

2022 Annual Report

UNCOMMON cornerstone



Celebrating 105 years + an unlimited future



VCU

School of Social Work

FROM THE DEAN

A community cornerstone unlike any other



As the VCU School of Social Work publishes our second annual report – find the full report at annualreport.socialwork.vcu.edu – we are recognizing the stellar accomplishments of our community. We have forged over a century of excellence in social work education. In fact, October 2022 represented the 105-year anniversary of the school opening its doors in 1917. What began with seven social work students has grown to a community of over 1,000 students with over 11,000 alumni worldwide.

We've always been on the forefront of innovating to create access. In 1926 the school used a Ford Model T to reach rural communities. Alum **Byrd McGavock** recalls participating in this effort: "The only protection riders had from the weather were old, worn-out curtains," but like resilient mail carriers, "we went out every day regardless of the weather." That commitment to access continued, and in 1993, the school began using technology to expand the reach of the program through distance education.

More than a quarter-century later, we launched our fully online format of the M.S.W. Program in 2019; and in fall 2023, we will follow with a fully online B.S.W. Program format. Access to a VCU social work degree is now available nationwide, with students from 25 states and Washington, D.C., enrolled.

As interim dean, it has been an honor and privilege to be a part of this continuum of social work education. This year we will be celebrating 105 years of social work education with 105 Moments of Service to our community partners. We proudly call ourselves a community cornerstone, in recognition of the many networks, partnerships and affiliations that sustain us and that have grounded and centered us for 105 years. Thank you all for making VCU School of Social Work a special place.



Rebecca Gomez, Ph.D.
Interim Dean and Associate Professor
VCU School of Social Work



View the full report online

UNSURPASSED EXPERTISE

Welcoming new faculty for 2022-2023

Assistant professors in teaching



Qasarah Bey Spencer, Ed.D.
(M.S.W.'08/SW; Ed.D.'21/E)
Expertise includes anti-racist pedagogy, field education, social justice and faith-based service delivery, and social policy



Cassie DeSena-Jacobs, D.S.W., LCSW
Expertise includes work with adverse childhood experiences, mental health and criminal justice involvement, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and trauma-informed practice



Shenita Williams, Ph.D.
(B.S.W.'93/SW; M.S.W.'95/SW; Ph.D.'22/E)
Expertise includes field education, adolescent and youth development, and school-based social work practice. Also director of field education.

Assistant professors



Adrienne Baldwin-White, Ph.D.
Expertise includes gender, trauma-informed care, violence against women and children, and violence prevention among emerging adults



Mer Francis, Ph.D.
Expertise includes community-based participatory research, mental health, research design and measurement, social work practice, and substance misuse and addictive behaviors



Jacob Goffnett, Ph.D.
Expertise includes adolescent and youth development, communities and neighborhoods, health and mental health, sexual orientation and gender identify, and substance misuse and addictive behaviors



McKenzie N. Green, Ph.D.
Expertise includes adolescent and youth development, family, mental health, and race and ethnicity. Also a scholar with VCU iCubed (Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation)



UNPARALLELED RESEARCH

Faculty & staff excellence



The power of 'spit'

Karen Chartier, Ph.D., associate professor, is the new director of VCU's Institute for Research on Behavioral and Emotional Health and its Spit for Science student survey, whose genetic and survey data are invaluable to researchers. "My hope is that social work faculty doing related research will gain from developing new collaborations," Dr. Chartier says about facilitating opportunities for colleagues with her new role.

The art of Black motherhood

Nicole Corley, Ph.D., assistant professor, co-led an interdisciplinary research project – and art exhibit – titled *And, Ain't I a Mother?* The project explored the beauty, vulnerability and strength of Black mothers and the institution of Black motherhood. A gallery exhibition featured the collage work of 26 Black mothers who were asked to explore the question "what does it mean to you to be a Black mother?" "Collage in many ways is like a metaphor for Black motherhood," Dr. Corley says. "Art and our bodies are sites of knowledge. It is important to consider methodologies that go beyond text and that can embody the lived experiences of the storyteller."



Stocking up to fight food insecurity

The expansion of VCU's Ram Pantry food bank is tied to research by **Youngmi Kim, Ph.D.**, associate professor, on student food insecurity. Dr. Kim's studies with VCU students found 35 percent had experienced food insecurity, co-occurring basic needs insecurity, intensified risk during the pandemic, and barriers to affordable and nutritious food. To promote food access, 13 Little Ram Pantries, inspired by little libraries in neighborhoods, were launched in 2021 with non-perishable food. The project is an interdisciplinary partnership with the Sustainable Food Access Core of VCU iCubed and included collaboration with social work grad students Jennifer Murphy and Jessica Hoy. "Whenever you have limited funds, food is a very easy thing to cut out," Dr. Kim says. "College students are young adults, and they think they can compromise temporarily. But that is harmful for your health and academic success."



RESEARCH BY THE NUMBERS, 2021-22

Publications



63

Published, in press or
accepted

17

Revisions and
Resubmissions

35

Additional manuscripts
submitted for peer review

Presentations



53

At national conferences

29

Invited presentations/
local engagements

Projects



39

Active

34

Proposals submitted

\$1 million

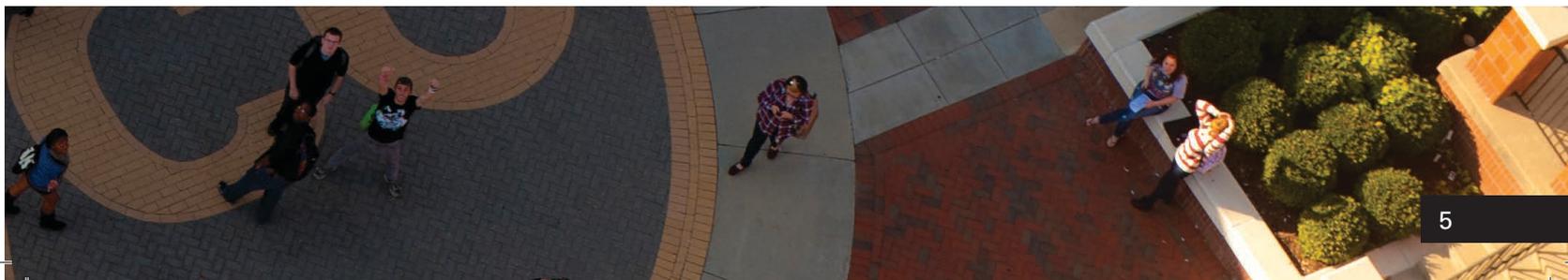
In funding

\$2 million

Including continuations
and subawards

CONGRATULATIONS!

To former Professor **Kia J. Bentley, Ph.D., LCSW**, named the school's first distinguished career professor after a 33-year VCU career when she retired this summer. ... to Assistant Professor **Holle A. McGinnis, Ph.D.**, the school's Social Justice Award recipient. ... to Field Education Enrollment and Agreements Manager **Cinnamon M. Francis, M.Sc.**, the school's Outstanding Staff Award recipient. ... and to faculty fellows, (former) Associate Professor of Teaching **Abbie D. Kinnebrew, M.S.W., LCSW**, and Assistant Professor in Teaching **Qasarah Bey Spencer, Ed.D.** (Inclusive Teaching Fellowships), and Professor **Elizabeth P. Cramer, Ph.D.**, LCSW, ACSW (Learning Spaces Teaching Fellowship).



UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

Student excellence



Leading change from CSWE board

As a junior, B.S.W. student **Oscar Kemp** was selected as the first undergraduate student representative of the Council on Social Work Education Board of Directors. He is a former president of the Association of Black Social Workers, currently a senior intern in the VCU president's office and a fellow on the school's racial justice task force. "There are so many people who never had the slightest chance to experience what I have. I want to change that," he says.

Amplifying rural voices

Leah Bouchard, a May 2022 Ph.D. graduate, earned a prestigious National Rural Health Association fellowship. Dr. Bouchard's focus is on the intersection of substance misuse and youth from marginalized populations in rural areas. "During my time at VCU, I have sought to amplify rural voices and experiences through my research," she says. "I'm excited to provide a social work lens to this work while also learning from those serving as practitioners and healthcare providers in rural areas."



Congratulations!



To our three May Commencement student speakers, Bouchard; **Sophia Booker**, M.S.W.; and **Paige Wise**, B.S.W. Among Wise's words of wisdom: "The most valuable lesson that has revealed itself during this pandemic is truly how important human connection is. How at the end of the day, that's what we do as social workers, we seek to connect with people, to understand people – maybe in a way that no one else has before." ... To our 341 graduates (2 Ph.D., 244 M.S.W., 95 B.S.W.) ... 106 scholarship, award and honor recipients ... 23 certificate and certification recipients ... and 23 Child Welfare Stipend Program participants.



UNSTOPPABLE DRIVE

Alumni excellence



Right at home at the White House

It's not every day you're invited to the White House. Except ... **Allison Gilbreath** (B.S.'11/GPA; M.S.W.'16/SW) went *twice* in four months in 2022, the second time bringing along **Sophia Booker** (B.S.W.'18/SW; M.S.W.'22/SW). The policy director for Voices for Virginia's Children, Gilbreath participated in a Build Back Better roundtable in February, discussing affordable child care, working mothers and equitable pay for child care, particularly for women of color. Her son, Perry, then 3, attended.

In June, she tapped Booker to join her for a session with the Domestic Policy Council on child welfare. Booker spoke about her own lived experience with mental health challenges and her work experience as youth development coordinator at foster care agency UMFS. Both Booker and Gilbreath had similar reactions: "Sometimes it's hard to wrap my head around it ... who gets to go to the White House?" Booker says. "Who gets to go twice?" Gilbreath says. "I felt enormous pride. And this is just the beginning for Sophia. I could definitely see her going back."

Making a difference, daily

It's only been 20 years, but that is enough time for **Sofia Hiort-Wright** (B.S.W.'98/SW; M.S.W.'99/SW; Ph.D.'06/E) to have made a lifelong impact in VCU's athletic department.

She received the 2022 President's Inclusive Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award from VCU, where she is senior executive associate athletic director. "Every day I hope to make a difference in people's lives, and all of us in social work want to do that," says Hiort-Wright, who also played varsity tennis at VCU. "VCU is a special place. People can find themselves here."



Congratulations!

To **John Bricout** (Ph.D.'98/SW), the school's 2022 Making a Difference Alumni Award recipient ... to **James Forte** (M.S.W.'78/SW; Ph.D.'90/SW), a 2022 recipient of the NASW-Maryland chapter's Lifetime Achievement Award. ... and to **Helen Rai** (B.S.W.'16/SW; M.S.W.'17/SW), the 2022 Amy Rosenblum Award recipient from the school's Office of Field Education.



UNAFRAID

of the future

Scenes from May 2022 Commencement