slow down.

One of the critical priorities I’ve mentioned over the past year is the development of our school’s strategic plan to guide us into the future. We completed the plan, titled “Beyond 125: Connecting our Legacy to the Future,” after a collaborative process that involved many internal and external stakeholders. The cover story in this edition of Connections reflects the energy and commitment that went into crafting the plan, the key goals and themes, as well as examples of the plan already in motion. Several alumni were also part of this process. We recognize that your input and engagement are essential to our success.

Another way our school is moving forward involves partnering with community colleges to ensure we’re doing our part to provide a highly educated nursing workforce. The future of nursing depends on us being innovative and flexible to meet student and employer needs. It also requires scholarships for future nurses, and fortunately I’m pleased to share that we’ve received a couple of large gift commitments this year from donors interested in supporting this need.

As you may already know, we celebrated our school’s 125th anniversary in 2018 and culminated the yearlong observance with a fundraising gala in the fall. Thanks to many of you, more than $93,495 was raised for our 125th Anniversary Scholarship. It’s not too late if you’d still like to support this effort. Our goal is to raise $125,000 for this endowed scholarship fund. Please contact Pam Lowe in the Development Office to let her know you’re interested.

As we look ahead to the next academic year, I’m excited to discover what new opportunities lie ahead for our school. I am indeed grateful for your support.

Jean Giddens
Dean and Professor
Doris B. Yingling Endowed Chair
Truth be told, the name of VCU School of Nursing’s new strategic plan – “Beyond 125: Connecting Our Legacy to the Future” – could just as easily have been “Above and Beyond 125.” Building on the successes of its first 125 years, the school continues to go above and beyond in working to meet the evolving needs of the nursing workforce.

Commenting on last year’s milestone anniversary, Dean Jean Giddens, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, professor and the Doris B. Yingling Endowed Chair, noted that meeting new challenges requires the school to continue offering relevant programs and adding innovative practice models while remaining a leader in scholarship and research.

Identifying those challenges was part of the charge for a five-year strategic plan to be developed with input from faculty, staff, students, alumni and partners at VCU Health. The process, as collaborative as many of the projects that sprang from it, built on the school’s new vision, mission and values that were established and adopted in 2017.

Last year — armed with their mission of shaping nursing’s future — Giddens, a faculty and staff task force and an external consultant spent about eight months crafting “Beyond 125” in alignment with the university’s strategic plan, “Quest 2025: Together We Transform.”

A high level of faculty and staff engagement was critical to success. The result was not just a collection of words. You actually could call it a vision in motion.

As portions of the plan are implemented, Giddens said, “We really are living this. Every time we think about something we are doing, I can point to the strategic plan and what it represents.”

She noted that the 125th anniversary last year was a pivotal time, a perfect time to think about long-range planning especially in light of the university’s work on a new strategic plan.

“It was an excellent opportunity for us to leverage our work in that way,” she added.
It’s within the strategic themes, the attributes that set the school apart, that one can see vivid illustrations of the plan at work.

“Every one of these themes is critical,” said Giddens. “We are being bold and proactive, positioning ourselves to be in a different place than we are today for what health care’s needs will be in the future.”

It goes without saying that innovation permeates the new strategic plan. One example is the graduate certificate in health care innovation, a collaborative effort between the School of Nursing and the VCU da Vinci Center that is awaiting approval by the university and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

Deborah Barksdale, Ph.D., FNP-BC, CNE, FAANP, FAAN, associate dean of academic affairs and Nursing Alumni Endowed Professor, explains that the 12-credit certificate program targets graduate or nondegree-seeking students who wish to learn more about leadership, quality and safety, outcomes management, design, product development and more. Ideally, said Barksdale, “We are hoping [certificate-holders] will be able to engage in health care environments but also be more comfortable coming up with innovations.”

She said the combined online and on-site program, one of very few in the country thus far, is designed to be “useful and value-added.”

Also falling within the innovation purview are more groundbreaking discoveries to address a diversity of current and future health conditions. Ongoing research and scholarship in areas ranging from Parkinson’s disease to precision medicine, tailored to the individual, puts the School of Nursing at the forefront of the research enterprise.

“In addition to our outstanding research and scholarship, we have developed an effective research funding and sustainability model that enables us to support our unique research infrastructure and grow our research enterprise. Consequently, the School
of Nursing is well poised to achieve the next level as a research powerhouse in the near future,” said Deborah B. McGuire, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, associate dean for research, scholarship, and innovation and the Florence E. Elliott Professor.

With inspiration provided by new director Michael Bleich, Ph.D., RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, the Langston Center for Innovation in Quality and Safety is living up to its name by serving as an innovative incubator for the creation of patient-centered solutions to complex clinical problems and ensuring patient- and family-centered quality and safety outcomes.

Next year, the center plans to host its first International Virtual Symposium, linking innovation, quality, safety, environment and culture in partnership with organizations, other universities and health providers.

One of the school’s quality pipeline-themed projects is looking at ways to increase outreach to people interested in the school’s RN to B.S. program, particularly community college students and graduates. “We have memorandums of understanding with the Virginia Community College System. And concurrent -enrollment agreements with two of those colleges, Southside Virginia and Rappahannock, will help nurses earn their degrees faster via our online program,” said Barksdale.

Increased scholarship support – including a recent $2.5 million commitment for need-based scholarships funded by philanthropist William E. Conway Jr. and his wife Joanne – also will be available to aid these students.

“We are intentionally increasing enrollment in our pre-licensure and RN to B.S. programs,” Barksdale said. At this time, she noted, there is more interest in the pre-licensure baccalaureate programs than the school can accommodate – a great problem to have. “So, in addition to increasing enrollment in the RN to B.S. option, we have also focused on admitting more pre-licensure students to address an impending shortage of nurses as a result of retirements.”

Barksdale said the school also is exploring strategies to increase the number of students pursuing the DNP, Ph.D. and M.S. with concentration in administration and leadership degrees online. With that in mind, the school continues to enhance its online infrastructure, ensuring that online offerings and deliveries are state-of-the-art and meeting the standards for current best practices.
Community engagement, of course, continues to be an integral part of the nursing school experience. Pamela Parsons, Ph.D., RN, GNP-BC, FNAP, associate dean for practice and community engagement and the Judith B. Collins and Joseph M. Teefey Distinguished Professor, is project director for the Richmond Health and Wellness program, a national model for community engagement that she said connects people, where they live, to available services that will help them in their daily lives.

Within the program, the School of Nursing collaborates with schools and departments university wide, from pharmacy and physical therapy to social work and medicine, as well as more recently with the University of Richmond’s School of Law for a medical-legal partnership.

RHWP, which already exists in five area locations, recently expanded to participate in the VCU Health Hub at 25th initiative. The new wellness center, in Richmond’s East End, will offer a variety of services to community residents, such as health screenings, nutritional counseling, behavioral health support and chronic disease management.

An excellent example of how the school’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan for Action plays out is the activities of a highly engaged Diversity and Inclusion Council, led by Christine Wynd, Ph.D., RN, professor and chair of the Department of Family and Community Health Nursing. The group works to ensure an inclusive and welcoming environment for new students as well as current students, faculty and staff. In collaboration with SON LOVE (Living Our Values Every Day) – a faculty-staff group that develops activities encouraging employees to embrace and demonstrate the school’s values – the council organizes a variety of community-building activities.

As is evident, collaboration and interdisciplinary work are key throughout the strategic plan. But one of the best examples – and most recent, as it has yet to launch – is a partnership among RHWP, the Langston Center for Innovation in Quality and Safety, and the VCU da Vinci Center.

The program initially will target Dominion Place, RHWP’s flagship location. The basic premise, Parsons said, is to help residents feel less socially isolated with the aid of 21st-century technology such as smart speakers that respond to voice commands.

The Langston Center’s Bleich elaborated. “RHWP is the mission interface between the world of practice, teaching and research. Dominion Place provides low-income housing, always with an aim to elevate resident services, this time by adding voice-enabled devices.”

Bringing the Langston and da Vinci centers to the table, he said, will ensure interprofessional expertise in innovation, design and technology that can only enhance the end product’s quality, safety and impact. “Residents,” he said, “can expect voice-enabled cues in wellness practices, voice reminders promoting safety and well-being, and an effective alert system in the event of a medical emergency.”

From employing technological advances and promoting inclusion to offering new kinds of training and outreach, the School of Nursing has positioned itself, as Giddens has noted, to be proactive for future impact.

As well as other stakeholders, alumni can be an important part of these efforts, the dean said, especially in terms of support, engagement and advocacy. “Word-of-mouth endorsement is powerful. Regardless of whether you work across the street at VCU Health or across the country in California, it helps our visibility if our alumni are talking about what a great school they attended.”

The strategic plan is crucial, said Giddens. “Everything that we are doing is necessary for the future. This is a path for us to ensure we remain leaders in academic nursing.”

By Cynthia McMullen

Jean Giddens
There’s a saying in education that we are preparing students for a future we cannot see. For Kimberly Curry-Lourenco, Ph.D., M.Ed., RN, CHSE, that future is clear.

Curry-Lourenco, who joined the VCU School of Nursing as director of the Clinical Learning Center in October 2017, is responsible for overseeing the center and leading new initiatives to ensure the School of Nursing is a national leader in simulation. More recently, she was also appointed assistant dean of academic affairs.

“My goal for both of my roles is to work alongside faculty and staff to create the future of nursing by what we do every day,” said Curry-Lourenco. “Our work today is really about tomorrow. From our academic programs, to the learning experiences we offer our students, partnerships we cultivate, and our own development as educators, scholars, and clinicians, I want VCU SON to lead the way.”

Curry-Lourenco’s development as a nurse started at home while she was young. She had a role model right in front of her – her older sister was a nurse and served in the military.

“I remember seeing her in the uniform, hearing of her experiences, and although I don’t recall deliberately choosing, I seemed to have followed her path,” said the San Diego native who lived most of her life in Virginia Beach. “All of my grandfather’s sisters were nurses. Although I never had the chance to meet them, maybe it runs in the family!”

Curry-Lourenco started her nursing career as a staff nurse at Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital’s Coronary Care Unit after earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Old Dominion University. Within six months, the self-described introvert became an evening shift charge nurse.

“I used to be very shy and quiet,” Curry-Lourenco said, “but nursing has a wonderful way of helping you find your voice.”

After two years she went back to school to earn a master’s degree in nursing, also from ODU, and then rotated between the Coronary Care, General Intensive Care and Post Anesthesia Care units at Sentara. Her next move was to join the U.S. Naval Reserve Nurse Corp, where she served nine years while working full time in Sentara’s Cardiac Surgical Intensive Care Unit.
A tip from a colleague about an adjunct position at ODU led Curry-Lourenco to enter the higher education arena in 2000. Since then she has worked in teaching and leadership roles at both undergraduate and graduate levels, focusing on curriculum and instruction, advancing simulation, program evaluation, and faculty development. Curry-Lourenco, who also earned a master’s degree in education from ODU and a Ph.D. in nursing from Duquesne University, was coordinator of instruction and technology and professor at Tidewater Community College’s Beazley School of Nursing before joining VCU.

“The foundation is solid, and the potential is unlimited,” she said, reflecting on what drew her to VCU. “I wanted to be a part of where the SON is heading.”

Already, Curry-Lourenco has made progress with an initiative she inherited – model the CLC as a service center for use by outside individuals and organizations for a fee. The CLC team moved the service model from concept to implementation during the 2018-2019 academic year.

“We have been able to actualize initial goals through offering locally and statewide-promoted professional development workshops,” Curry-Lourenco said. “The CLC service center holds great promise as a future hub of learning and collaboration within and beyond the SON.”

She is also working on a project with a team of faculty and staff that explores clinical decision making and situation awareness in simulation with undergraduate students.

Debra Barksdale, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Nursing Alumni Endowed Professor and associate dean of academic affairs, said Curry-Lourenco has worked with faculty and students to create efficient, effective and quality clinical learning experiences.

“She has been a tremendous asset to the school of nursing,” Barksdale said. “Kim is a big picture thinker who also ‘has the grit and tenacity’ to ensure the best day-to-day operation in the center while enhancing our simulation education.”

As part of her efforts to be on the forefront of simulation protocols and best practices, Curry-Lourenco is active in several professional organizations at the state and national levels. Two key ones include membership on the Regulatory Initiatives Committee of the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning, and on the Board of Directors of the Virginia State Simulation Alliance, Inc. She also serves on the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses Academic Task Force.

In her spare time, Curry-Lourenco enjoys anything by the water, as well as exploring new areas with her husband, 23-year-old son, 19-year-old daughter and three dogs who “are every bit part of our family.”

“One of our dogs loves a road trip, so anytime we can get ‘lost’ wandering with him, is a good day,” she said.

Looking ahead, Curry-Lourenco is excited about the evolution of clinical education. The knowledge and skills required of nurses are rapidly expanding beyond individual patient care, she explains, to include management of diverse populations – from wellness through end of life.

“Opportunities to develop deep understanding, and elevate decision making skills will be key,” she said. “I believe we can expect to see more clinical education models that combine various strategies and settings such as increasing use of simulation, telehealth technology, team-based learning, and focused clinical experiences in areas such as primary care and population health.”

By Angela L. Flagg
Recover, rebuild and regain – Ai Garner triumphs over trauma

The road to recovery after escaping from Vietnam during her childhood had an unexpected bright side for Ai Garner. The Saigon, Vietnam native ended up in the nursing field after experiencing life on the run from Viet Cong soldiers, spending time in a refugee camp and later immigrating to America with her mother in search of a better life. Her life journey fueled her current path toward becoming a psychiatric and mental health nursing practitioner.

“Both as a refugee and as a child having witnessed trauma, I am very passionate about playing a part in the process that helps those with childhood trauma recover, rebuild and regain their lives,” said Garner, 35, a master’s degree student at the VCU School of Nursing.

Garner fell in love with the mental health treatment process when she began clinical learning experiences while attending John Tyler Community College. She said she noticed a strong desire to talk with her patients and listen to what they were going through.
“My third semester of nursing school, I opened a psychiatric nursing textbook and it was as if someone turned on the lights in my brain,” said Garner, who currently works as a psychiatric intake nurse in Chippenham Hospital’s emergency department.

She also recalls being exposed to the specialty when working at Tucker Pavilion, a mental health treatment facility. She was referred there to seek employment by her favorite instructor at the time, Barbara Hornsby (B.S.’03/N; M.S.’06/N), who is also a VCU alumna.

“I worked there for several years and had the privilege of witnessing the powerful impact that mental health therapy can have on mental illness,” Garner said.

Her passion for psychiatric nursing couldn’t have come at a more perfect time – the demand for psychiatric nurse practitioners is high, and the number of psychiatrists in the country is low according to the National Alliance on Mental Health Illness. As stated in the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), one in five adults experience mental illness in a given year, and approximately one in five youth (ages 13-18) experience a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. Intervention and treatment are crucial for children with mental illness, because 50% of all lifetime cases begin by age 14, according to the SAMHSA.

Working with children and adolescents has been an increasing focus of Garner’s interest in psychiatric nursing. The mental health field is full of opportunities for nurses who want to help the most vulnerable members of society, said Lyons Hardy, M.S., RN, PMHNP (B.S.’03/N), clinical instructor at the VCU School of Nursing, who taught Garner in her first PMHNP class.

“Students like Garner have taken their personal tragedies and experiences and turned them into a desire to offer high quality psychiatric services to others,” she said.

Garner vividly remembers being a four-year-old child with her mother in Vietnam, running and hiding from Viet Cong soldiers and their dogs. She remembers her mother’s courage, the night of their final attempt to escape Vietnam, and how she managed to stay strong through their adversity. Garner also recalls her mother’s strength during their time staying at the Chamboray refugee camp in Thailand after fleeing from Vietnam. Garner and her mother finally made their way to the United States, arriving in New York in 1980. They lived there for a year before moving to Virginia.

In addition to having an associate degree in nursing from John Tyler Community College, Garner earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from VCU and a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Old Dominion University. Outside of school and work, she participates in extracurricular activities that reflect her passion. She is a member of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association, and at Chippenham Hospital she is a member of the Trauma Informed Leadership Team, which provides trauma education across the hospital. In addition, Garner recognizes that a person’s physical health is just as important as their mental health, so she started a Get Fit challenge in her department to help nurses improve their self-care practices.

She is currently in her last year of the PMHNP concentration of the School of Nursing’s master’s program and expects to graduate in May 2020.

“I knew that whatever field I chose, it would have to be something that was an extension of who I am, and not just something I get paid to do.”

Ai Garner

Looking forward to what the future holds, Garner said her long-term goal is to work in an outpatient setting serving children, adolescents and young adults.

“I knew that whatever field I chose, it would have to be something that was an extension of who I am, and not just something I get paid to do.”

By Morgan Martin
Jeffrey Petraco, M.B.A., AGPCNP, RN (B.S.’16/N; M.S.’18/N), was nearing 60 years old when he decided to pursue a career in nursing. In just five short years at the VCU School of Nursing, he left a lasting impact on all he touched in his various roles – student, research assistant, affiliate faculty member, mentor, and the most recent – project coordinator for the Office of Practice and Community Engagement. He passed away unexpectedly in November 2018.

Petraco’s love for helping people spanned decades, starting much earlier than nursing school. He spent 31 years working in public health and human services in positions of increasing authority, mostly in Philadelphia and later in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Englewood, New Jersey native also had earned two degrees already - a B.A. from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and an M.B.A. from Temple University.

His passion for nursing led him to move to Richmond, after retiring from civil service, to pursue his third degree – an accelerated B.S. at the VCU School of Nursing.

“I wanted to keep working and I realized what I was missing was a clinical perspective,” said Petraco, when interviewed last May for a VCU News Center article on first-generation graduates; he was the first college graduate in his family. “Initially I was apprehensive because I had taken an environmental science class in college, but I hadn’t done biology, chemistry, any of those sciences. And I realized quickly that I enjoyed it.”

In that same interview, Petraco encouraged students to know yourself, know your passion. Those are words he lived by.
After earning his B.S. degree in nursing, Petraco continued at VCU as a master’s degree student in the adult gerontology primary care nurse practitioner concentration. He graduated in May 2018 and started working as the program coordinator for the school’s Richmond Health and Wellness Program, an interprofessional care coordination program for vulnerable and low-income senior citizens. This role allowed him to continue his lifelong goal of making a difference in people’s lives. He managed a variety of complex projects for RHWP, as well as tapped his skills and training as a nurse practitioner to precept student teams.

“Jeff had a true passion for social justice and a real commitment to the work that we were engaged with to better the lives of the underserved in our community,” said Pam Parsons, Ph.D., GNP-BC, FNAP, associate dean for practice and community engagement and the Judith B. Collins and Joseph M Teefey Distinguished Professor. “His passion, wit and caring attitude helped to make daily work a fulfilling endeavor and work a fun place to be! His caring attitude was inspiring. I miss him every day.”

Many of Petraco’s colleagues and students felt the same, expressing their thoughts in tributes posted on his office door, as well as in the comments of a blog post established in his memory on the School of Nursing website. Below are a few blog excerpts.

“He was a wonderful, caring and attentive mentor and gave me a ton of advice to help guide me through the program,” said Kenna Onyeador, an accelerated B.S. student and SON Leadership Fellow.

“Jeff had a way of always making those around him feel special and important to him. He was genuinely interested in and cared for people and it showed in every encounter,” said Carley Lovell, Ph.D., M.S., M.A., RN, WHNP- BC, clinical assistance professor, who taught Petraco in his first clinical rotation.

Petraco’s dedication and hard work led to his selection for this year’s Outstanding Recent Alumnus Award. His nephew, Brian Petraco, and sister-in-law, Lori Petraco, attended Reunion Weekend in April to accept his award.

The school also honored Petraco by raising funds to adopt two Baxter Perkinson framed prints located near the Office of Practice and Community Engagement on the third floor. In addition, the school installed a remembrance bell in his honor in the SON garden and created an annual award to be presented to a faculty or staff member who exemplifies his commitment to optimism, diversity, being respectful, and treating people with kindness and compassion.

“Jeff clearly demonstrated so many amazing qualities and connected effortlessly with everyone he encountered,” said Dean Jean Giddens, Ph.D., RN, FAAN. “Our faculty and staff wanted to demonstrate how much he meant to us in several meaningful ways. We will greatly miss his infectious smile and the sincere joy he spread throughout our school.”
Judith Collins, RN, WHNP-BC, FAAN (Cert.’75/N), received a 2018 Compassionate Care Award for dedication and service to CrossOver Healthcare Ministry. She is a former chair of CrossOver Healthcare Ministry’s Board of Directors and has been a dedicated clinic volunteer since 2011, working with its obstetrics program.

Genevieve Beaird (on left), RNC-OB, CHSE (B.S.’09/N, M.S.’11/N), and Lathika Mohanraj (on right), Ph.D., RN, BMTCN (B.S.’14/N), both assistant professors at the VCU School of Nursing, were selected for the Virginia Nurses Foundation’s 2018 40 Under 40 Award for exceptional rising nursing leaders. Winners were selected based on achievements in professional practice, leadership and positive promotion and advancement of the nursing profession beyond the practice setting.

Elizabeth Day, Ph.D., RN, CHPN (B.S.’95/N; M.S.’01/N), received the Dr. Bill F. Stewart Achievement of Excellence Award which annually honors a State Center Community College District employee who best exemplifies qualities in leadership, innovation, vision, and hard work. She is the first nurse to receive this award since its inception in 2001. In addition, as an adjunct faculty, she was voted Faculty of the Year for the School of Nursing by the students of the University of Phoenix Riverpark.

Two VCU School of Nursing alumnae were recognized at the Virginia Council of Nurse Practitioners 2019 Annual Awards Ceremony. Cindy Fagan (on left) (B.S.’97/N; M.S.’99/N), a nurse practitioner at the Hunter Holmes McGuire Medical Center, received the President’s Award in recognition of outstanding work for the association or NP practice. She currently serves as VCNP’s government relations chairperson and has served as past-president of the statewide organization. Shelly Smith (on right), DNP, APRN-BC (M.S.’01/N), clinical assistant professor and director of the DNP program, received the Distinguished NP Award, which honors a member who has exemplified or made contributions to the role of nurse practitioner. Smith has been an outstanding advocate of NP practice and showed great leadership in advancing practice roles at the state level in Virginia.

Beth Hoettels, CCRN, CEN (B.S.’05/N), assumed the role of commander, 423d Medical Squadron, 423d Air Base Group, 501st Combat Support Wing, at Royal Air Force Alconbury in the United Kingdom. As commander and director of base medical services, she is responsible for the delivery of comprehensive medical, nursing, mental health and dental services supporting 11 multi-service/national units, including USAFRICOM, EUCOM and NATO intelligence centers. She manages delivery of medical services for 4,900 beneficiaries.
OurHealth Magazine for Richmond has recognized four alumnae among the 14 outstanding nurses for 2019. The nurses were nominated by the community for possessing qualities that exemplify excellence in every way. This year’s winners include:

**Jo Lynne Robins** (on left), RN, ANP-BC, CHTP, AHN-C, (M.S.’91/N; Ph.D.’99/N), an associate professor at the VCU School of Nursing and volunteer for 22 years at the Health Brigade, a community clinic; **Sherry Fox** (on right), RN, CNRN, FAAN (B.S.’80/N; M.S.’89/N; Ph.D.’02/N), a veteran neuroscience nurse leader and current nurse expert navigator at asknursedebbie.com (on right); **Lesli Davis** (B.S.’87/N), clinical coordinator at VCU Health and Chesterfield Meadows; and **Monika Smith**, RN, CRRN, (B.S.’02/N), a staff nurse at Sheltering Arms Physical Rehabilitation Center.

**Hilaire Thompson**, Ph.D., RN, ARNP, CNRN, AGACNP-BC, ACNPC-AG, FAAN (M.S.’96/N), received the 2019 Western Institute of Nursing Regional Geriatric Nursing Education Award which recognizes evidence of excellence and/or innovation in gerontological nursing education. She is the Joanne Montgomery Endowed Professor and graduate program director at the University of Washington School of Nursing. Inducted into the American Academy of Nursing in 2008, Thompson co-chairs the Acute and Critical Care Expert Panel.

**Robert Powell**, M.S.N., APRN, FNP-BC (DNP’18), authored an article on his DNP project work in the *Journal for Healthcare Quality*. The article is titled “Shared Medical Appointments in Preoperative Joint Replacement: Assessing Patient and Healthcare Member Satisfaction.” Powell, a family nurse practitioner in South Hill, Virginia, was part of VCU’s first cohort of DNP graduates last year.

**Kenneth White**, Ph.D., RN, FACHE, FAAN (B.S.’95/N, M.S. ’95/N), associate dean for strategic partnerships and innovation at the University of Virginia School of Nursing, received the Gold Medal Award for 2019 from the American College of Healthcare Executives at its annual Congress on Healthcare Leadership. A former health care executive who also spent 20 years at VCU in teaching and administrative roles, White currently works part time as a palliative care nurse practitioner at UVA Medical Center in addition to his full-time academic responsibilities.
Alumni return to campus for reunion 2019

VCU School of Nursing classes ending in ‘4 and ‘9, St. Philip alumnae and grand alumni returned to campus in April to celebrate Reunion Weekend. Events included a variety of activities, from class dinners to tours of the School of Nursing’s research lab, from a champagne brunch to a State of the School address, and more. A highlight of the activities was the presentation of the 2019 Alumni Awards. Honorees include: Outstanding Nurse Service Award - Kathy Baker (M.S.’94/N, Ph.D.’11/N), nursing director of resource management and emergency services at VCU Health; Outstanding Nurse Practice Award - MaryAnne Harmon (B.S.’13/N, M.S.’15/N), a family nurse practitioner at VCU Health; Outstanding Nurse Alumnus Award - Barbara Brown (B.S.’70/N, Ph.D ‘87/HP), senior research advisor at the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association; and Outstanding Recent Alumnus Award - Jeff Petraco (B.S.’14/N, M.S.’18/N), who was program coordinator for the Richmond Health and Wellness Program before his unexpected death in November. View more photos in an album on the VCU School of Nursing Facebook page.
1970s

Jane Allen (B.S.'75/N) retired in 2014 as the school health coordinator of Charles City County Public Schools in Virginia after working in school health for 23 years.

Mollie Anderson (B.S.'75/N), was named one of the top nurse practitioners in the region for 2018 by Richmond Magazine. She received the most votes in her category.

Linda Cupit (B.S.'71/N; M.S.'76/N) is a clinical consulting hypnotist. She trained at the New York School of Hypnosis, the only certified program in New York State. Cupit maintains a private practice in Naples, Florida. She is certified by the National Guild of Hypnotists.

Darlene Fishman, Ed.D. (B.S.'71/N), retired from nursing education in July 2018 after 40 years of service.

Diane Hice (B.S.'70/N) earned an M.S.N. in nursing education from Eastern New Mexico University in Portales, New Mexico, at age 70.

Deborah Wagus (B.S.'72/N) retired in April 2015 and is loving the life of a full-time grandmother and mom.

1980s

Katherine Fornili, DNP (B.S.'82/N; M.P.H.'95/M), earned a doctorate in nursing practice in 2016 from the University of Maryland School of Nursing in Baltimore. She is a registered nurse, a certified addictions registered nurse and a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Linda Thurby-Hay (M.S.'88/N) was accepted as a board member at-large for the YMCA of Greater Richmond's Community Advisory Board.

Dory Walczak (B.S.'86/N) was selected Virginia March of Dimes Nurse of the Year 2017 in the category of pediatric nursing.

1990s

Marie F. Gerardo (M.S.'90/N; Cert.'99/N), nurse practitioner for the House Calls program at VCU Health, was appointed in May 2018 to the Virginia Board of Nursing by Gov. Ralph Northam.

Eleanor Mitchell (B.S.'95/N) retired as a neonatal nurse.

Jenny Thomas-Wright (B.S.'99/N) retired in 2016 as assistant professor of nursing from Bon Secours Memorial College of Nursing in Richmond, Virginia.

2000s

Victoria Cox, DNP (B.S.'02/N), received a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Liberty University as part of its first inaugural class of 2016.

Jennifer Norman Amaral (B.S.'09/N) married Kristopher Amaral on April 12, 2014.

Elizabeth Seeger (B.S.'04/N) spoke at the ANCC’s National Pathway to Excellence Conference on May 3, 2018, in West Palm Beach, Florida on the topic, “Engaging Nurses Through the Power of Professional Development.”

Kathleen Smith (B.S.'08/N) has six children: Natalie Gianna, 10; Genevieve Frances, 8; Felicity Kendall, 6; Anastasia Therese, 5; Cecilia Bernadette, 3; and Mary Agnes Elizabeth, 1.

2010s

Katie Hummer (B.S.'15/N) is a registered nurse. She moved from Fairfax, Virginia to Richmond to work as a ventricular assist device coordinator with a heart transplant office.
In Memoriam

1930s
Jean B. Kivlighan (B.S.’34/N)

1940s
Hattie L. Allen (St.P.’43/N)
Emily L. Cassity (B.S.’46/N)
Helen C. Copeland (St.P.’45/N)
Virginia M. Fratrick (B.S.’47/N)
Leola A. Glenn (B.S.’46/N)
Pauline W. Manson (B.S.’49/N)
Loretta J. McWilliams (B.S.’44/N)
Jean H. Muncy (Cert.’49/N; B.S.’51/N)
Mary A. Norville (B.S.’49/N)
Thelma D. Spellman (St.P.’45/N)
Della D. Tolson (B.S.’48/N)
Dorothy S. Wagoner (B.S.’45/N)
Florence E. Whitacre (B.S.’49/N)
Laura L. White (B.S.’48/N)

1950s
Carolyn G. Barbe (B.S.’52/N)
Yvonne M. Bennett (St.P.’58/N)
Evelyn D. Berryman (B.S.’51/N)
Phyllis A. Burton (B.S.’57/N)
Julia F. Campbell (B.S.’54/N)
Vondelear A. Haggins (St.P.’54/N)
Rosa K. Kline (B.S.’54/N)
Cary D. Mangum (B.S.’58/N)
Frances W. McNew (B.S.’52/N)
Mary C. Northrop (B.S.’58/N)
Peggy Rosenberger (B.S.’52/N)
Sallie A. Scott (St.P.’56/N)
Shirley K. Scott (St.P.’50/N)
Oris G. Terry (St.P.’53/N)
Betsy W. York (Dipl.’53/N)

1960s
Mathilda S. Merker (B.S.’65/N; M.S.’75/N)
Celeste L. Opfell (B.S.’63/N)
Nancy R. Pinkston (B.S.’63/N)

1970s
Nancy L. Carper (B.S.’70/N)

1980s
Mary P. Blalock (M.S.’87/N)
LeKeith O. James (B.S.’83/N)
Julie L. Kiser (B.S.’88/N)
Dana G. Norman (B.S.’82/N)
Michele A. Scanlon (B.S.’86/N)
Catherine S. Siock (B.S.’88/N)
Melissa A. Smith (M.S.’88/N)

1990s
Barbara B. Carper (B.S.’91/N)
Tammy R. Gettings (B.S.’95/N)
Clemmie H. Kirk (B.S.’96/N)
Diane A. Van Landingham (B.S.’91/N; M.S.’97/N)

2010s
Sarah L. Anders (B.S.’14/N; M.S.’16/N)
Jeffrey B. Petraco (B.S.’14/N; M.S.’18/N)
Dear Friends,

It has been an exciting year since joining the development and alumni relations team in August 2018. Over the past several months, I have had an opportunity to see our programs at work, meet our faculty and alumni and also get to know our talented students. Thank you for all you do as supporters, volunteers and ambassadors!

In addition to me joining the team in August 2018, there have been several other changes to our staff and I’d like to take an opportunity to introduce you to the other members of the development and alumni relations team.

Amber Yancey is our Alumni Relations and Stewardship Specialist and joined our team in July 2018. She manages Reunion weekend, the Connector (mentor) program and oversees donor stewardship for the school. Sydney Taylor is our Development Specialist and joined the team in April 2019. Sydney assists with event coordination and manages our senior class giving program. Each of us are eager to connect/re-connect with you!

There are many ways to get involved with our school and I encourage you to contact myself or a member of the development and alumni relations team. We are here to help you be a mentor to students, a class liaison for reunion weekend or an ambassador within your workplace.

As I make my way around the country to meet with our School of Nursing alumni and donor family, please know that it would be my pleasure to share a cup of coffee with you and learn how your VCU School of Nursing experience shaped who you are today!

Warm regards,

Pamela Lowe
Sr. Director of Development

In May 2020, the School of Nursing will award the inaugural Paul A. and Veronica H. Gross Achievement in Nursing Award.

This biennial award will recognize accomplished, professional registered nurses, alumni of the school who have earned graduate degrees (at VCU or other accredited institutions) related to leadership and management in their field of study.

Please look for the nomination call in January 2020. In the meantime, please think of VCU nursing graduates to consider nominating!
SON Quick Facts

Fall 2018 enrollment diversity
- 868 students
- African American 17%
- Hispanic/Latino 4%
- Two or more races 5%
- Asian 8%
- White 61%
- Unknown 4%
- American Indian/Alaskan Native 1%

533 Undergraduate students
335 Graduate students

DID YOU KNOW?
100% of VCU’s School of Nursing’s AGACNP, PMHNP and FNP graduates passed the ANCC certification examinations on the first attempt in 2018!

Faculty Diversity
- 58 full time or nearly full time
- African American 16%
- Asian 6%
- White 78%

8 No. of faculty who are American Academy of Nursing Fellows

SON Quick Facts

Fall 2018 enrollment diversity
- 868 students
- African American 17%
- Hispanic/Latino 4%
- Two or more races 5%
- Asian 8%
- White 61%
- Unknown 4%
- American Indian/Alaskan Native 1%

533 Undergraduate students
335 Graduate students

DID YOU KNOW?
100% of VCU’s School of Nursing’s AGACNP, PMHNP and FNP graduates passed the ANCC certification examinations on the first attempt in 2018!

Faculty Diversity
- 58 full time or nearly full time
- African American 16%
- Asian 6%
- White 78%

8 No. of faculty who are American Academy of Nursing Fellows
VCU receives $2.1 million NINR grant

Theresa Swift-Scanlan, Ph.D., RN, director of the School of Nursing’s Biobehavioral Research Laboratory, is the primary investigator on a $2.1 million grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to study how a gene could influence cognitive decline in patients undergoing chemotherapy for breast and endometrial cancers. Co-investigators are R.K. Elswick Jr., Ph.D., professor of biostatistics here at the SON, and Charlotte Boettiger, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Ingrid Pretzer-Aboff co-leads study on vibration therapy for Parkinson’s patients

A team of five VCU researchers — led by Ingrid Pretzer-Aboff, Ph.D., senior nurse researcher in the School of Nursing, and Leslie Cloud, M.D., neurologist in the VCU Parkinson’s and Movement Disorders Center — are testing a vibrating device worn inside the shoe that could help Parkinson’s patients who have trouble walking or stabilizing themselves. The team received a $434,715 grant from The Michael J. Fox Foundation to fund the project “Optimizing Vibration Therapy to Improve Gait and Balance in Parkinson’s Disease.”

Deborah McGuire to retire in June

After more than nearly six years at the helm of the VCU School of Nursing’s research enterprise, Deborah B. McGuire, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, associate dean for research, scholarship, and innovation and the Florence E. Elliott Professor, is retiring effective June 30, 2019. She will be missed greatly, and we wish her the best on her well-deserved retirement. Below are her reflections when asked about her experience here at the School of Nursing.

1. What do you feel is your biggest accomplishment in your role as associate dean of research, scholarship and innovation here at the SON?

One of the major challenges I encountered when I started in my position was figuring out how to sustain the wonderful research resources the SON had built through its two NINR-funded research centers, generous support from the SON and the University, and the hard work and research productivity of previous and current faculty. A nationally renowned researcher in oncology and palliative care, she has published numerous articles and has previously served as president of the International Society of Oral Oncology, as well as a member of various other national health-related organizations. Working with SON administration, faculty, and staff, we developed a research funding and sustainability model that supported the SON’s research infrastructure through a variety of revenue sources (including grants, indirect cost recovery, philanthropic funds, and a University-approved service center based in the Biobehavioral Lab) while minimizing impact on the SON’s overall budget. I am very proud that this collective accomplishment now supports faculty research and scholarship across both tenure and term tracks as well as students across program levels who pursue funding opportunities for their scholarship.

2. What will you miss the most about our school?

When I first visited the SON to give a lecture back in 2012, I was struck by the incredible warmth, friendliness, and support I observed in both faculty and staff. Since coming here, I have learned that the SON community is comprised of incredibly dedicated, hardworking, and compassionate people. They are fully committed to making the SON the best it can be, and to supporting one another in their pursuits, no matter how large or small. Words that come to mind when I think about the people here are professional, respectful, courteous, fun-loving, excellent, driven to succeed, and loyal. I will truly miss this wonderful work community, and the individuals within it.
NSWB provides health outreach during annual trip to Guatemala

Several members of Nursing Students Without Borders at VCU participated in an annual community service trip to the Highlands Region of Guatemala, where they provided health outreach to villagers. Led by Tammy Williams, Ph.D., M.S., RN, and Juliane Milburn, Ph.D., RN, both clinical assistant professors, the students built three brick clean cookstoves for families in remote mountain villages and helped conduct health screenings for diabetes and hypertension. They also provided health education to women training to be midwives and learned about breastfeeding among Guatemalan mothers.

Partnering offers concurrent enrollment at VCU and two community colleges

The VCU School of Nursing has partnered with Southside Virginia Community College and Rappahannock Community College to offer accelerated coursework to registered nurses who are students at both community colleges, providing them a faster path to obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Students will be enrolled concurrently at VCU and their respective community colleges. Enrollment opened on May 1 to nursing students at both community colleges and classes will start in fall 2019.

Couple’s $2.5M gift bolsters scholarship support to VCU nursing students

The VCU School of Nursing has received a commitment of $2.5 million from philanthropists William E. Conway Jr., co-founder and co-executive chairman of the Carlyle Group, and his wife, Joanne, to fund need-based scholarships for undergraduate students. Installments of $500,000 annually will support scholarships for nursing students who do not have prior nursing degrees or are enrolled in the school’s RN to B.S. program for nurses with associate degrees. In addition, to increase the pipeline of future nursing faculty, one to three scholarships will be awarded annually to doctoral students who have an interest in a faculty career.

DNP program moves up in national rankings

VCU School of Nursing’s Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program continues to be ranked among the nation’s best graduate programs. The program has moved up to No. 44 in the latest U.S. News and World Report rankings. Also, the school’s master’s program continues to be ranked among the top 10% of graduate nursing programs nationwide.

Connections Annual Edition 2018 23
New Faculty & Staff

**Johnathan Bennett** is the department administrator for the Office of Practice and Community Engagement. He most recently worked in Pelvic Health at VCU Health’s Stony Point Surgery Center. Bennett earned a B.S. degree in urban and regional studies from VCU and is pursuing a master’s degree in urban and regional planning also at VCU.

**Dana Burns**, DNP, FNP-BC, is a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Family and Community Health Nursing. She most recently served as a family nurse practitioner at the UVA Lake Monticello Primary Care Clinic and as an adjunct clinical instructor in the FNP program at the UVA School of Nursing. She earned a B.S.N. from the University of Rhode Island, an M.S.N. from Columbia University and a DNP from Florida Atlantic University.

**Ana F. Diallo**, Ph.D., M.P.H, B.A., RN, is an assistant professor in the Department of Family and Community Health Nursing. She most recently served as a clinical and translational post-doctoral fellow at the National Institutes of Health. Diallo earned both a B.S. in nursing and a B.A. in international studies from VCU, and both an M.P.H. and a Ph.D. in nursing from the University of Connecticut.

**Alicia Edgerton** is a recruitment/admission advisor in the Office of Student Success. She most recently served as academic advisor/counselor at Richard Bland College of William & Mary. Edgerton earned a bachelor’s degree in social work from VCU and is working on a master’s degree in higher education at Mary Baldwin University.

**Erica Edler** is the graduate clinical placement specialist in the Office of Academic Programs. She most recently served as clinical coordinator for the Physician Assistant Program at South University. She earned a B.S. in kinesiology with a minor in clinical psychology from Old Dominion University and is currently completing coursework towards an M.P.H. at Liberty University.

**Alex Feygin** is a research specialist in the Biobehavioral Research Laboratory. He most recently served as a research specialist in the Department of Pathology at VCU. He earned a B.S. degree in molecular genetics and a master’s degree in biology from the State University of New York at Fredonia.
Jacob Graham is manager of the Biobehavioral Research Laboratory. He most recently served as research assistant in the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products in the Department of Psychology at VCU. Graham earned a B.Sc. in biological sciences from Virginia Tech.

Kirby Patmon, M.S., PMHNP-BC, is an instructor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. She most recently served as a psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner at Thriveworks Chesterfield. Patmon earned a B.S. in nursing from Saint Louis University and an M.S. in nursing (psychiatric-mental health advanced practice program) from the University of Virginia.

Pamela Lowe is the senior director of development. She most recently served as director of development at North Carolina State University’s College of Sciences. Lowe earned a B.S. in music performance with an outside field in psychology from Indiana University Bloomington and a B.M. degree in music therapy from Michigan State University.

Megan Rapchick is the undergraduate clinical placement specialist in the Office of Academic Programs. She most recently served as assistant director for strategic partnerships and outreach for the VCU Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity. Rapchick earned a B.A. in psychology from Michigan State University and an M.A. in higher education administration from the University of South Carolina.

Chris Schreiner is an academic evaluation and analytics specialist in the Office of Academic Programs. He most recently served as curriculum and assessment specialist at Riverside College of Health Careers. Schreiner earned a bachelor’s degree in workforce education and development and a master’s degree in education from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

Melvin “Curtis” Sexton is the building manager. He most recently served as an electrician/interim zone superintendent at VCU. Sexton earned a master electrician license.

Wanda Swaringen is an administrative professional in the Office of Student Success. She most recently served as hospice health information manager at Bon Secours Richmond Health System. Swaringen is a student at the Apex School of Theology.

Sydney Taylor is a development specialist in the Development Office. She most recently served as a meetings coordinator at EAB. She earned a B.A. degree in history from the University of Virginia.

Catherine West is executive assistant to the dean. She most recently served as an administrative assistant in the Commissioner’s Office at the Virginia Department of Health.

Amber Yancey is an alumni relations and stewardship specialist in the Development Office. She most recently served as events and sponsorship manager at the Richmond Ballet and as an adjunct professor of Philanthropy in the Arts at the University of Richmond. She earned a B.S. in mass communications from VCU, an M.A. in arts administration from the Savannah College of Art and Design and a certificate in non-profit marketing from the University of Richmond Institute of Philanthropy.
Selected Faculty Publications


Classes ending in ‘5 and ‘0, St. Philip alumnae and grand alumni are invited to return to campus April 17-19, 2020 for Reunion Weekend. Join your classmates, friends and fellow alumni for a weekend of fun and catching up. Look for your save-the-date mailing in early summer!

Pictured are alumnae from the class of 1960 during Reunion Weekend in 2010.