

## From the Dean



### Dear Friends,

As we transition to optional masking in most spaces on campus, all of us here at the VCU School of Education remain committed to the quality of our programs and the engagement of our

students. That commitment is reflected in part by maintaining our reputation as one of the nation's top higher education programs. In recognition of that, we were recently ranked **#16 Best Public Graduate Education Program** in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*. We are excited and proud that the School of Education is the highest *U.S. News & World Report* ranked college or school at VCU.

We also remain committed to meeting the needs of the communities that we serve in a way that is meaningful and engaging to our students. One of the most important ways that we do that is by creating opportunities for research that our students are looking for. For example, we followed our record-breaking year of external funding in FY21 by topping that record in just the *first half* of FY22! This means that our grant awards comprised nearly half of Monroe Park Campus' total grant awards during that time.

We continue to put all our efforts into meeting the needs of the children, families and communities that we serve, whether it's in Richmond, across Virginia, or across the globe. Of course, none of this would be possible without your continued support — so thank you on behalf of the entire VCU SOE community.

### Andrew P. Daire, Ph.D.

Dean and Ruth Harris Professor,  
VCU School of Education

## What's your School of Education legacy?

Our Heritage Society members have big dreams and have included the VCU School of Education in their estate plans. "I want to make a difference, and the best way for me to do that, is to do that on my own timeline. For me, that means giving through my will," said one Heritage Society member.

Gift planning is now a preferred way for many to make their big dreams come true. "Giving through estate planning opens doors for donors. Many folks aren't in the position to establish an endowment out of their current assets," said Ed Kardos, executive director of development, "and a gift in our will allows donors to dream big and leave a legacy gift."

The most popular way to make a planned gift is through revocable gifts executed through your will or living trust, which allow you to remain in control of your assets with the flexibility to change your bequest if needed. Additionally, we recognize donors today for what they plan to do at a later time.

As a Heritage Society member, you are providing future students opportunities that are only a dream today, and serving as an example to other alumni and friends of the school to think "big" too.

### Meet a few Education Heritage Society members:

**Stephanie Holt** "VCU's School of Education helped to change my life, and I realized that by endowing a scholarship I could help young people to attain their goals of teaching, especially in an urban environment. It is important to me to make sure that students can realize their dreams, and continue their education at VCU through the teacher preparation programs in the School of Education."



**Carolyn Eggleston, Ph.D., and Thom Gehring, Ph.D.** "We're graduates of the Ph.D. in Urban Education at VCU and received a world-class education from the school, which we applied toward successful careers in higher education. We appreciated the quality of the curriculum, faculty and support staff; the quality made us better people and prepared us extremely well for future positions. We have stayed in touch with VCU and have observed that the quality has continued in the same way."

**Virginia Arnold** "Teaching, learning and developing materials for children and their teachers were factors in my life's work. So it makes sense that the VCU School of Education and I make a perfect partnership!" Virginia Arnold was very engaged with the School right up until the time of her passing. As a faculty member, she worked closely with many students and made an impact then, continues today, and will do so well into the future.



The Heritage Society looks forward to working with you and your advisors to ensure that your gift will become an enduring and meaningful legacy for many years to come.

**Questions?** Ed Kardos, executive director of development: egkardos@vcu.edu or (804) 828-4692

## Deonte Young: VCU School of Education alum and 2021 10 Under 10 honoree Young is co-founder of Alchemy InCoaching and a Fairfax County Public Schools education administrator

VCU Alumni's 10 Under 10 awards program recognizes the noteworthy and distinctive achievements made by alumni who earned their first VCU degree (undergraduate, graduate, or professional) within the past 10 years. The program honored two VCU School of Education alumni in 2021. One of them was Deonte Young (M.Ed. '13/E), who graduated with a master's degree in counselor education.

In 2011, Deonte Young was preparing to graduate from VCU with a political science degree and a presidential ambition inspired by former President Barack Obama — but he didn't have a clear idea of his next steps to make the dream a reality. VCU adviser Carlton Goode helped him identify school counseling as a way to channel his drive to help people and become a leader.

Young went on to graduate school at VCU, earning a master's degree in counselor education, which helped focus his goal to help young people unlock their potential. His success fueled his desire to work with kids and sparked a new goal: to reform educational policy and provide equal access and opportunity for all students.

Young began working as a school counselor in Fairfax County Public Schools in northern Virginia, seeking out activities that enrich students' lives. He worked with academic support programs and led service-learning trips to Ethiopia and Ecuador. In 2019, he and two partners, including fellow alum Armand Johnston II (B.S.'12/H&S), founded Alchemy InCoaching, an educational consultancy working with students in sixth grade through college. Sessions focus on development gaps like executive functioning abilities.

"We provide students with the skills and resources they are not getting in a typical school day," says Young — practical skills that help them achieve their goals, such as time management, study skills and



Deonte Young (M.Ed. '13)

effect systemic change and ways to expand his involvement in advancing educational policy to create a more equitable public school system. In the immediate future, he wants to develop programming at Alchemy InCoaching and have a dedicated collaborative space to host group activities and bring families together. As the company grows, Young continues to evolve his business model to provide greater access for students and families who can't afford coaching costs. He also gives back to VCU as a mentor through the African American Alumni Council.

Young is fueled by words he often heard from his grandfather: "Good, better, best; never let them rest until the good is better and the better is best."

"That's one thing I think about daily," Young says. "I'm constantly trying to make my best even better and pass that philosophy on to the next generation."

organization. "We are not interested in quick fixes — we want to be part of an educational transformation that leads to lasting success." Alchemy InCoaching is working with individual students in northern Virginia and has recently partnered with Norfolk City Public Schools in Southeastern Virginia.

Young's passion for empowering others extends to his peer group. In 2018, insightful conversations with friends and fellow members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. inspired him to form an empowerment group for men. Let the Man S.P.E.A.K. (Share thoughts, Perfect your craft, Empower others, Achieve goals, Know your worth) began as an avenue for men to prioritize open discussions and support; discussions might range from professional development and financial management to mental health and family relationships.

Young continues to seek opportunities to effect systemic change and ways to expand his involvement in advancing educational policy to create a more equitable public school system. In the immediate future, he wants to develop programming at Alchemy InCoaching and have a dedicated collaborative space to host group activities and bring families together. As the company grows, Young continues to evolve his business model to provide greater access for students and families who can't afford coaching costs. He also gives back to VCU as a mentor through the African American Alumni Council.

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## Estefania de la Rosa: DACA recipient co-founded UndocuRams while studying to become an elementary school teacher



Photo: Kevin Morley, University Marketing

When Estefania de la Rosa started taking classes at Virginia Commonwealth University, she believed that she should keep quiet about her temporary residency status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

"For a really long time, I thought being undocumented was like this really big secret that I had to keep from people, because I was like, 'Well, if I tell people, they're going to know that I'm different, and they might shut me out,'" de la Rosa said.

Gradually, though, de la Rosa became more comfortable in the university community. She became an advocate for other students like her, co-founding the UndocuRams student organization and leading training for educators and students called UndocuAlly about how K-12 school personnel can support undocumented students and their families.

### A drive to be a teacher

De la Rosa's family moved to the United States from Mexico when she was 3 years old. Following graduation from high school, she

attended John Tyler Community College for a year before transferring to VCU in 2017.

She worked two jobs her first year at VCU while commuting from her home in Chesterfield County, remembering days when she would drive home from one job and stay only long enough to change her T-shirt before heading to the next job. Homework and studying usually were done late at night.

"It was something that was just necessary for me to do — I couldn't not do that," de la Rosa said. "Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be able to go to school."

De la Rosa graduated in December 2021 with a master of teaching degree from the Early Elementary Education program in the School of Education. She looks back on all of the hard work with a feeling of pride.

"Graduation was something that I didn't really think about because I always thought I was never going to finish — something was going to come up. I'm really grateful that I was able to finish this experience because I really did appreciate my time at VCU and everything that it taught me."

## A message from the Education Alumni Council

Dear Fellow Alumni,

Spring is upon us and with it comes renewed hope and opportunities to connect. I remain inspired by the extraordinary demonstrations of innovation and resilience shown by this

community and the larger School of Education community. In the face of ongoing adversity, from a lingering public health crisis to new global conflicts, the School of Education students, staff, faculty,

administration and alumni continue to bring growth and support to those around us. The awarding of prestigious grants to faculty, consistently strong national rankings of the school, and recognition of alumni in national organizations (to name only a few) stand as testaments to the demonstrated excellence of the School of Education.

With the prospect of entering a post-COVID environment on the horizon, the School of Education and the Education Alumni Council are poised to engage with our communities with renewed vigor. Already, the Education Alumni Council is planning community service activities, networking opportunities, and events to engage with current students. Among other initiatives, we look forward to the first annual Alumni College in February 2023 which will bring accessible professional development to area educators while highlighting the expertise of our faculty and doctoral students.

As my time sitting on the Council formally draws to a close, I look forward to the amazing work the group will continue to engage in. The Education Alumni Council, as always, remains dedicated to supporting all School of Education alumni, both current and future. Thus, I invite all alumni to connect with the Council in partnership to continue driving excellence in the School and in the community.

Yours in service,

**Jared Crist, M.Ed. '18**

President, School of Education Alumni Council

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

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# VCU

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## NTDC meets needs of disability beneficiaries in pandemic year

### The VCU Social Security National Training and Data Center will launch a new initiative to advance racial equity in 2022

In July 2020, the U.S. Social Security Administration awarded a new five-year \$27.7 million contract to the Virginia Commonwealth University National Training and Data Center, part of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center in the VCU School of Education. The award is the largest in the school's 53-year history.

The center is part of the Social Security Administration's efforts to ensure that beneficiaries with disabilities receive accurate information about their benefits, and can use that information to make a successful transition to work. Key to their efforts is a national program of over 700 highly trained "benefits counselors" who provide in-depth counseling to individuals about benefits and support their efforts to achieve their employment and self-sufficiency goals.

"Much of the center's first-year efforts focused on a response to the COVID-19 crisis," said Susan O'Mara, National Training and Data Center project director.



The center addressed the need of benefits counselors for immediate and accurate information on changes in Social Security policies affecting beneficiaries with disabilities by developing and continuously updating web-based resources for professionals. It developed a special course, Supporting Beneficiaries with a Job Loss, which 386 benefits counselors completed during the year. Center staff provided over 2,000 hours of technical assistance to benefits counselors working with beneficiaries with disabilities on employment and healthcare issues.

In 2022, the center will launch a new initiative to support the Social Security Administration's efforts to implement President Joe Biden's executive order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government. The center will develop and implement a data collection system that will

enable the Social Security Administration to determine whether people of color and other underserved populations receive equal opportunity and inclusion in the national benefits counseling programs.

## SOE ranked #16 Best Public Grad Program by *U.S. News & World Report*

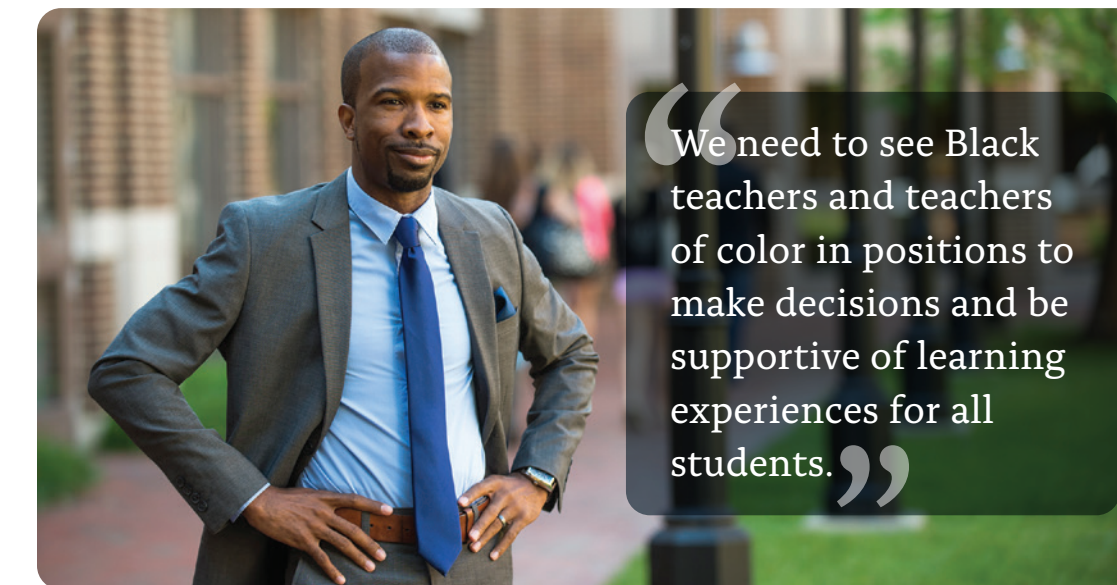
The VCU School of Education was recently ranked #16 Best Public Graduate School of Education by *U.S. News & World Report*. The school comes in at No. 25 overall in the recently released 2023 rankings. With 456 schools of education surveyed nationwide, only two Virginia schools of education ranked among this year's top 50, with VCU being one of them.

"Our ranking in *U.S. News & World Report* is reflective of the incredible work and effort by our faculty, staff and students. What is even more impressive is that we strive for excellence through

inclusion and through leaning into addressing the highest needs areas in our community through our research and service," said Andrew Daire, Ph.D., dean and Ruth Harris Professor in the School of Education.

Now an annual tradition in academia, the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings have become the definitive list for assessing the nation's top higher education programs. Each year's rankings are compiled via a combination of quantitative measures, expert opinion and peer assessment data.

## Dr. LaRon Scott: A teacher for teachers



"We need to see Black teachers and teachers of color in positions to make decisions and be supportive of learning experiences for all students."

Associate Professor LaRon Scott, Ed.D., may be exploring the nationwide, systemic issues that lead to teacher shortages and inequities in special education — but his interest began closer to home.

Scott was first introduced to the special education system when supporting his own sister, who has a disability. Scott wanted to support her and his family, and advocated for her to receive the academic and social services she needed. Along the way, he became intimately familiar with how students, parents, teachers and others were engaged in the process.

"That was the beginning of what has been a great career, and a great learning experience," he said.

Scott went on to get his teaching license and enter the classroom where, again, he had a realization. Looking around the school, he saw few other teachers of color and even fewer Black men.

He started looking into the systemic and structural barriers that keep potential Black educators from enrolling in higher education programs and staying in the profession once they enter the field. Then, as an associate professor of

counseling and special education in VCU's School of Education, he applied both his research and personal experiences when preparing his own students. In particular, he hopes these future educators will join a movement to advocate for policy and practice changes that will further cultivate a diverse teacher workforce.

His research has struck a chord. Scott has received more than \$6 million in grants. He has been published in more than 40 peer-reviewed journals and has written two books and 14 chapters. And, in 2021, he received the University Award of Excellence, one of VCU's highest honors for faculty, in recognition of his superior teaching, scholarly activity and service.

More importantly, though, Scott hopes his research, teaching and mentorship will help more teachers of color enter — and stay in — the profession. After all, he said, research has shown that Black teachers improve academic outcomes and set a higher standard of achievement for Black students.

"It's critically important that teachers of color are part of our bureaucratic spaces," he said. "Part of that is showing all students — not just students of color — that there's a balance of power."

## Momentum | Spring 2022

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### Education Alumni Council Representatives

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

To view the Education Alumni Council roster visit: [go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)

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

## The VCU School of Education lost two pillars in the school's history in January

**Gordon Keesee, Jr.**, Ph.D., a former faculty member and director within the School of Education, died on January 16, 2022. After the School of Education was formed in 1964, Keesee developed the Department of Counselor Education, before Counseling and Special Education were merged into one department. Including his time as an adjunct professor, he served as an employee of the school for over 50 years!

**John S. Oehler**, Ed.D., who led the School of Education as dean from 1985 to 2002, died on January 17, 2022. Oehler led the school during a time of exceptional growth as it rose to the national forefront in education reform by establishing cutting-edge teacher preparation programs. He also guided the school's initial development efforts to secure funding for scholarships, faculty development and unrestricted gifts.

# momentum

Spring 2022

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