Making Connections
New program connects alumni with nursing students
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- Page 3. About the Cover: VCU School of Nursing student Jamara Allen, pictured left, was paired with Corinne Dorsey, a nursing alumna for the VCU Nursing Student-Alumni Connector program. This new program is organized by the MCV Alumni Association and the VCU School of Nursing. The photo was taken at Clista’s Coffee and Cream in Quinton, Va. (www.clistascoffeeandcream.com).
As we approach the conclusion of another semester, there are many exciting changes occurring at your School of Nursing. As you’ll read in the cover story of this issue of Connections, our VCU Nursing Student-Alumni Connector program is well underway. A joint effort of the School and the MCV Alumni Association of VCU, this program pairs sophomore nursing students with alumni who are there to provide support throughout the school year.

We have been thrilled with the response of both students and alumni with this program. Our nursing alumni have been enthusiastic in volunteering for this program and serving a vital role in the lives of our students. As always, our alumni are ready to support our students in any way and help those students succeed on their path to nursing.

Our students also value this program and the chance to connect with alumni who are experienced, successful nurses. It is my hope that this program will continue to grow and that more alumni will consider volunteering.

In this issue, you’ll also read about our new Nursing Alumni Endowed Professors. Thanks to the strong support of our alumni and friends, we have named four impressive faculty members to these professorships: Drs. Mary Jo Grap, Nancy McCain, Cindy Munro and Rita Pickler. These scientists are dedicated to the School, our students, our patients and nursing research. Each of these faculty members has contributed to establishing the School’s Center for Biobehavioral Clinical Research (CBCR), currently funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research. Through the CBCR, these scientists are supporting early stage researchers as they establish their individual research programs.

In December, Dr. Janet Younger, who committed more than 30 years to the School, announced her retirement from the VCU School of Nursing. As associate dean of academic programs, Janet made innumerable contributions to the School, our students, faculty and alumni. Beyond her many successes here at the School, Janet also dedicated herself to improving the profession, serving on the Virginia Board of Nursing and on the National Council of State Boards of Nursing task force. Words just can’t convey the important role Janet has played in the life of the School and the nursing profession. I wish her well in her retirement.

Our students are also doing their part to engage in the community and improve lives for patients. The VCU School of Nursing Chapter of Nursing Students Without Borders is very active both locally and internationally. In January, they traveled to Belize where they volunteered in a free clinic and provided health screenings to elementary students. This summer, they will travel to Haiti. In addition, they are supporting local efforts including blood drives, book collections and health fairs. I’m proud of the work that our students are doing and their commitment to service.

At the end of April, the School will conclude its inaugural lecture series. In the fall, the School hosted lectures with the new VCU President Michael Rao and Dr. Teena McGuinness, a VCU alumna and faculty member at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing.

On April 28, Dr. Patricia Grady, Director of the National Institute of Nursing Research, will present the Mahoney-Hamner Nursing Alumni Lectureship. We are delighted to host Dr. Grady and our faculty and students are looking forward to meeting a true leader in nursing research.

In conclusion, I’m looking forward to the 2010 Alumni Reunion and reconnecting with friends. We here in your School are pleased to join the Alumni Association in fulfilling its goal to keep you engaged with each other, the School and the University.

Fond regards,

Nancy F. Langston, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN
Making Connections
New program connects alumni with nursing students
Nursing school is tough and no one understands that better than a nurse who's been there. From difficult classes to long days in clinicals, VCU nursing students face many challenges on the path to graduation.

To add a new level of support to those students, the Nursing Division of the MCV Alumni Association of VCU (MCVAA) partnered with the VCU School of Nursing to create the VCU Nursing Student-Alumni Connector. It kicked off this fall and has been enthusiastically supported by both students and nursing alumni.

“We know that enrollment has grown tremendously over the last 10 years, but the number of full-time faculty has remained essentially unchanged. The nursing faculty continue to provide an exceptional education to our nursing students. What was missing is the frequent one-on-one interaction that supports and nurtures students,” said Terri Adcock Gaffney (B.S. ’81), chair of the Nursing Division Board of MCVAA.

Gaffney and VCU School of Nursing Dean Nancy Langston Ph.D., R.N., FAAN saw an opportunity to more fully engage the School's alumni community in the lives of its current undergraduate students. The Connector program kicked off in September with 40 alumni-student pairs.

“Our alumni understand exactly what nursing students are going through. Through this program, alumni can nurture and support students and offer valuable career advice,” Gaffney said.

At the beginning of the semester, alumni volunteers and sophomore students completed a questionnaire. Gaffney used that information to match each student with an alumnus. All alumni volunteers participated in an orientation program, either in person or remotely.

According to Gaffney, each of the matches works differently and participants communicate in a variety of ways. For alumni living in other states, communication is mainly electronic while Richmond-area alumni may choose to meet their students in person. At some point, a Connector reception is planned to allow in-person interaction among students and alumni.

While this program is certainly beneficial to nursing students, alumni are finding it rewarding as well. It provides a new connection with the School and its current students. “We’ve heard from our alumni that after leaving the School, they feel a sense of loss without a class or peer group to support them. Alumni are looking for a new community, a place to go back to,” Gaffney said. “As nurses, we are obligated to give back and to prepare a future generation of nurses. The Connector program encompasses both those goals in a neat package.”

The MCVAA has surveyed Connector participants to gauge what is going well and identify any areas for improvement. Based upon the results of the survey, the program will continue in 2010 with a new class of sophomore students.

“The Connector program is a wonderful opportunity for our students to engage with the many accomplished alumni of this School of Nursing. We believe this interaction will strengthen the student experience and enrich the lives of nursing alumni,” said Dr. Langston.

A perfect match
Corinne Dorsey (’54, ’65) was paired with Jamara Allen, currently a sophomore at the VCU School of Nursing. As the pair has gotten better acquainted, they have found many similarities, including a connection to the town of Quinton, Va., located in New Kent County.

Despite a busy schedule, Dorsey signed up because of a strong desire to give back to nursing and remain involved with the school. “I have a very strong commitment to the School of Nursing and enjoy getting to know the students,” Dorsey said.

Throughout her nursing career, Dorsey taught various nursing courses. After retiring, she helped establish the School’s Unity Scholarship and had the opportunity to meet many of the recipients. Dorsey is excited about the Connector program and believes it offers an important service to students.

“This program offers students support as they go through nursing school. Our alumni have achieved some level of success in various areas of nursing and can offer students guidance as they think about the careers ahead of them,” Dorsey said. “We were all nursing students once. Although nursing education has changed, we can still relate to that fear of the unknown and the stress of preparing for tests and exams.”

Allen, who expects to earn her B.S. in 2012, decided to participate in the program to enhance her nursing school experience and find a source of guidance and support.

“I wanted to participate in the Connector program because I wanted to meet someone with experience who has been where I am now. Being completely new to this I thought it would be nice to just have someone to talk to who understands,” she said.

Allen said the program has been a real success and taught her interesting things about the history of the School and nursing.

“I’ve learned a lot from Corinne so far. I’ve learned how far VCU’s school of nursing has come and how much history is behind our School. I also learned to just try to relax at times even though things get hectic. Corinne just has such a calm demeanor about her that I admire and hope it rubs off on my anxiety prone personality,” Allen said. “I’m happy to have met such a sweet person like Corinne and have her as a life-long friend.”

For more information about the MCVAA or the Connector program, please visit http://www.vcu-mcvalumni.org or email mcv-alum@vcu.edu.
The VCU School of Nursing has a long, proud history of service to the community. Members of Nursing Students Without Borders (NSWB) of VCU take that commitment to heart and seek to make a difference both locally and internationally.

In January, eight members of the organization traveled to Belize to provide health screenings to kindergarteners and volunteer in a local clinic. Students traveled along with Colby Kohler, R.N., a nurse with the VCU Health System. Student participants included: Jennifer Peyton, president of NSWB, Amanda Hightower, Jeannette Spiedel, Katie Wilt, Kristina Holthus, Julie Williams and Grace Cowley.

“This trip provided us with some truly amazing experiences. We met two amazing women at the Good Shepherd Clinic, Nurse Juan and Dr. Guerra. Both women have spent the greater part their lives working to improve the quality of life for everyone around them, in any way possible. Meeting and working with them was extremely inspiring.” Peyton said.

Participating students not only supported patients in Belize on the trip, but also gained significant educational benefits from the trip. They performed health screenings on nearly 400 students ranging from preschool to 6th grade. The health screenings consisted of measuring height, weight, respiratory and heart rate, conducting a very basic dental exam, checking hearing, vision and blood pressure and evaluating umbilical hernias.

“Well, straight off the bat, I learned new practical skills. In addition, I have acquired insight to different cultures and am
more in tune with my fellow man - connecting through warm
smiles, cookies, a soft voice, eye contact, and health care. Also,
I became friends with my seven travel mates. We lived together
for one week, shared stories, experiences, food, drinks, laughter,
weather, bug bites, etc. Those seven girls are wonderful people
and will continue to improve the world around them wherever
they go,” Peyton said.

Future plans
After Haiti’s devastating earthquake, the group saw another way
to serve. This summer, the group will work with Rita Pickler,
Ph.D., R.N. FAAN, interim associate dean for research and
scholarship with the VCU School of Nursing, to plan a medical
mission trip to Haiti. Dr. Pickler has an established relationship
with Haiti Outreach Ministries.

NSWB is also planning a second trip to Belize in January 2011.
Locally, the students are supporting blood drives, health fairs and
other community efforts aimed at important health-related issues.

In August, NSWB will support the Teen Health Summit,
organized by the VCU School of Nursing Community Nursing
Organization (see article on page 12 for details). The organization
is now hosting fundraisers and accepting donations of money
and supplies to support its upcoming trips. If you’d like to
support NSWB, please visit www.nursing.vcu.edu and click on
NSWB seeks support for upcoming trips. For more information,
please email Peyton at peytonjm@mymail.vcu.edu
Join the MCV Alumni Association

The MCV Alumni Association is your connection to lifelong educational, career and social networking opportunities. Your continuing involvement with the university is critical to its sustained excellence.

Join now at www.vcu-mcvalumni.org.
Or call 804-828-3900 or 800-MCV-7799

Members Can Rent the MCV Alumni House

New for 2009, members of the MCV Alumni Association may now rent the Alumni House for a variety of uses:

- Receptions – Weddings, Business, Social
- Meetings – large or small conferences, individual breakout rooms, etc.

Call or stop by for details.
804-828-3900 or 804-MCV-7799
1016 E. Clay Street, Richmond, VA 23298

Online Journals Access

Through the VCU Libraries, current students enjoy online access to an amazing range of publications, journals and reports. Now as a benefit of membership in the MCV Alumni Association, alumni can get that same kind of access courtesy of the alumni association’s Online Journals Access provided by EBSCOhost. Alumni can get access to more than 3,350 full-text academic and professional publications plus 1,450 business publications and reports.


A sample of recently viewed publications: American Journal of Nursing • Creative Nursing • Biological Research For Nursing • Advanced Emergency Nursing Journal • Autonomic Neuroscience • Pain Practice • JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association • Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology • International Journal of Social Welfare • Paediatric Anaesthesia • The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine • British Medical Journal • Annals of Oncology • New York Times • Spine • Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise • Lancet • Time Magazine • People • Journal of Family Practice • Women in Business • Smithsonian • New England Journal of Medicine • New York Review of Books • Fortune • Futurist • Brain Research • Kiplinger’s Personal Finance Magazine • Nursing Management – UK

Annual $40
Recent Annual $25
Life $495
Senior Life $225

www.VCU-MCValumni.org
Chrisman Returns to Nursing School for New Career

The nursing profession and nursing education have changed dramatically in the last 20 years. While the average nursing student was once young and female, the options available to nurses have broadened interest in the field.

VCU School of Nursing sophomore Chris Chrisman is one of those students who doesn’t fit the mold of your stereotypical nursing student. At 46, Chrisman is now in his second semester, pursuing his B.S. in nursing.

A native of Dayton, Ohio, Chrisman didn’t consider nursing or even a college degree when he graduated from high school. After working at a restaurant for a year, Chrisman decided on an occupation that couldn’t be more distant from nursing.

“I liked cars so I decided I would be a mechanic. That’s all the thought I really put into it,” he said. “I enrolled in auto diesel school, did well, and completed the program a year later.”

For the next 15 years, Chrisman worked as a mechanic at a variety of companies including a Chevrolet dealership, a military contractor and a country club.

In 1996, Chrisman shifted gears and enrolled in massage school. He worked for a day spa and as an independent masseuse before finding himself in another industry. He worked in the mortgage business for five years. During this time he met Dawn, whom he later married.

After traveling to Hawaii with Dawn, who serves in the military, Chrisman learned that Dawn was being sent to Iraq. To be close to her, Chrisman accepted a position as a mechanic for KBR, a military contractor. He spent 13 months abroad, living in Kuwait and Iraq.

In 2008, Dawn returned to her base in Hawaii and Chrisman joined her. Once again, he started to evaluate his life and where he wanted to go.

“My sister-in-law is a nurse and I met several nurses while I was in massage school, but I never really considered it. While I was in Iraq, I really thought about what I wanted to do. I decided to pursue nursing as soon as I came home.”

Chrisman enrolled in a nursing program in Hawaii and began his path to nursing. However, adapting to college life presented some challenges.

“It was a really tough transition. I felt intimidated being on a college campus after so many years. I felt like I could be everyone’s father. But I got used to the classes and the homework and I’m doing well,” he said.

In 2009, Chrisman faced yet another transition. His wife was transferred to Fort Lee in Virginia and he had to find another nursing program. He was accepted into VCU’s traditional B.S. program and started classes in the August 2009.

“Coming to the VCU School of Nursing was another tough transition. The level of study here is much more intense,” Chrisman said. “Every day is a study day and you don’t have time to think about anything else.”

The move from the male-dominated field of auto mechanics to female-dominated nursing presented a major culture shock for Chrisman. “Being a 46-year-old man in classes with 19- and 20-year old women is a major culture shock. It’s intimidating, but I want to be taken seriously as a male nurse.”

Despite the challenges of life in nursing school, Chrisman has found the courses and clinicals rewarding and interesting. He’s also been impressed by the professionalism and commitment that his fellow students have to nursing education.

When he graduates in 2012, Chrisman hopes to continue his education and become a nurse anesthetist. He’s also interested in working in the ER.

While free time is limited, Chrisman enjoys an active lifestyle including running, snowboarding and mountain biking. When things slow down, he hopes to return to participating in triathlons. He and his wife Dawn live in Richmond, Va.
From left, Margaret Shea, Jessica Scott, Mary St. Germain and Darcey Jones
Congratulations to our newest graduates

On Dec. 12, more than 180 nursing students graduated at Virginia Commonwealth University’s December ceremony. On Dec. 11, the VCU School of Nursing hosted its Recognition Ceremony where nursing graduates were honored.

During the ceremony, the School recognized several students for their accomplishments. Award recipients include the following:

- Martha M. Borlick Award: Karen Hill-Holliday
- Temple Memorial Award: Dorothy Medina
- Marguerite G. Nicholson Award: Kelly Norman
- Mabel E. Montgomery Award: Pamela Rogers
- Yingling Senior Achievement Award: Genevieve Downs and Mary Beth Dwyer
- Mayme B. Wilson Lacey Award: Katie Owens and Elizabeth Leppert Huggins
- RN Award: Shelly Clark
Innovative program improves nurse retention in Virginia

Submitted by the Nurse Leadership Institute of Virginia

The Nurse Leadership Institute of Virginia (NLI), an initiative of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, is the only program addressing Virginia’s nursing shortage by providing intensive leadership training for nurse managers and emerging nurse leaders. The 30 nurse managers in the Class of 2010, the third cohort of Institute participants, are learning the skills needed to address critical issues nurses encounter daily - communication and relationship management, leadership styles, professional standards and codes of ethics, knowledge of the healthcare environment and business knowledge and skills. Forty-seven nurse leaders from across the Commonwealth have already completed the program.

The NLI continues its work at a time when healthcare dominates the headlines - as Congressional leaders make progress on national health reform, the nursing shortage continues and the Baby Boomers age. These are all concerns calling for more nurses to provide compassionate, quality patient care.

Addressing the nursing shortage requires multiple strategies, such as increasing the capacity of nursing education programs at all levels and increasing the number of nurse faculty who educate new and returning nurses. However, the shortage cannot be solved solely by increasing the number of new nurses. The real and lasting solution to the problem is to keep nurses in the nursing workforce. Building nurse managers’ leadership skills helps nurse managers more effectively lead their staff, increasing the likelihood that both the nurse manager and his or her staff stay in their jobs.

Nurse managers are Registered Nurses (RNs) responsible for training, educating and supervising staff, overseeing patient care and financial management for a unit or department within a healthcare institution (e.g., hospitals, academic medical centers, public health, schools, home health, mental health and long-term care).

The Institute is a nine-month leadership development program designed for mid-level nurse managers, who have exceptional clinical skills, equipping them with leadership, financial and performance improvement skills to meet the challenges of leading a staff in a complex work environment. Fellows participate in five face-to-face sessions at the Roslyn Conference and Retreat Center in Richmond, engage in distance learning activities, develop and implement an applied leadership project and work closely with a mentor.

“Virginia is experiencing a growing nursing shortage that threatens the healthcare system, and we are honored to help support a solution to this problem,” says Jeffrey S. Cribbs, executive director of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation. “This grant represents an extension of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation’s commitment to improving the community’s health by funding nursing initiatives.”

“The NLI is the only program of its kind in Virginia and one of a very few in the United States. Fellows consistently report that what they learn through the Institute has a direct impact on their ability to lead and retain their staff,” said NLI Director Denise Daly Konrad.

In 2007, the NLI was developed by the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation in partnership with the Virginia Partnership for Nursing. RMHF was awarded a two year, $250,000 matching funds grant from the Partners Investing in Nursing’s Future Program of the Robert Wood Johnson and Northwest Health Foundations. The Cameron Foundation and John Randolph Foundation have also invested in the NLI. In 2009, the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation made an unprecedented decision to invest $750,000 over an additional 5 years to sustain the Nurse Leadership Institute. This is the longest grant period made by the Foundation in its history.

The NLI enjoys broad community support from the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Nursing, the Virginia Health Care Association, Virginia Nurses’ Association, Virginia Nurses’ Foundation, Virginia Partnership for Nursing, the Virginia Organization of Nurse Executives, as well as hospitals, health systems and other healthcare providers across the Commonwealth that sponsor their employees participation in the Institute.

To learn more about the Nurse Leadership Institute of Virginia, please go to www.virginianli.org. For more information about The Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, visit www.rmhfoundation.org. Information about Partners Investing in Nursing’s Future is available at www.PartnersInNursing.org.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF) (originally the Richmond Memorial Hospital Foundation) provided support to the former Richmond Memorial Hospital and the communities the hospital served. Since 1998, the focus of the Foundation is on providing grants that improve the health and health care in Richmond and Central Virginia. In the last 5 years, RMHF made more than 60 grants to 40 different organizations totaling over $8 million. The Nurse Leadership Institute of Virginia is a natural progression for the Foundation’s work to address the nursing shortage.

Johnston Releases New Book

Deborah J. Johnston, R.N., a strong supporter of the VCU School of Nursing and CEO of Care Advantage, will soon release a book, "The School of Heart Knocks: How I Turned One Idea and Many Adversities into a Multi-Million Dollar Business - And So Can You!" The book offers a candid look at Johnston’s journey from a humble start as a Registered Nurse to the entrepreneurship of a multi-million-dollar compassionate care company. For more information or to order your copy, visit www.heartknocks.net.
Community Nursing Organization Organizes Youth Summit

The VCU School of Nursing Community Nursing Organization is working with the Hayes E. Willis Health Center in Southside Richmond, Va., to sponsor a Tweens and Teen Summit. The event will be held on Aug. 28 at George Wythe High School from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Summit will provide a variety of educational and health topics of interest to adolescents’ success in school, career planning, and healthy behaviors.

We are seeking school supplies, including backpacks donations, which will be given to 100 youth participants.

If you would like to donate supplies or volunteer your time for this event, please contact Dr. Stephanie Ferguson at slferguson@vcu.edu. She can send you a list of school supplies needed and give you more information about the event in general. Information is also available at www.vcunursing.vcu.edu.

Faculty Honors

Dr. Grap Receives Three-year NINR Grant

Congratulations to Mary Jo Grap, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN, professor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. Effect of Backrest Elevation on Skin Integrity in the Critically Ill has been funded for three years by the National Institute of Nursing Research.

Her collaborators include Drs. Munro, Schubert and Wenzel. This work continues the line of inquiry established about 15 years ago by Drs. Grap and Munro, focusing on development of knowledge to inform nursing interventions in the provision of care for the critically ill adult.

Dr. Haddad Receives Funding to Study Tobacco Use

Linda Haddad, Ph.D., R.N. an associate professor in the Department of Family and Community Health Nursing, received a grant for her pilot study, Tobacco use among youth Arab-Americans in Virginia, funded by the Virginia Tobacco Settlement Foundation for $10,000. This grant will build on her prior work in health practices related to tobacco use.

Dr. Starkweather Earns Ph.D.

Congratulations to Dr. Todd Starkweather, copyeditor for the VCU School of Nursing, on earning his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago. This spring, he successfully defended his dissertation, "The Rise and Fall of the Muscular Christian: Sport's Influence on Masculinity in British Literature."

Dr. McGrath Selected as Sigma Theta Tau Mentor

Jacqueline McGrath, Ph.D., R.N., FNAP, FAAN, associate professor in the department of Family and Community Health Nursing, has been selected as a mentor for the 2010 cohort of the Sigma Theta Tau International: Nurse Faculty Mentored Leadership Development Program (NFMLD). The NFMLD was developed by Sigma Theta Tau International in partnership with the Elsevier Foundation to enhance the personal leadership development of new nurse faculty in order to promote faculty retention and cultivate high performing, supportive work environments in academia. Mentors for this program are selected for their accomplishments in academia and leadership activities.

VCU School of Nursing Faculty and Students Attend 2010 SNRS Conference

The VCU School of Nursing was well represented at the 2010 Southern Nursing Research Society Annual Conference. In addition to a number of faculty who presented research findings, doctoral students Denna Chaber, Debra Kelly, Deborah Fisher, Julie Strunk, Lois Phillips-Pula, Judy dellaRippa, Yui Matsuda, Brenda Baker and Claudia BouHadir (not pictured) presented posters. Post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Alison Montpetit presented both a poster and a paper.

Dr. Lyon receives D. Jean Wood Nursing Scholarship Award

Debra Lyon, Ph.D., R.N., FNP-BC, has been selected for the Southern Nursing Research Society's (SNRS) D. Jean Wood Nursing Scholarship Award. Dr. Lyon is an associate professor and interim department chair in the Department of Family and Community Health Nursing.

The purpose of the award is to recognize the contributions of a researcher who has enhanced the science and practice of nursing in the Southern region. The award is named in honor of the first SNRS President, D. Jean Wood, whose leadership set the course for the positive growth and development of the Society.

This is a very prestigious award for our colleague and brings recognition to the VCU School of Nursing.

Dr. Gray Receives SNRS Leadership Award

D. Patricia Gray, Ph.D., R.N. was selected for the Southern Nursing Research Society 2010 Leadership in Research Award. Dr. Gray is chair of the VCU School of Nursing’s Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems.

As stated in her award notification her service “as President, President-elect, Newsletter Editor, Chair of the Nominating Committee, and through service to our sister organization, the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science, you have insured that research in the Southern region and beyond will continue to be a vital force within the scientific community. Developing the infrastructure to insure that the next generation of nurse scientists will be able to share their research with others is a critical part of your legacy; many will be indebted to you for years to come.”

Nursing Faculty Publish Results of Project on Improving Communication

Congratulations to Jean Ellen Zavertnik, Tanya Huff and Dr. Cindy Munro on the publication of the results of the VCU funded project on improving communication skills in the undergraduate nursing curriculum. To read the journal article, please visit www.nursing.vcu.edu.
In December, Dr. Janet Younger retired from her position as associate dean of academic affairs for the VCU School of Nursing. Dr. Younger has dedicated nearly 40 years of her academic career to the School. Her years of service have made a meaningful and lasting impact on the School, nursing education and the nursing profession.

Younger’s involvement with VCU began as a student. She earned both her B.S. in Nursing and an M.S in Maternal-Child Nursing from the VCU School of Nursing. In addition, Younger earned both an M.Ed. in Education and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

Looking back on her time as a student, one faculty member stands out in Dr. Younger’s memory: Dr. Beauty Crummette. "There was something about her gentleness that brought out the best in me as a student. She was a major influence on my life. Beauty had a quiet kind of confidence that was so empowering," Younger said.

In addition to her gentle approach, Younger was motivated by Crummette’s intellectual approach to nursing, specifically pediatrics, and her commitment to ethical behavior. She said that Crummette played a pivotal role in her decision to pursue pediatric nursing.

New directions in nursing
Younger joined the VCU faculty in 1972 as an assistant professor in maternal-child nursing. Her tenure at VCU coincided with a pivotal change in nursing education as the number of nurse practitioner programs was growing. Seeing the important role of nurse practitioners, Younger was instrumental in establishing and obtaining federal grant support for the nurse practitioner program at VCU. Once the program was up and running, she served as co-director of that until 1980.

In 1981, Younger returned to school and began her doctoral work at the University of Virginia. After earning her Ph.D., she returned to VCU as chair of the Department of Medical-Surgical Nursing. Less than 10 years later, she was appointed as the associate dean for academic programs, a position she has held for 18 years.

In the role of associate dean, Younger oversaw the development and implementation of the accelerated master’s and accelerated baccalaureate programs, which allows non-nurses who hold at least a baccalaureate degree to earn a B.S. and M.S.
in nursing. During Younger’s tenure, the School doubled student enrollment in an effort to address the nursing shortage.

Younger’s leadership also helped change the relationship with the School and the VCU Health System (VCUHS). This strengthened partnership acts to expand the boundaries of nursing knowledge and understanding through research, clinical scholarship and practice. This led to an improved clinical experience for students and the chance for many VCUHS nurses to serve as adjunct faculty and preceptors for the School.

Preparing a new generation of nurses
While she’s held various leadership roles within the School, her reputation as an educator has remained strong throughout her career in education.

“Janet’s contributions as a master teacher and expert clinician have established her as a role model for many generations of nursing students,” said Judy Collins, R.N., M.S., FAAN, a professional and personal friend of Younger. “She has a gift for taking complex information and making it understandable and relevant for students.”

Barbie Dunn, R.N., Ph.D. is another longtime friend and colleague of Younger. She complimented Younger’s abilities as a teacher and nurse practitioner.

“I’ve known only a handful of exceptional teachers and Janet is the best of the best. She has a passion for knowledge and has accumulated a vast amount of information on a wide variety of subjects from nursing, psychology and health to law, opera and haiku,” Dunn said. “Coupling her knowledge and clinical skills with her ability to convey that information to others in creative ways makes her a truly exceptional, unique teacher.”

Younger said she has a passion for teaching and has learned much from her students. She takes great pride in the accomplishments of those students and the difference they make in the lives of patients each day.

“I love teaching and find it very motivating. It’s intellectual and creative and involves a lot more than just delivering information,” she said. Younger has also made it a priority to instill integrity in her students and believes it’s an important value for nursing and for life.

“The best way to teach integrity is to prevent any lapse of integrity and make it clear how much you value it.”

Younger has also supported the School through her philanthropic efforts. She, and husband, Carter, made a generous gift to the School’s building fund. Younger Auditorium is named in their honor.

Serving her profession
Younger’s contributions to nursing extend beyond education. In 1996, Younger was appointed to the Virginia Board of Nursing, a position she held until 2005. She served as president of the Board and chair of the Committee of Joint Boards of Nursing of Medicine. Younger was appointed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing to serve on a multi-organization consensus group to develop a coherent model for education and regulation of advance practice nurses throughout the nation.

“I learned so much about policy and the day-to-day defining of a profession during my time with the Board of Nursing. It’s almost an extensive series of case studies in what goes wrong in practice and why. No day was ever the same and I really value the experience I gained,” Younger said.

Although she has officially retired, Younger is teaching a course at the VCU School of Nursing and maintains her relationship with the Board of Nursing. She doesn’t have concrete plans for retirement. Rather, she hopes to take each day as it comes.

Dunn, both a colleague and friend, has nothing but good wishes for Younger in this new phase of life.

“I hope that she will take some time to relax and smell the roses, as well as continue to use her knowledge, teaching abilities and thoughtfulness to contribute to the larger community. I hope that she’ll also have a chance to discover new passions or reconnect with old ones,” Dunn said.
The VCU School of Nursing is pleased to announce the appointment of four faculty members to the VCU School of Nursing Alumni Endowed Professorships. Mary Jo Grap, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN; Cindy Munro, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN; Nancy McCain, D.S.N., R.N., FAAN and Rita Pickler, Ph.D., R.N., PNP-BC, FAAN have been selected for these positions.

The professorships would not be possible without the support of our generous alumni and friends. The fundraising effort began in 1987 with the creation of the Nursing Alumni Centennial Committee. This group was tasked with generating interest in the School’s centennial and in raising funds to establish an endowed chair in nursing. In 1988, the School established the Nursing Alumni Centennial Fund with a $50,000 bequest and fundraising began the following year.

P. Buckley Moss created a painting to commemorate the centennial, “Nurses Parade.” She donated the original and prints to the Committee to support the fundraising effort.

Throughout the years, the fund has grown to a level that would sustain four endowed professors. Grap, McCain, Munro and Pickler were selected for this honor because of their commitment to education, research and service. As leaders in biobehavioral clinical research, these scientists are developing new nursing knowledge, serving as mentors to colleagues and students and elevating the status of the VCU School of Nursing.

We are pleased to introduce you to the inaugural Nursing Alumni Endowed Professors.

For more information please visit www.nursing.vcu.edu
Rita H. Pickler, PhD, RN, PNP-BC, FAAN

Pickler is the acting associate dean for research and scholarship. For the last 20 years, Pickler’s research has focused on infant and maternal health, specifically feeding patterns of preterm infants. Currently, she's the principal investigator on a $1.6 million grant through the NINR to study feeding approaches for preterm infants. Pickler is a fellow in the American Academy of Nursing and has received numerous awards, including the 2009 Award for Excellence in Research from the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; the Alumni Star Award from VCU; and many others.

Cindy Munro, Ph.D., R.N. FAAN

Munro is a professor in the Department of Adult Nursing Systems. She maintains an active research program in the field of oral care of critically ill patients. Currently, she's working on a $1.78 million grant through NINR to study the impact on oral care in intubated patients and incidences of pneumonia. Munro was selected for Oxford’s Harris Manchester College 2008 Summer Research Institute and the MCV Alumni Association's Outstanding Nurse Alumnus Award in 2009.

Mary Jo Grap, Ph.D., RN, FAAN

Grap is a professor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. Her research focuses on improving outcomes in the critically ill. In 2009, she was awarded a three-year, NINR grant to study the effect of backrest elevation on skin integrity in the critically ill. Grap has received numerous honors including the 2009 Distinguished Nurse Researcher for the American Association of Critical Care Nursing and the VCU School of Nursing’s 2009 Mable Montgomery Teaching Award.

Nancy McCain, D.S.N., R.N., FAAN

McCain is a professor in the Department of Adult Health and Nursing Systems. Her research focus is psychoneuroimmunology. Currently, McCain is studying the impact of stress management in early breast cancer patients through a $3 million National Cancer Institute grant. Her many honors include selection as the Southern Nursing Research Society’s 2008 Distinguished Researcher, the University of Alabama in Birmingham School of Nursing’s 2004 Distinguished Alumna and the recipient of the 2002 VCU School of Nursing Senior Research Award.
First Fridays

Each month, nursing students, faculty and staff gather in the student lounge for First Fridays. Participants enjoy breakfast and a chance to get to know each other outside of the classroom. The event is held the first Friday of every month and is sponsored by the VCU School of Nursing’s Office of Enrollment and Student Services.
Connector Program
Benefits Students, Alumni

In March, I had the pleasure of attending the American Association of Colleges of Nursing spring meeting and pre-conference to share some of the wonderful initiatives supported by our VCU Nursing Alumni Community. I joined colleagues from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and the Duke School of Nursing to discuss strategies for engaging alumni in the school’s mission. As I discussed the launch of our VCU Student Nurse/Alumni Connector Program, the audience came alive with questions. Everyone is looking for creative ways to support students, engage alumni and extend limited resources. I think we have created an exciting program that meets all three of these needs.

In our first year, the Connector Program boasted 40 student-alumni matches. What a wonderful start! Most connections were established and maintained via e-mail. In some cases students and alumni were from the same community and found time to meet in person. One student learned that her alumni worked at the hospital where she had a rotation in high school.

We recently asked the students what they thought of the program and here is what we learned. Students found the program helpful and would like more contact with their mentors. They enjoyed learning about their alumni connectors’ experiences both as a student and in the professional environment. They especially appreciated positive attitudes expressed by alumni connectors and having alumni available to answer questions. Students also enjoyed receiving notes wishing them luck before their exams.

Clearly students are interested in creating connections with us. I’ve heard from many alumni that they are interested in developing stronger ties with the VCU School of Nursing. Serving as an Alumni Connector offers an opportunity to get to know our next generation of nurses and reconnect with the VCU Nursing Community. I hope you’ll consider serving as an Alumni Connector. As one alumni member shared with me, “Anyone who participates will get a much larger return than one is asked to give.”

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

Alumni Honors
VCU alum appointed to CMS post
Marilyn Tavenner, who received her B.S. in Nursing and Master's in Health Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University, has been named the principal deputy administrator at the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Tavenner was appointed as Virginia's secretary of health and human resources in 2006 by Gov. Tim Kaine. Prior to serving as secretary, Tavenner worked for HCA, beginning as a nurse and completing her tenure as president of outpatient services.

School Loses Dear Friend, Supporter
In September 2009, the VCU School of Nursing lost a long-time supporter and friend, Shirley T. Downs. A member of the School of Nursing staff for more than 30 years, Downs helped guide the lives of many students.

Downs joined the School as a student recruiter, introducing students to the School and to Richmond. By the time she retired, she had become the assistant dean of student affairs and management.

After her retirement, Downs continued to support the School, its missions and its students. The School’s administrative suite bears her name in honor of a generous gift to the building fund. The Shirley T. Downs Scholarship and Emergency Fund was established to recognize her commitment to students.

During the upcoming Reunion Weekend, a memorial service will be held to honor her life and her many contributions to the VCU School of Nursing. Dr. Kathy Bobbitt, a long-time friend of Downs, remembers her as a supportive colleague and a friend to all students.

Bobbitt first met Downs when she applied to the MCV School of Nursing. Although Bobbitt did not meet the height requirements for nursing students that existed at the time, Downs helped her get admitted to the program.

“Shirley was such a positive person and she always put the students first,” Bobbitt said. “She had a great attitude about life and knew how to get things done around the School.”

Bobbitt’s friendship with Shirley extended long after her retirement from VCU. Although she battled health problems in the later years of life, Downs maintained her positive attitude. “No matter what she was facing, Shirley always had a positive attitude and a kind word. She was my friend and I miss her.”
Last fall, the VCU School of Nursing kicked off its inaugural lecture series. The series combined three lectureships, offered by the School and the MCV Alumni Association of VCU (MCVAA). Two were offered last fall and the final lecture will be held April 28.

“The VCU School of Nursing honors this proud legacy of shared vision and partnership between the School and our alumni to establish a nursing lecture series that will enhance the educational experience for our students, connect alumni and professional colleagues with the School and share cutting-edge scholarship and ideas with community partners and colleagues,” said Dean Nancy F. Langston, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN.

The series started in September, with the Jackie Denise Jackson Memorial Cultural, presented by VCU President Michael Rao. During the lecture, Rao discussed the issue of diversity in higher education and at VCU. The event brought together approximately 100 students, faculty and staff from across the university as well as nursing alumni.

The lectureship was established to honor the life of Jackie Jackson, a dedicated employee of the School for 20 years. Langston shared stories about Jackson’s impact on the School. During the lecture, Rao discussed the importance of diversity in our society. A podcast of the Jackie Jackson Lectureship is available at www.nursing.vcu.edu.

In October, the School hosted the Legacy Lectureship in Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing. The guest speaker was Teena McGuinness, Ph.D., APRN, BC, a professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing and 1982 graduate of the VCU School of Nursing’s master’s program.

During her talk, she highlighted the importance of psychiatric nursing and the important role it plays in the lives of patients. “Psychiatric nursing is a meaningful choice of career. All nurses are psychiatric nurses to some degree. Some of us embrace working with a huge range of psychiatric conditions in specialty centers,” McGuinness said. “What’s so beautiful is it really gives meaning and purpose to me and most of the people who chose it. Consider joining psychiatric nursing because we need you now.”

A recording of McGuinness’ lecture can be accessed at www.nursing.vcu.edu.
Mahoney-Hamner Lectureship

The Mahoney-Hamner Nursing Alumni Lectureship, presented by the MCVAA, will be held Wednesday, April 28 at the VCU School of Nursing building in room 1011. Patricia Grady, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN, director of the National Institute of Nursing Research, will be the guest speaker. The lecture will be held at 2 p.m., followed by a reception at 3 p.m. Following the reception, Grady will meet with the School’s doctoral students.

Dr. Grady, an internationally recognized researcher, will address translational and interdisciplinary research during the lecture.

The idea for the school’s oldest endowed nursing lectureship was initiated in 1962 when Anne F. Mahoney (Cert. ‘29), a former member of the MCV Board of Visitors, talked with Dean Doris Yingling about establishing a chair or professorship. They determined that a lectureship would be most appropriate. In 1965, the Nursing section of the MCV Alumni Association voted to establish the nursing lectureship. Nora Spencer Hamner of the Memorial Hospital Training School’s class of 1914 and the first woman appointed to the MCV Board of Visitors, co-chaired the committee with Mahoney to raise funds to establish the Nursing Alumni Lectureship – later renamed the Mahoney-Hamner Nursing Alumni Lectureship - in honor of their efforts.

Alumni are encouraged to attend. You can RSVP by email mcv-alum@vcu.edu or phone (804) 828-3900.
Alumni and Friends Honored at Annual Cabaniss Dinner

On Oct. 30, the VCU School of Nursing hosted its 2009 Sadie Heath Cabaniss Society Dinner. More than 80 of the School’s top annual donors gathered at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for an evening of celebration and camaraderie. Two special members of the VCU Nursing family spoke during the dinner program: Dr. Teena McGuinness, PhD, APRN, BC, a 1982 graduate of the VCU School of Nursing’s master’s program and professor at the University of Alabama-Birmingham School of Nursing, who presented the Legacy Lecture in Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing earlier in the day; and Ms. Genevieve Downs, a scholarship recipient and leader who is in her final semester of the School’s accelerated BS program, a fast-track program for those who already have a bachelor’s degree in another discipline.

Membership in the Cabaniss Society is conferred upon those whose annual contributions to the School total $250 or more. Visit http://www.nursing.vcu.edu/alumni/give.html if you would like to become a member of the Cabaniss Society.
Upcoming Events

Wednesday, April 28, 2010 - 2 p.m.
Mahoney-Hamner Nursing Alumni Lectureship
VCU School of Nursing - Room 1011
Lecture begins at 2 p.m. followed by a reception at 3 p.m.
Free parking will be available in the 8th Street Parking Deck
Speaker: Dr. Patricia Grady, director of the National Institute of Nursing Research

Friday, May 21 - 7 p.m.
Spring 2010 School of Nursing Recognition Ceremony
VCU Siegel Center

Tuesday, Oct. 19 - 6 p.m.
VCU School of Nursing Cabaniss Dinner
Invitations will arrive in the Fall 2010
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Friday, Dec. 10 - 7 p.m.
Winter 2010 School of Nursing Recognition Ceremony
VCU Siegel Center

April 15-17, 2011
MCV Alumni Association of VCU Reunion Weekend
For class years ending in 6 and 1
Details will be available in early 2011