A Constellation of Stars

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Connections is the official magazine of the VCU School of Nursing and is published twice yearly. Comments and letters may be directed to the editors.

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Correction: In the winter 2008 issue of Connections, we incorrectly identified the woman in this photo as Dr. Rachel Cobb. The caption should have read as follows: Dr. Cynthia Little received her Ph.D. in May 2008. We apologize for the error.
A Message from the Dean

What a Constellation of Stars

I am writing to you, our readers, having just participated in a whirlwind of activities this past week, a whirlwind that makes even more visible and real the basic tenet of this issue of Connections. That tenet is the success of this School has been made possible because all associated with the School, either through employment, enrollment and graduation or voluntary affiliations understand and act from a belief that sustainable successes are created not by individual stars but rather by constellations of people, groups and organizations.

We have highly successful individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing the mission-focused work of this School. They possess a shared vision that though there are shining stars that orient the navigation of various projects, it is only through the constellations of those stars that real and sustained progress is made.

On Tuesday, I attended a celebration following the submission of a major grant application that pulled together 19 scientists from seven different departments across four different schools and the Health System of VCU, and two scientists from another university. What a constellation! As I indicated at the party, this research team verges on being a galaxy.

On Friday, I met with our volunteer Advancement Council to discuss how we must position the School for the upcoming capital campaign. What a stellar group of dedicated volunteers committed to the advancement of this School. On Friday morning, I taught my freshman class, where we were joined by a few of our alumni who had begun their Reunion Weekend activities. On late Friday afternoon, a Tea Party in our newly completed garden served as the kick-off for the formal festivities of the Reunion Weekend. Beginning on Saturday morning, reunion classes (1944 through 1989) met together in rooms throughout the building to "remember when" and learn about the present and the envisioned future for the School.

Saturday evening we came together again to celebrate the achievements of three of our outstanding alumni and talk about alumni activities to directly support current students through mentoring and networking. On Sunday morning, the "grand alumni" (graduates 50 or more years ago) from all programs on the MCV campus came together for a final weekend meal together. WHAT A CONSTELLATION of stars that came together in this venue that we know as the MCV campus of VCU to celebrate each of our Schools and our heritage and to talk about creating together a dynamic future.

During this last week, it was apparent to me that the theme of this issue, selected many months ago, is very appropriate and represents the essence of what has been unique for many decades at this remarkable school of yours!!! As you read this issue, you will read in more detail about the extensive nature of the constellations that have come together around and for the continuing development of this truly fine School of Nursing. You will gain more insight into how in the past decade, the School of Nursing managed to double our enrollment, exponentially expand our research leading to a 2008 NIH ranking of 19th among Schools of Nursing, cement our relationship with our colleagues in nursing services of VCUHS, and move into a new, state-of-the-science building, in which teaching and learning have been transformed.

While the School has accomplished much in its impressive history, we have an exciting journey ahead and many discoveries yet to make. Thanks to the contributions of everyone within our constellation, your School of Nursing will remain on its continual journey to greatness.

With regards and great gratitude for all that you do, are, and give to this constellation that makes your school so bright.

Fond regards,

Nancy F. Langston, R.N., Ph.D, F.A.A.N.
Educating tomorrow's nurses requires a community of professionals, joined in a common cause to prepare VCU students for the challenges and rewards of a career in the nursing profession. This constellation includes not only the support of School faculty and administrative professionals, but partnerships with nurses and other health care professionals throughout our community from our own partner institution VCU Health Systems, to community hospitals and private/public practices throughout the region and the state.

"It takes a constellation to create a great school of nursing. It doesn't rely on a single star, but requires all of us working together to form a constellation to develop our academic programs and provide the quality learning experiences that students through the years have experienced. We work as a community of mission-focused professionals and that is why this School will continue to move forward," said Dean Nancy F. Langston, R.N., Ph.D.

Langston joined the School as dean in 1991. In that time, enrollment has doubled and research has increased exponentially, but the number of faculty has grown modestly. The School was able to fill several vacant and new positions in 2007 and 2008, thereby adding 11 new faculty members. However, the growth has not been through simply modest growth of faculty numbers; it has occurred through the constellation of groups of people who have joined the School to transform the nature of and way we all envision and undertake our work.

"We are moving forward in the development as a full mission school embracing research as well as our long standing..."
commitment to excellence in teaching and community outreach. We’re capable of contributing important knowledge to better health care and the human condition through research, our graduates are well prepared to begin or to advance their leadership in clinical care and our faculty, administrative professionals, and students all undertake outreach programs to better the lives and health of people of our communities.” Langston said.

Mary Jo Grap, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN professor with the School’s Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems, has been a member of the faculty since 1984. During her time with the School, she has witnessed dramatic growth, particularly in the area of research.

“The biggest change I’ve seen is the number of doctoral-prepared faculty. When I started, our primary focus was on teaching. There was research, but it was very limited and it was limited and wasn’t the main focus of the School,” Grap said.

During Grap’s early days with VCU, the School’s program offerings were also limited. Now, the School offers a constellation of programs that provide avenues for students from varying educational backgrounds. Accelerated programs allow students with a non-nursing degree to pursue a B.S. or Master's quickly. Post-licensure programs such as the R.N.-to-B.S. and the B.S. to Ph.D. tracks allow nurses to continue their formal education at VCU.

The School’s constellation of researchers has also grown significantly. In the 1980s, the School began a more organized research effort. When Langston joined VCU as dean in 1991, she worked with faculty to strengthen the research focus and increase the dissemination of scholarship through publications and presentations.

Although the School has experienced substantial growth, Grap said it has retained its supportive, nurturing culture. "We’re very supportive of one another and you don’t find that everywhere. In some universities, there’s a lot of competition among the faculty," she said. "When potential faculty come here for interviews, they immediately see that about us. They may not come to work for VCU for whatever reason, but they always remark about our collaborative environment.”

This collaborative, supportive environment made a distinct impression on Angela Starkweather, Ph.D., R.N., who joined the School in August 2008 as assistant professor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. She and her family moved from Washington State to join the nursing faculty at VCU. The School’s reputation for research and its supportive culture encouraged her to take this big step.

“The faculty at VCU and the School’s Center for Biobehavioral Clinical Research is well known,” Starkweather said. "Mentorship is also fostered here: its importance is recognized and built into the program. I’m very excited to be here.”

As the School and its research activities have grown, students have more exposure to the work of nurse scientists. Students learn about research in the classroom and see it first-hand in the hospital. This exposure introduces students to another side of the nursing profession and may inspire those students to consider a Ph.D. for themselves.

“Our students see the whole spectrum of nursing, the entire trajectory of a nursing career,” Grap said. "Students see research in action and learn that nursing isn't just a job. This is thinking work. We teach them to ask the next question and take an active role in answering that question.”

Strong faculty collaboration also led to the creation of the School’s Center for Biobehavioral Clinical Research (CBCR) nearly five years ago. With the support of a grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research, the CBCR is supporting the development of first-time investigators. Five VCU faculty members, Grap, Rita Pickler, Ph.D., R.N., Cindy Munro, Ph.D. R.N., Nancy McCain, D.S.N., R.N. and R.K. Elswick, Ph.D., are principal investigators on the grant. They have ongoing roles within the CBCR and serve as mentors to junior faculty.

Faculty are also leading students in various efforts to give back to the community. For example, faculty within the Department of Family and Community Health organize a program with Richmond’s Fan Free Clinic to provide back-to-school check-ups to area children.

The School’s supportive administrative professionals and staff also play an important role in the lives of nursing students. They assist students in the admissions process, support advising and class scheduling and help the School operate efficiently.

Dedicated to community service, the administrative professionals organize food and school supply collection efforts. Other activities include providing holiday gifts to area children and supporting the family of a VCU staff member serving in Iraq. In 2007, the VCU School of Nursing Administrative Professionals Association was selected by the university as the Staff recipient of the Presidential Awards for Community Multicultural Enrichment (PACME) for its outreach efforts in the community. Again this year (2009), a member of the School of Nursing staff, Milagritos (Millie) Flinn was the staff recipient of the same award.

As Hispanic Coordinator, Flinn’s role has been to increase enrollment and retention of Spanish-speaking nurses. She more than achieved that goal by increasing target minority enrollment over three years by 240 percent. Recognizing a need to communicate more effectively to minority audiences, Flinn underwent media training at the School of Mass Communications and launched a public relations campaign in both English and Spanish.

Such activities and the recognition of their significance through the years has been achieved because it is an essence of a constellation of dedicated personnel not simply a random act of kindness of one.

**Hands-on Learning**

Since moving into a new building two years ago, nursing faculty and students have benefitted from new learning technologies. Equipped with the most advanced clinical learning facility in
Virginia, VCU’s Clinical Learning Center (CLC) is changing the face of nursing education.

Collaboration has been a critical component in the development of the CLC. Faculty have worked together to integrate clinical education into the curriculum and enhancing the experience for nursing students.

Sandra Voll, M.S., R.N., F.N.P., director of the CLC, has been with the School for five years. A member of the School’s faculty, before the move to the new building, Voll has witnessed firsthand the advances of just a few years.

“Teaching is much more hands on now. Instead of talking about how we would treat a certain condition, simulation allows students to jump in and perform the actual care. Seeing and doing really teaches the students much more effectively,” she said.

Voll works with students and faculty to adapt or create scenarios that prepare nursing students for the demands of patient care. Through the CLC, students have the chance to hone skills and build knowledge. Learning experiences run the gamut from the basics, such as inserting an IV or moving a patient, to highly complex scenarios that test students’ abilities to prioritize and make decisions under pressure.

“In the six years that I’ve been here, we’ve moved from an archaic building to a state-of-the-art facility,” said Tanya Huff, M.S.N., R.N., C.C.R.N., clinical assistant professor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. “The CLC has opened so many opportunities to our students. This is a hands-on profession. It makes sense that our students would be educated in this manner.”

Jean Ellen Zavertnik, M.S.N., R.N., clinical assistant professor, has also been impressed with the transformative impact of the CLC.

“Our students are able to practice skills prior to working directly with patients. This decreases stress level and increases proficiency. Our students are also able to get immediate feedback from instructors, reinforce correct techniques immediately,” Zavertnik said. “Through the CLC, students transfer classroom
knowledge into their clinical rotations and begin using critical thinking skills. The ability to think on your feet is the essence of being a proficient bedside nurse.”

The School's constellation of clinical faculty has transformed nursing education and simulation has been incorporated at every level, from the introductory nursing course through the senior-level clinical synthesis. This approach to simulation has garnered the attention of national nursing organizations. At the 2008 National League of Nursing Education Summit, a panel of five VCU School of Nursing faculty members presented a session on integrating simulation in undergraduate clinical courses.

**Best Partners for Best Practice**

One of the School's unique strengths is its partnership with the VCU Health System (VCUHS). As both organizations work under a commitment to "Best Partners for Best Practice," students, patients and the profession benefit. In all, the School employs 144 adjunct faculty to support the education of our students. Once again, this effort relies on a constellation of people work across organizational entities to assure that the current and future practice of our profession is created through effective collaboration. As with other elements of the School, the partnership and its numerous collaborative initiatives between the hospital and the School has only increased in numbers and grown in strength over the last decade.

"Our strong partnership with the School is rare among nursing programs. Through their clinicals in the hospital, our students see and learn things that students just don't experience in other nursing programs," said Lauren Goodloe, Ph.D., R.N., director of medical and pediatric nursing for VCUHS and assistant dean for clinical operations for the VCU School of Nursing.

While the hospital and the nursing school have always been linked, this relationship wasn't always as open as it is now. During the last 10 years, the two organizations have worked to open the lines of communication and strengthen the systems for students, staff and patients.

"We have worked hard to build a strong relationship. This partnership relies on a willingness to talk and to share and a spirit of openness between the hospital and the School," Goodloe said.

The benefits of this arrangement haven't gone unnoticed. When the VCU Health System obtained Magnet Status in 2005, the ANCC noted in its report the partnership with the School of Nursing as one of the strengths of the institution.

The partnership is seen in many ways. First, Goodloe and Langston hold joint appointments between the hospital and the School. Second, nurses within the hospital serve as adjunct faculty and preceptors and as members of committees and task forces of the School. This constellation of connected people and systems has a positive effect on both the quality of the academic programs of the school and the clinical and translational research that faculty are able to undertake and it serves to enhance the quality of clinical care of all. The links to the hospital extend well beyond hospital administrators. Nursing students work with nurses and clinical instructors in a variety of units throughout the hospital. Heather Craven and Audrey Roberson are just two of the nurses who work with students from the School of Nursing.

Craven, a nurse clinician on a 28-bed Acute Care Unit, has worked for the VCU Health System since she completed her nursing degree at VCU in 1982. She returned to the School of Nursing to earn her Master's in 1989. Roberson works in the Medical Respiratory ICU, also received her B.S. and M.S. from the School of Nursing and is preparing to enter the Ph.D. program.

Craven works with nursing students as both a clinical faculty member and a preceptor. She believes the clinical experience offered at VCUHS sets the School apart from other programs.

"Students have the opportunity to work with an interdisciplinary team in an environment where teaching is part of the mission. They are often exposed to types of patients and treatments that they would not see in the community environment and have the opportunity to participate in medical rounds," Craven said. "By virtue of the hospital's mission, staff expect and accept their role in precepting students and many have gone on to further their own education or take on the role of adjunct faculty."

Roberson said the clinicals are extremely beneficial to students, allowing them to develop confidence, skills and decision-making ability. Nursing students also see the administrative side of the hospital, attending meetings where critical decisions are made.

"We see such growth in the nursing students during their time in the unit," Roberson said. "It's so rewarding to see the progress they make and to be a part of their education." The benefits of this partnership also strengthen the hospital. Craven finds personal and professional fulfillment through her work with students.

"What I find the most rewarding is the energy and passion they bring to the clinical environment. They have come to us from diverse backgrounds and bring the richness of that diversity with them into the clinical environment," Craven said. "They also challenge my staff, helping to push their practice further than they might have gone independently."

**Alumni**

This constellation extends beyond the walls of the School and the hospital into our active alumni community. From generous gifts to voluntary service on committees, alumni also support the work of our students and our faculty. Alumni generosity is invaluable; your gifts support nursing scholarships, student activities and the work of our faculty.

Now, alumni have another option for supporting nursing students. A new program offered through the School of Nursing and the MCV Alumni Association connects volunteer alumni with current nursing students. See pages 17 and 22 for more information.
LifeEvac Team Trains in CLC

The VCU LifeEvac flight crew used the School’s Clinical Learning Center (CLC) for a training exercise in February. CLC staff worked with the crew to design a specialized training program for paramedics and flight nurses. The CLC not only supports the School’s nursing students, but working nurses and other health care providers.
Dr. Michael Rao to be VCU’s Fifth President

The Virginia Commonwealth University Board of Visitors has announced that Michael Rao, Ph.D., president of Central Michigan University, will be VCU’s next president and president of the VCU Health System. He also will be a tenured professor in the School of Education.

Rao, 42, comes to VCU with the experience of three successful presidencies at universities of increasing size and complexity.

“Michael Rao’s accomplishments are remarkable,” said VCU Rector Tom Rosenthal. “Members of the board, the Presidential Search Committee and others representing university groups who have met Mike are excited about the energy, enthusiasm and intelligence he will bring to VCU as its fifth president.”

Rosenthal said the board’s decision was unanimous and comes after an extensive process that sought input from the entire university community about VCU’s future and the type of person who should be its next president. A 17-member, university-wide presidential search committee used that information as it conducted a national search and forwarded recommendations to the VCU Board of Visitors.

Rao will officially take the helm of the university on July 1 when Eugene P. Trani retires from the positions of VCU president and president and chair of the VCU Health System. Trani will remain at VCU as University Distinguished Professor.

“I am very pleased with the appointment of Michael Rao to be my successor,” Trani said. “I am impressed with his experience and the energy he will bring to one of the best jobs there is. The board and the search committee have found the right person to continue VCU’s transformation as a world class university and academic medical center.”

Rao has served as president and professor at Central Michigan University since 2000. CMU, located in Mount Pleasant, Mich., is a public doctoral research institution with 28,000 students and an operating budget of more than $400 million.

Rao is one of the three longest-serving presidents among Michigan’s 15 public universities.

Rao and his wife, Monica, a professional watercolorist and graphic designer, have two sons, Miguel, 9, and Aiden, 9 months old.
Finding Their Paths

VCU Students Share Different Journeys to Nursing

As the nursing profession has evolved and the shortage has intensified, an increasing number of people are considering a career in nursing. To meet the needs of a diverse student population, the VCU School of Nursing offers a variety of programs for its dedicated students, including RNs, non-nurses or professionals seeking advanced degrees.

Katherine Skaggs

Skaggs, a 28-year-old student in the traditional bachelor’s program, comes to nursing from a career as a ballerina. A dancer with the Richmond Ballet until May 2008, Skaggs decided it was time to retire and make a change.

While nursing and dance are very different fields, Skaggs said she was always open to a career in health care. Her father, an orthopaedic surgeon, often said Skaggs would make a good nurse. "I liked taking care of people," she said. "But my first love was the ballet. I always wanted to be a dancer, but knew it wouldn't last forever."

Health concerns also influenced Skaggs' decision to retire last year. In 1997, soon after landing a job with the Richmond Ballet, Skaggs was diagnosed with Lupus. "At first, I felt like the floor fell out from under me. I wasn't sure if I would be able to dance," she said. "But I was able to work with my doctors to control my symptoms and continue dancing."

The life of a dancer also involves inevitable injuries. As she endured several knee surgeries, Skaggs had several interactions with nurses. The care and compassion they demonstrated had an impact on Skaggs and influenced her decision to apply to the VCU School of Nursing.

"Nursing seemed like the right career choice for me. The opportunity to work one-on-one with patients really appeals to me," she said.

After nearly a year in the nursing program, Skaggs said she's been very impressed with the School and enjoys the curriculum.

"It was a challenge to change direction. I moved from a job where I was on my feet all day to sitting in class for hours at a time," she said. "But some skills have been a real asset to me. As a dancer, I was very disciplined. That work ethic translates very easily to the demands of a nursing student."

Skaggs hasn't completely left the ballet behind. She finds time to teach children's ballet classes and her husband, Phillip, still dances with the Richmond Ballet.

Jeanne Minetree

As a child, Minetree thought she would grow up to be a nurse some day. However, she settled on a career in public education when she entered the workforce more than 30 years ago.

"From childhood I wanted to be a nurse but somehow took a different path in college, probably because my older sister decided to be a nurse and I was tired of competing with her,"
she said. "Now that mortality seems to be approaching much faster, I wasn’t comfortable with the thought of having any regrets about what I should have done with my life. So, five years ago, I started from the bottom again to become a nurse and then decided to pursue graduate nursing studies."

Minetree continues to work full-time as a high school librarian while pursuing her master’s in nursing on a part-time basis. Although the transition required adjustment, her children are grown, offering her more free time to pursue her dream.

"At the outset of nursing school, I announced to all of my friends and fellow church members that my time for the next several years would need to be prioritized for nursing school. I have had to put my former ‘normal’ life on hold because nursing classes have totally monopolized my time," she said.

Moving from a humanities background into a scientific curriculum was also a challenge for Minetree. As she juggles nursing school and a full-time job, she relies on organization, weekly deadlines and self-discipline.

"Regardless of how smart you are or how many degrees you already have, nursing school is a challenge. I wasn’t too proud to ask for help. When I took Microbiology and also Anatomy and Physiology, I spent many afterschool sessions with my high school’s biology and anatomy teachers for extra instruction. They helped me build a solid foundation of understanding that has proven invaluable as I progress in VCU’s MSN program," Minetree said.

Minetree is working towards dual certification as a psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner and a clinical nurse specialist.

Krystle & Melani Brunson
Sisters Krystle and Melani Brunson are pursuing master’s degrees in nursing from VCU. In addition to pursuing graduate degrees together, both received their B.S. from VCU and both work for the VCU Health System.

Sharing an interest in advanced practice nursing, Krystle and Melani knew that they would not stop with the bachelor’s degrees. Although Melani initially planned to begin the graduate program immediately after graduating, she decided to wait until Krystle graduated.

"We came up with the idea of attending graduate school together. Almost immediately I thought it was a great idea because we always wanted to be in the same class. So in the end, I took a year-long break from school to allow Krystle to graduate. We enrolled in graduate school fall 2008," she said.

Both sisters are pursuing their master’s degree part-time while maintaining full-time nursing jobs. Krystle believes that her work experience is an asset to her education.

"Although I aspire to be an nurse practitioner, I feel that going to school part-time and working full time is best for me because I am able gain the experience I need as a bedside nurse before becoming an advanced practice nurse," she said.

While going through the program together provides a support system, both Melani and Krystle admit that life is demand-
Congratulations to the Class of 2008

On Dec. 12, the VCU School of Nursing held its December Recognition Ceremony to honor more than 200 new graduates. VCU recognized all 2,400 graduates from across the University at the Graduation Ceremony the following day.

During the Recognition Ceremony, a number of students were recognized for their accomplishments. Award recipients include:

- Mabel E. Montgomery Award: Aimee Phillips
- Marguerite G. Nicholson Award: Ginger Vanhoozer
- Mayme B. Wilson Lacey Award: Whitney Hardy
- Yingling Senior Achievement Award: Jean McPherson Rabb
- Yingling Senior Achievement Award: Claudia Verdirame
- RN Award: Elizabeth Ann Tatterson
- Temple Memorial Award: Kerin James
- Martha M. Borlick Research Award: Pamela Sharp
Together nearly half their lives
Aimee Dutton Phillips and Danny Phillips have been together for nearly half their lives. A fact made all the more astounding when you consider that they are only 23 and 25 years old, respectively. Married in the summer of 2008, they have been in school together since she was a cheerleader and he was a football standout in Winchester, Va. Aimee was the first to attend the University of Alabama, and Danny followed soon thereafter. Then Danny transferred to VCU and it was Aimee’s turn to follow him. At the VCU School of Nursing they both were hired to work in the Clinical Learning Center (CLC). One might think that so much togetherness would be hard on a couple, but Aimee and Danny present a quiet maturity that reaches far beyond their years.

Their story is, by all accounts, extraordinary. Aimee lost both parents within weeks of each other while still in high school. Danny, a child of divorced parents, returned to Virginia from Alabama to help care for his mother after she suffered a stroke. As each of them applied to VCU for nursing, Danny was accepted to the traditional program, while Aimee was wait listed for the accelerated bachelor’s program. She was, however, at the top of the list and was soon admitted to School.

Initially, Danny was a couple of semesters ahead of Aimee when she started the program, but she soon caught up due to the fast pace of her program. She graduated in December ’08, while Danny will graduate in May ’09. Of the experience of being together in nursing school, the couple says that it was good – they were able to be there for each other to offer support and encouragement in ways that other spouses and partners could not, though they did have to make an effort to not talk school and work talk too much. Each feels they gained a lot from their work in the CLC where they had constant opportunities to interact with other students and faculty. The experience served to reinforce the skills they acquired and gave them a bit of an insider’s view to the VCU School of Nursing.

Of their decision to attend VCU over Radford or UVA, Aimee says that they had friends in Richmond that showed them around campus and downtown and got them excited about living in the city. Of their best experiences at VCU, Danny says that the school really helped him to focus on his potential. The recipient of numerous scholarships, Danny was one of 10 VCU students to be named a Trani Scholar – the University’s most prestigious student award. The Trani Scholars program was established through a $1 million gift from Dianne and C. Kenneth Wright in honor of VCU President Eugene P. Trani as he neared retirement. Aimee also enjoyed seeing Danny realize his potential while in school and personally feels that she gained a lot of confidence in her capability to be a nurse while at VCU. At the school’s Recognition Ceremony in December, Aimee was awarded the Mable E. Montgomery award for clinical nursing excellence.

Soon after graduation, Aimee got her wish and accepted a position in the NICU at the VCU Health System. She is already at work in the hospital and has plans to pursue a master’s in nursing education in the next few years. Danny is in his last semester of school and applying to the nursing leadership and administration graduate program at the School of Nursing, with an eye on graduate school in nurse anesthesia in the next few years.

After so much time spent in close proximity to each other, the couple has not ruled out working together in the future. The couple says that Aimee is the more organized of the two, while Danny is more technical. Though they can’t see a natural overlap for their nursing careers just yet, they won’t rule it out.
VCU Libraries Add Nursing History to Digital Collection

VCU is pleased to announce the release of a new addition to its Libraries Digital Collections - A Proud Heritage: 100 Years of Nursing Education. The collection, available at http://go.vcu.edu/proudheritage, is a digitization of the entire book, originally published in 1992.

In the late 1980s, nursing alumni, faculty, and students began planning for the 100th anniversary observance of the founding of the VCU School of Nursing. The school traces its rich heritage back to the organization of the Virginia Hospital Training School for Nurses which opened in 1893. Betsy A. Bampton (MCV Class of 1960) undertook the writing of a school history published as the centennial celebration was set to begin. In this abundantly illustrated work, Bampton and her collaborators chronicle the development and growth of the eight diverse schools and programs that formed the foundation of the VCU School of Nursing. The stories unveiled in A Proud Heritage are integral to a full understanding of the VCU School of Nursing today.

The original publication was distributed widely both within the VCU community and beyond, but few copies remain to circulate among new students and friends of the school. The VCU Libraries, working in cooperation with the School of Nursing, is pleased to make available an electronic version of this useful book. A Proud Heritage is just one of several electronic resources available for those interested in the study of the history of nursing in Virginia.

Visit the VCU Libraries Digital Collections at http://dig.library.vcu.edu/

VCU Moves Up in NIH Rankings

According to recent data from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the VCU School of Nursing is now ranked 19th among 82 nursing schools for NIH funding. In 2007, the School was ranked 23rd. The School has set a goal to rank consistently among the top 20 Schools.

The VCU School of Nursing was awarded $2.2 million in 2008 for research that largely is focused on the development of the science for improving the health of the nation.

“The faculty has a major concentration on bio-behavioral clinical research that improves the quality of care and therefore the quality of life of people experiencing critical illnesses,” said Nancy Langston, Ph.D., dean of the VCU School of Nursing.

Recent Dissertation Defenses

Rachel Cobb: “How Well Does Spirituality Predict Health Status in People Living with HIV Disease”


Junyanee Griffin: “The Experience of Mothers of a Preterm Infant During the First Month After Infant’s Hospital Discharge”

Kathleen Putnam: “The relationship of Inner Strength and Health Promoting Behaviors in Midlife Women, and their effect on Quality of Life”

Pamela Sharp: “Self-Efficacy and Barriers to Health-Promoting Behavior in Cardiac Rehabilitation Participants and Non-Participants”

Deborah Ulmer: “The Experience of Volunteering for Hurricane Katrina Relief”

Carol Zogran: “Exploring the Experience of Benefit Finding in Parents of Children with Cancer: A Grounded Theory Study”

Faculty and Staff Notes

The National Cancer Institute, NIH, is funding a grant for Dr. Debra Lyon to study Cranial Stimulation for Chemotherapy Symptoms in Breast Cancer Patients. Co-investigators include, Dr. Nancy McCain, Dr. Jeanne Walter PhD ’05, Dr. Christine Schubert, and Dr. Harry Bear.

Dr. Jeanne Salyer submitted a research proposal to the American Heart Association for a project entitled "Symptom Clusters in Patients with Heart Failure.” Contributors to the proposed research project include Maureen Flattery and Debra Lyon; Lorraine Murphy provided support for budget development and proposal submission requirements. The proposal is now making its way through the AHA review process.

At the State of the Science conference, Dr Patty Gray, received the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science 2008 Service Award for exemplary service rendered to the Council over the past 2 1/2 years.

A project from the department of Family and Community Health Nursing was selected as one of the 40 Acts of Caring celebrated at the 40th Anniversary of VCU. The project titled, "Preparing Children for School Entry,” is a service learning project and graduate course for a concentration in Child Health Clinical. The project involved both faculty and students led by Dr. Rita Pickler, who initiated this community service learning and community engagement activity.

Debra Hearington was elected as chair of the VCU Head Start Governing Board. Debra has been on the VCU Head Start Governing Board for several years. Head Start programs are well known for their improved outcomes related to child learning and health.

Selected from among a highly selective pool of applicants, The American Journal of Critical Care, the premier research journal in critical care recently selected Dr. Cindy Munro as the new co-editor Dr. Kathy Dracup previously served in this role.
The board of the Oncology Nursing Society has selected Dr. Jeanne Walter to lead a diverse "think-tank" team of oncology leaders as they focus on Preparing the Next Generation of Oncology Nurses. Members are located across the country and specialize in administration, education, practice and research. Walter will choose the team members (from more than 60 applicants) and pull the team together within the next month. Walter is a professor in the School’s Department of Family and Community Health Nursing.

Former faculty member, Ed Kardos, the current Director of Development at the School of Dentistry, announces the completion of his new book, *Zen Master Next Door: Parables for Enlightened Everyday Living*. It was released in March, 2009 and more information can be found on his website: http://www.edwardgkardos.com

The Institute for Women’s Health awarded $10,000 to Dr. Jo Lynne Robins for her project "Exploring the Feasibility and Acceptability of a Novel Tai Chi Program for Stress Management in Women." This opportunity will support Robins’ community based research efforts in women’s health. Robins is an assistant professor in the School’s Department of Family and Community Health Nursing.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the leading cause of death in women. Women tend to present with more advanced disease and experience increased mortality and morbidity compared to men. In addition to physiological indicators of increased CHD risk such as hypertension and diabetes, perceived stress, lower social support and socioeconomic status all significantly increase risk. Because CHD develops over decades, it is possible to decrease risk through lifestyle modification including effective stress management.

The purpose of this project is to assess feasibility and acceptability of tai chi as a self-care stress management strategy. A tai chi program will be offered to women with increased CHD risk living in the Fulton Hill neighborhood in order to establish a desirable, viable program in an existing community organization whose mission is to empower at risk individuals to improve their lives and the lives of others in the community. Primary PI Jo Robins, PhD, RN, School of Nursing Community Partner: Neighborhood Resource Center (NRC) is a grassroots, non-profit center for personal growth and community change located in Greater Fulton Hill. (Richmond’s East End) The NRC Neighborhood Resource Center strengthens individuals and communities by providing a multi-purpose space where neighbors come together to build relationships, access resources, and develop skills to enhance their lives and determine the fate of their community.

Milagritos Flinn selected for PACME Award

Congratulations to Milagritos (Millie) Flinn, Hispanic Coordinator for the VCU School of Nursing, on her selection as the staff recipient of the 2009 Presidential Awards for Community Multicultural Enrichment (PACME). The PACME Awards honor individuals who have made significant contributions toward enhancing VCU’s commitment to diversity. Four separate awards recognize students, faculty, classified and hourly staff, and administrators. The awards ceremony was held in April.

Millie coordinates efforts to recruit Spanish-speaking nurses to VCU’s RN-to-BS program. This grant-funded initiative has attracted many students to the VCU School of Nursing.
Alumni Nurse Mentors: Creating a Stronger Nursing Community

The word “service” is frequently sprinkled throughout our conversations these days. High school students worry over collecting enough community service hours for graduation. Organizations such as AmeriCorps connect young adults with opportunities to serve their communities. And President Obama encouraged all of us to volunteer over the Martin Luther King weekend. While service may be a relatively new concept to some, nursing has long demonstrated a commitment to contributing to the welfare of others. It is in this spirit that I invite our alumni to serve the VCU nursing community in a unique way.

The Nursing Division is seeking alumni to join the VCU Nursing Student-Alumni Connector, beginning with our sophomore class this fall. With 40 faculty spread across 1,000 students, alumni offer an important link in nurturing students along their educational journey and career path. Recalling my days as a nursing student, I would love to have had an extended support system. What a wonderful gift it would have been for me to receive a note of encouragement from someone who walked in my nursing shoes. What a treasured resource to have been able to ask advice of a nurse alumnus. And what a boost it would have been to receive a call from a member of the VCU nursing community to offer congratulations when I soared over yet another hurdle along my journey to become a professional nurse.

I invite you to participate in the VCU Nursing Student-Alumni Connector and join me in creating a nurturing community for our VCU nursing students. This endeavor will require the support of all of us. For alumni who don’t reside in the Richmond area, you can still serve as a mentor. All you’ll need to do is be on the other end of that e-mail, telephone call or letter to share your wisdom and experience. You’ll be asked to offer encouragement and guidance during the highs and lows of our students’ educational year. We’ll help you get started by providing an orientation program and structure for the mentoring relationship.

This is an exciting program that benefits all of us – experienced nurses as well as students. Not only will you learn how today’s educational experience differs from our time at the school of nursing but you’ll gain personal satisfaction from fostering the development of a nursing student. And you’ll also experience the gratification of passing a legacy to our next generation.

To answer this call to service and become a mentor please contact the MCV Association’s Michael Greene-Russell at (804) 828-3900 or migreene@vcu.edu. Interested in participating in our mentoring program.

Terri Adcock Gaffney (B.S. ’81)
Chair, Nursing Division Board
MCV Alumni Association

Alumni Survey

The VCU School of Nursing is seeking your input as we improve communications efforts and identify the needs of our alumni. The survey can be accessed through the VCU School of Nursing homepage. If you prefer to receive an email or paper version, please call 804-828-2095 or email awridolphi@vcu.edu. Your input is important as we seek to enhance our communications with alumni.
Alumni Honored for Contributions to Nursing

The MCV Alumni Association of VCU presented the following nurses the 2009 Outstanding Alumni Awards during Reunion Weekend:

- Cindy Munro, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N.: Outstanding Nurse Alumnus Award
- Vivian H. Bagby, R.N: Outstanding Nurse Service Award
- Christi Adams, M.S.N., R.N.: Outstanding Nurse Practice Award

"Alumni from the MCV, St Philip and VCU Schools of Nursing are a diverse and accomplished group. It is a humbling experience to review the nominations and a pleasure to recognize these outstanding clinicians, educators, and community leaders during reunion weekend," said Trish Bernal, chair of the MCV Alumni Association Awards Committee.

Outstanding Nurse Alumnus

Munro earned a diploma in nursing from the York Hospital School of Nursing, her B.S.N. from Millersville University of Pennsylvania and her M.S.N. from the University of Delaware College of Nursing. In 1992, Munro completed her Ph.D. in a program offered cooperatively through the VCU School of Nursing and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in the VCU School of Basic Health Sciences. Munro also earned a Post-Master’s Adult Nurse Practitioner Certificate from the VCU School of Nursing.

Munro has served as a professor with the VCU School of Nursing since 1992 and currently teaches in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. An active researcher, Munro is currently studying the impact of oral care on the prevention of ventilator-acquired pneumonia in critically ill patients. She recently received a $1.78 million continuation grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to further her work. In addition, Dr. Munro serves as nurse co-editor of the American Journal of Critical Care and volunteers as an adult nurse practitioner with the Petersburg Health Care Alliance.

"Dr. Munro fully exemplifies the VCU spirit of service to others first," said D. Patricia Gray, Ph.D., R.N., department chair for the VCU School of Nursing Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. "She is committed to the success of VCU and the success of our students. She is equally passionate about the conduct of clinically significant research and the provision of high quality health care services."

Outstanding Nurse Service Award

Bagby earned her nursing diploma at the St. Philip School of Nursing in 1960. During the era of racial segregation, MCV established St. Philip for African-American women. Bagby continued her training by earning a B.S. from the VCU School of Nursing in 1982. In 1989, she completed her M.S. in Gerontology from VCU. She retired from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Richmond in 1998 following 36 years of dedicated service.

An active member of her community, Bagby applies her nursing skills and knowledge to health initiatives. She is the pastoral leader of the Health Ministry of the Metropolitan African American Baptist Church in Richmond. In addition, she is an active member of the Greater Richmond Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, serving as chairperson of the African American Outreach Committee and a member of the Program Committee. In addition, she is a member of the Virginia Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Commission which serves in an advisory capacity to the Governor and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources.

"Vivian is a dependable and capable woman who has served our church for more than 10 years. I have come to admire her sound judgment, analytical mind and devotion to the task at hand. She is an asset to our church family," said Barbara E. Ingram, executive pastor of the Metropolitan African American Baptist Church in Richmond.

Outstanding Nurse Practice Award

Adams received both her B.S. and her M.S. (with a concentration in Adult Acute Care) from the VCU School of Nursing. In 2008, she became a certified clinical nurse specialist through the AACN.

Adams has worked for the VCU Medical Center for more than 20 years, currently working in the STICU as a nurse clinician. Committed to improving patient care, Adams led the STICU in drastically reducing nosocomial infections and piloted a study related to a ventilated acquired pneumonia protocol. As a result of this initiative, Adams received the 2005 VCU Medical Center Nursing Performance Improvement Award. In 2006, she received the VCU Medical Center Nurse Clinician Excellence Award. She lives in Mechanicsville with her husband and three school-aged children.

"Christi is a champion of interdisciplinary practice and is known for her skill in facilitating positive patient care outcomes with her colleagues," said Nancy New, Nursing Director at the VCU Health System. "She is known throughout the medical center, community and nation as a critical care nursing expert who is making a positive contribution to the advancement of critical care nursing practice."
Melissa Hedgepath Hunt (N’ 89, MSHA ’05), Christine McCaffrey Kroll (N’89) and Denise Young Lynch (BS ’89) haven’t strayed too far from the VCU School of Nursing since graduation in 1989. All are employed in some capacity in the VCU Health System: Hunt as the Director of Oncology Nursing Administration for the Massey Cancer Center, Kroll as an RN in Labor and Delivery and Lynch as an RN in the Gummenick Suites. In the 20 years since graduation, they have never had to worry about the prospect of a job, but this current economy has them concerned for the new grads entering the workforce this year.

"My hours have been cut for the first time ever in 20 years, but I am hourly," said Kroll.

In contrast, much of the Class of ’89 was hired straight out of nursing school, by as little as a phone call, with no real interview. Hunt noted "We had internships then. You were allowed to try a position for six months, then try another for six months and in the end you chose the one you liked best. Jobs were so in abundance.”

The quickness of job recruitment was in direct contrast to the slowness of the NCLEX. At the time, it was offered only twice a year and paper based. Taking it required two full days. If you didn't pass it you had to wait six months to try again.

Kroll was class president and remembers their class as being close knit. Lynch cites the NEXUS program that VCU had as helping all the pre-nursing students connect early on. This was advantageous, as they had to reapply to nursing school at the end of their sophomore year in order to be formally accepted into the program. It was a grueling and tiresome process, and not without some misinformation.

"Everybody thought they needed a new suit to be interviewed, so we would all show up in our suits and the first question was "Did you really think you needed a new suit?" said Lynch.

Living in Cabaniss Hall on the edge of the MCV Campus furthered their bonds, too, as did the somewhat unbalanced workload between their 18 hours of classes plus clinical...
rotations in comparison to other undergrads more relaxed schedules.

Their clinical experience began at 7 a.m. Nursing students were the first students up on campus – awake and out even before the cafeteria opened.

Hunt remembered, “They would open the cafeteria doors in the back so we could make our own sandwiches for lunch and have oatmeal and cereal for breakfast.”

The Class of ’89 did their community health rotations during the worst years of Richmond’s drug wars when the city had the sad distinction of being the per capita murder capital of the country.

“The school didn’t provide transportation and we didn’t have cars. We were sent out into private homes in really bad neighborhoods and had to rely on commuter students with cars to get there,” said Hunt. “I remember my father saying ‘they are sending you where?’ But it was required, so we did it.

Lynch remembered, “Gloria Francis thought we were weird because we hadn’t ridden the city bus, so she made us do it. We were so scared we walked back.”

Metropolitan Hospital (now the Honors Dorm on the Monroe Park Campus) was the site for the Psych/Mental Health rotation. All agree that it was a frightening experience.

Richmond was just rougher in general then.

“Christine’s parents were so surprised at the condition of Broad Street that they didn’t want to leave her here,” remembered Hunt. “But somehow the university always got Monroe Park cleaned up for Parent’s Weekend.”

Lynch remembered how naïve she was during her school years: “I was doing a substance abuse workshop in West Hospital and this woman said she got sent there after getting caught soliciting and I said ‘You got sent to jail for selling doughnuts?!’ because that’s what I thought soliciting was. I thought my instructor would die laughing at me.”

All agree that it got easier once they finished school and could concentrate entirely on working. Their class worked hard and studied hard. When they had spare time, they enjoyed the social perks on the MCV campus.

“We cried when they took down Larrick, because we lived in Larrick, we ate in Larrick,” Hunt said.
"It used to be $2 and all the beer you could drink on Friday night, the Sunglasses at Night parties. They raised money for the children's hospital," remembered Kroll.

"Since it was only $2, nobody cared if the beer stayed in the cup, so there was always beer all over the dance floor. The DJ was a dental student," Hunt added.

The men's dorm tended to host the parties and car washing was a social event. When they ventured to the Monroe Park Campus, movies at the Biograph Theatre on Grace Street were a good diversion, with a snack from Don's Hot Nuts beforehand and a late night trip to Golden Doughnut to cap off the evening.

They fondly remember the Army recruitment dinners at Red Lobster, though nobody they knew signed up for the service.

"We went for the free food," Lynch said.

As the class prepares to come back and celebrate their 20th reunion this April, they fondly remember their faculty, many of whom they hope to see during the weekend: Gloria Francis, Jeanette and Jackie Jones, Gail Johnson, Susan Lipp, Kathy Bobbitt and Dorothy Crowder.

*If you would like your class to be the subject of a Remember When column, please contact Amy Ridolphi at awridolphi@vcu.edu or (804) 828-2095.
Alumni Notes

Jacqueline Bailey BS’06, currently lives in Richmond, Va. where she works as a nurse at the Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center.

Margaret Ann Brown BS ’96 is practicing law with WootenHart, PLC in Roanoke, Va. in the area of medical malpractice defense. Before practicing law she worked in intensive care and hospice nursing.

Tine Sweeney Haney BS ’84, MS ’87 of Norfolk, Va. recently accepted a position as Assistant Director in the Registered Nurse Program at the Medical Careers Institute in Virginia Beach. Also, she recently married Scott Haney.

Alexa Merchant BS ’05 lives in Foothill Ranch, Calif., where she is a Travel Nurse with American Mobile Healthcare.

Deborah Raines PhD ’92, professor at Florida Atlantic University, was inducted as a fellow in the Academy of Nursing Education. She lives in Boca Raton, Fla.

Kathleen (Rixner) Smith BS ’08 currently lives in Greer, S.C. with her husband, Paul Smith, whom she married on August 2, 2008.

Kimberlyn D. Towles BS ’93 currently lives in Richmond, Va. where she works as a registered nurse for McGuire VAMC. She’d like to share that her son, Gabriel A. Walker, is in his third year at VCU’s undergrad program where he is studying business concentrating on pre-law. He was elected to SGA where he is the Director of Student Affairs.

Laura M. Wadsworth MS ’93, in Richmond, is job hunting after recently deciding to re-enter the workforce.

Denise Watkind MS ’85 lives in Urbana, Ill. where she works as a Nurse Practitioner at the University of Illinois.

In Memory

Miss Lois M. Barker ’50
Mrs. Margaret M. Beattie ’44
Mrs. Ursula H. Bew ’36
Mrs. Helen U. Britt ’42
Dr. Rebecca A. Brundrett ’60
Mrs. Helen T. Bryce ’35
Ms. Elsie J. Campbell ’83
Mrs. Tinnie B. Conover ’48
Mrs. Jeannette H. Deaton ’61
Mrs. Martha J. Frazer ’98
Mrs. Roberta K. Hallman ’55
Mrs. Alice R. Hamlett ’52
Mrs. Audrey S. Harrington ’54
Mr. Roy L. Hartsook ’89
Mrs. Evelyn R. Johnson ’39
Mrs. Margaret L. Johnson ’42
Mrs. Carolyn M. Kendall ’69
Ms. Theresa Knowles ’89
Mrs. Dorothy W. Lee ’51
Mrs. Carolyn R. Linden ’41
Mrs. Joan M. McDaniel ’51
Miss Clarie E. Minnis ’51
Ms. Baine M. Ney ’58

Nursing Alumni Sought for Student Program

The MCV Alumni Association is partnering with the VCU School of Nursing to introduce a program this fall that will pair alumni and students.

The new program encourages alumni of the School of Nursing and the St. Philip School of Nursing to serve in a nurturing role for sophomore nursing students, about 70 in the fall of 2009.

Alumni would work in teams of one “seasoned” alumnus (graduates from 1980 or earlier) and one “junior” alumnus (graduates from 1981-2008). The team would play a supportive role to the students by contacting them at least once every two weeks to offer words of encouragement during stressful times as well as a friendly voice celebrating accomplishments or everyday successes.

The alumni association and the School of Nursing will provide alumni with a list of significant dates in the students’ lives, such as birthdays, first clinical rotations, first days of exams and more.

If you are interested in participating, please contact the MCV Association’s Michael Greene-Russell at (804) 828-3900 or migreene@vcu.edu.
Go Green
Connect with VCU online

In an effort to reduce costs and support eco-friendly practices, the VCU School of Nursing is now offering a variety of electronic communication options. Alumni and friends can connect to the School via email, Facebook and the website (www.nursing.vcu.edu).

Connections
If you’d prefer to view an online version of Connections, please email vcunursing@vcu.edu. Alumni can also update records by visiting www.nursing.vcu.edu/alumni (click on update your records in the lower left). Instead of receiving the magazine in the mail, you’ll receive an email and link to view the latest issue.

Facebook
Facebook is the latest in online social networking trends. Users of the free site create personal profiles, complete with photos, and make friends, join common interest groups, networks, play games, etc. To join us in Facebook, create your own profile and look for the VCU School of Nursing. You never know who you might find to reconnect with!

Email
The School of Nursing is collecting email addresses from alumni who want to stay updated on events and activities at the School. Email addresses will remain private and used only for VCU-related communications. Please email vcunursing@vcu.edu today to share your address.