

Wilder School in Action

Fall 2019



**Analyzing social equity and
public policy from every angle!**

VCU hosts PPIA public service weekend

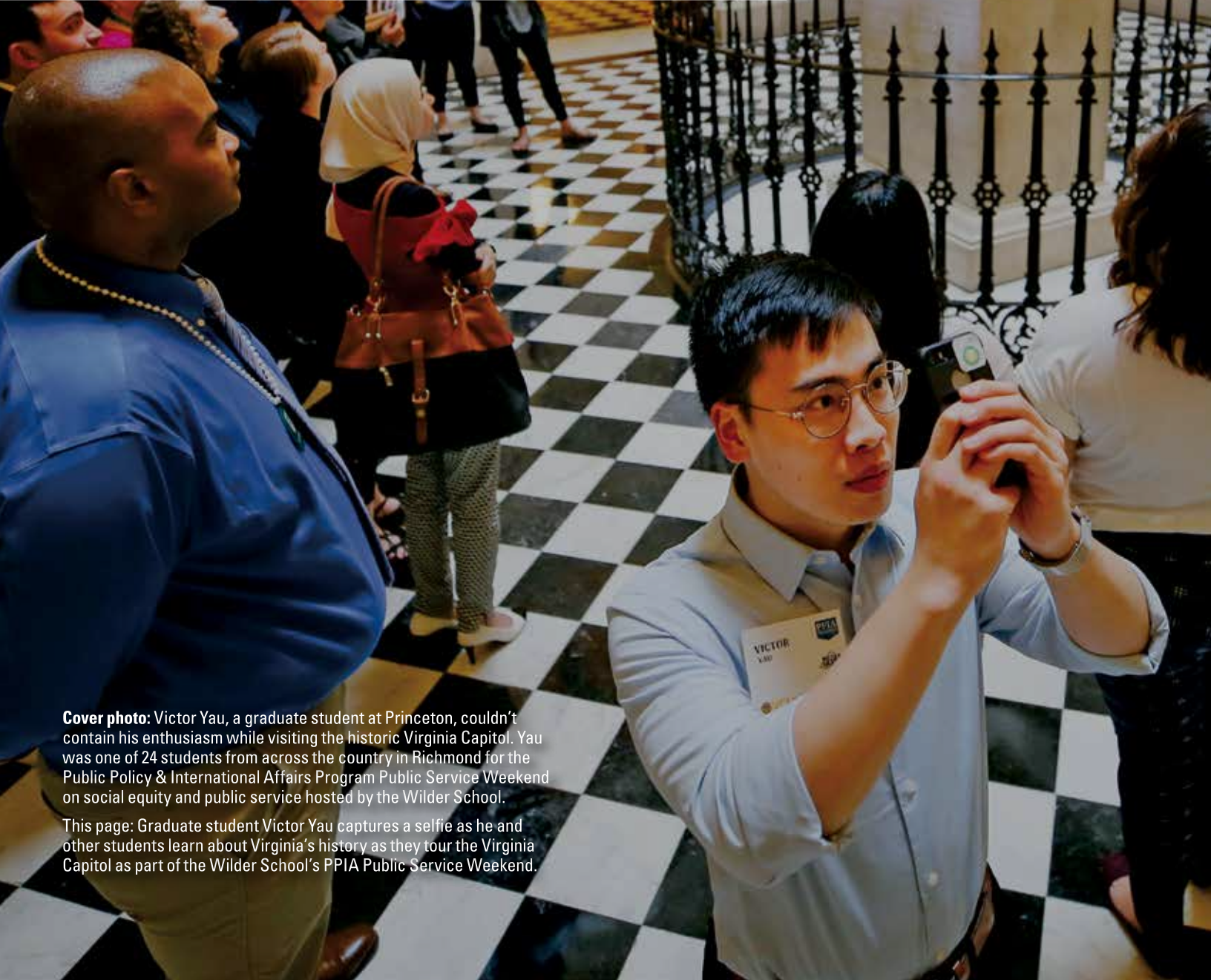


VCU

L. Douglas Wilder School of
Government and Public Affairs

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Cover photo: Victor Yau, a graduate student at Princeton, couldn't contain his enthusiasm while visiting the historic Virginia Capitol. Yau was one of 24 students from across the country in Richmond for the Public Policy & International Affairs Program Public Service Weekend on social equity and public service hosted by the Wilder School.

This page: Graduate student Victor Yau captures a selfie as he and other students learn about Virginia's history as they tour the Virginia Capitol as part of the Wilder School's PPIA Public Service Weekend.

Letter from the dean's office

Dear friends,

Welcome to the fall 2019 issue of Wilder School in Action, one important way we keep you informed about the meaningful work of our students, faculty and alumni. As you read the articles that follow, you will see the many ways that the Wilder School's national reputation is growing even stronger.

The year since our last publication has been an affirming one, with Wilder School faculty and students receiving 11 competitive national awards in their respective fields of public safety, criminal justice, governance, economic and community development. Our academic programs have likewise seen a precipitous rise in national prominence in recent years, ascending a total of 17 places in the U.S. News & World Report rankings since 2018. Our distinctive, comparatively emergent school of public affairs is now 39th in the nation.



This past year, we've stepped up our efforts to recruit exceptional graduate students with our membership in the Public Policy & International Affairs Program Graduate School Consortium. The Wilder School was selected as one of five schools to host a PPIA Public Service Weekend during summer 2019, which is the topic of our cover story.

Our national awards and accolades are gratifying and confirm that we are among the best at what we do. At the same time, all of us at the Wilder School recognize that in the world of academia, we must always strive to improve our programs and services.

In that spirit, during the past year we worked to enhance the reach and diversity of our student recruitment efforts. We've also strengthened the polling impact of our Center for Public Policy and increased the capacity of high-quality experiential student programs such as our flagship Virginia Capitol Semester program, while continuing to deepen the collaborative nature of our real-world scholarship.

It is my privilege to serve as interim dean of the Wilder School, where our imperative of public service in action is reflected in everything that we do. Although we've achieved so much in the past year, I am confident that we are on our way to achieving even more.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan T. Gooden".

Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D.
Interim dean

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Back row, left to right: Joseph Walters, deputy director of administration, VA Department of Corrections; Manuel Alvarez, chairman, Goochland County Board of Supervisors; Gloria Turner, chairman, Goochland Central High School Committee; Robert Holsworth, Ph.D., EVGA Committee Chair and VCU Board of Visitors member; Susan Gooden, Ph.D., Wilder School interim dean; Michael Rao, VCU president; Manju Ganeriwala, Virginia state treasurer; Joseph Vass, State Capitol Police; James Parrish, executive director, Virginia Equality. Front row, left to right: Karen Fowler, president, Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation – James River Chapter; Gayle Harris, daughter of the late Grace E. Harris; Robert Crouse, president and CEO, The Virginia Home; Jake Bittner, president, Qlarion; John Poggi, account executive, Johnson Controls

Celebrating excellence in government

From recognizing a 125-year-old nonprofit institution to a hero with 75 years of public service, the 13th Excellence in Virginia Government Awards celebration was a distinctive one. More than 250 state and local government officials; nonprofit and business leaders; elected officials; and Wilder School faculty, staff and students gathered in early April to honor individuals and organizations who have made outstanding contributions to the practice of government and the betterment of the commonwealth.

VCU President Michael Rao and Wilder School Interim Dean Susan Gooden were joined by American Society for Public Administration Executive Director William Shields Jr. and officials from the National Academy of Public Administration in recognizing the seven honorees.

“The Excellence in Virginia Government Awards program demonstrates that it is an integral part of the Wilder School’s mission to recognize individuals, groups and organizations that have made an exceptional contribution to public service,” says Robert Holsworth, Ph.D., former director of the Wilder School and current member of the VCU Board of

Visitors. Holsworth chaired the School’s EVGA Committee.

Also recognized at the event were the two students who received the \$2,500 EVGA scholarships for 2018-19: Suparna Dutta, who received her Ph.D. in public policy and administration in May 2019; and Myles Robinson, who received his undergraduate degree in homeland security and emergency preparedness in December 2018.

2019 honorees

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT (*posthumously*)

Grace E. Harris, Ph.D., who passed away in 2018, spent her career in service to the commonwealth, leaving a lasting legacy of collaboration, equity and transformational leadership. Harris joined VCU in 1967 as one of the first three African American faculty hired. She quickly rose through the ranks in the School of Social Work before being named vice provost for continuing studies and public service.

In 1993, she became the first African American and first female named provost and vice president for academic affairs. Following her retirement in 1999, the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute was established by the board of visitors, providing development opportunities for more than 1,000 leaders since its inception.

During the ceremony, the Wilder School announced that a new EVGA award has been created to honor Harris. The Grace E. Harris Leadership Award will celebrate an individual whose leadership in government or the nonprofit sector has made a difference in their communities and the commonwealth.

UNsung HERO

His public service began 75 years ago when Joseph Vass joined the Virginia Protective Force at age 15. He has worn the service uniform of every U.S. military branch and that of the Henrico Police Department. Vass has also served as security chief for the University of Richmond and Richmond Airport and police chief for the towns of Poquoson and Boykins. At age 91, Vass is still serving the public as the inventory and supply officer for the Capitol Police.

COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT

(*two honorees*)

Once a building many thought would be torn down, Goochland’s Central High School Cultural and Educational Complex now stands as a community resource providing a facility for a variety of programs and activities, as well as a museum and conference space. The award recognizes the Goochland Central High School Committee, which was formed by the Goochland County Board of Supervisors

to help determine the future of the building that had served as the county's African American high school before desegregation.

The Virginia Home is a private, nonprofit 130-bed facility in Richmond whose mission is to provide compassionate and professional residential care to adult Virginians with irreversible physical disabilities regardless of their ability to pay. Celebrating its 125th year in 2019, the Virginia Home works to positively impact and transform the lives of people with physical disabilities so residents might reach their highest potential and level of independence.

HILL-ROBINSON EXPANSION OF FREEDOM

Equality Virginia believes in a truly inclusive commonwealth where all are equally valued, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. For the past 30 years, Equality Virginia has been the leading advocacy organization in Virginia seeking equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Equality Virginia's work resulted in the 2014 decision to recognize gay and lesbian marriage in Virginia.

INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT

The mission of the Virginia Treasury is to serve as steward of the commonwealth's financial resources. Under the leadership of the state treasurer, Treasury worked with Qlarion to develop and implement a data analytics system. One example of the system's impact is a 35% increase in the number of unclaimed property claims paid in fiscal year 2018.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

The Virginia Department of Corrections is the national leader with the lowest recidivism rate — 23.4% — in the country. For those completing Corrections' Career and Technical Education program, it is even more impressive at 12.3%. Two career training programs were recognized: the Green HVAC program developed with Johnson Controls in Chesapeake, Va., and the partnership with the nonprofit Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, James River Chapter.

Title sponsors of the Excellence in Virginia Government Awards

Dominion Energy and Union Bank & Trust

Reception sponsor

Altria 

For the kids


What happens to long-term residents — especially children — when neighborhoods gentrify around them? Where do they hang out? And how? That was the focus of assistant professor Kathryn Howell, Ph.D., in her case study of Columbia Heights in Washington, D.C. Howell did intensive fieldwork using interviews, observation, documentary analysis and census data to understand the impact of cultural and social displacement. Her results, published in the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, were recognized as the Best Article by the Urban Affairs Association at their spring 2019 conference. The article, "For the Kids: Children, Safety and the Politicization of Displacement in Washington, D.C.," investigates the social and cultural displacement in public spaces, through the lens of youth and public safety. She finds that planners and policymakers promising "vibrant" neighborhoods accept and become complicit in excluding long-term African American and Latino residents when considering public spaces and preservation of affordability. The UAA noted that Howell's writing is "clear and accessible, and the data support various perspectives such as local government, long-term and new residents, and community advocates." They further stated that Howell's conclusions have implications for future research on gentrification in urban communities throughout the U.S. and beyond. 



Assistant professor Kathryn Howell receives her Best Article award from Hélène Bélanger of the Urban Affairs Association.

What happens after graduation?

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia has awarded \$750,000 to the Wilder School's Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory for a one-year research study. The study will describe post-college outcomes for recent baccalaureate and associate-degree earners at state-supported institutions of higher education in Virginia.

In collaboration with SCHEV, researchers at SERL will custom design, execute and report on a large survey of recent graduates. The survey design will cover important topics such as employment, the relationship of employment to college experiences, satisfaction with the college experience, life satisfaction, student debt and civic/community engagement. The survey results will be brought together with other existing data to create a study that provides a rich resource for policy discussions regarding higher education in Virginia. 



A lifetime of achievement

Blue Wooldridge embodies excellence in public affairs teaching and leadership

Generous. Uplifting. Collegial. Quick-witted. Caring. These are just a few of the ways VCU colleagues, students and scores of public administrators around the world describe professor Blue Wooldridge, D.P.A. After more than 30 years at VCU, Wooldridge retired in May 2019. He leaves a legacy of more than 50 years in the public administration field.

“I’ve been lucky,” says Wooldridge. “I’ve always enjoyed my work, and I see

myself continuing to do research and attend conferences in retirement. There may be just one thing I won’t miss: all of the grading.”

Wooldridge taught courses in public and nonprofit management and organizational behavior in the school’s Ph.D. program, including governmental financial management, human resource management, principles of public administration, public administration theory and public policy analysis. A prolific scholar, Wooldridge has authored or co-authored more than 150 papers, presentations, professional reports and training modules. A testament to Wooldridge’s international reputation and following, portions of his works have been translated into Czech, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Danish, Italian, Russian, Macedonian, French, Lithuanian and Georgian.

“Blue is an internationally recognized leader who has been actively engaged in enhancing the practice and study of public administration for more than five decades,” says Interim Dean Susan T. Gooden. “He embodies the characteristics of a model citizen, colleague, scholar and teacher.”

In addition to his traditional scholarship, for more than 40 years Wooldridge designed and delivered workshops and conducted training sessions to untold numbers of elected and appointed officials at all levels of government around the globe. His public-sector management and training experience have been utilized by governments in at least 24 countries and includes

Virginia’s Department for Employee Dispute Resolution.

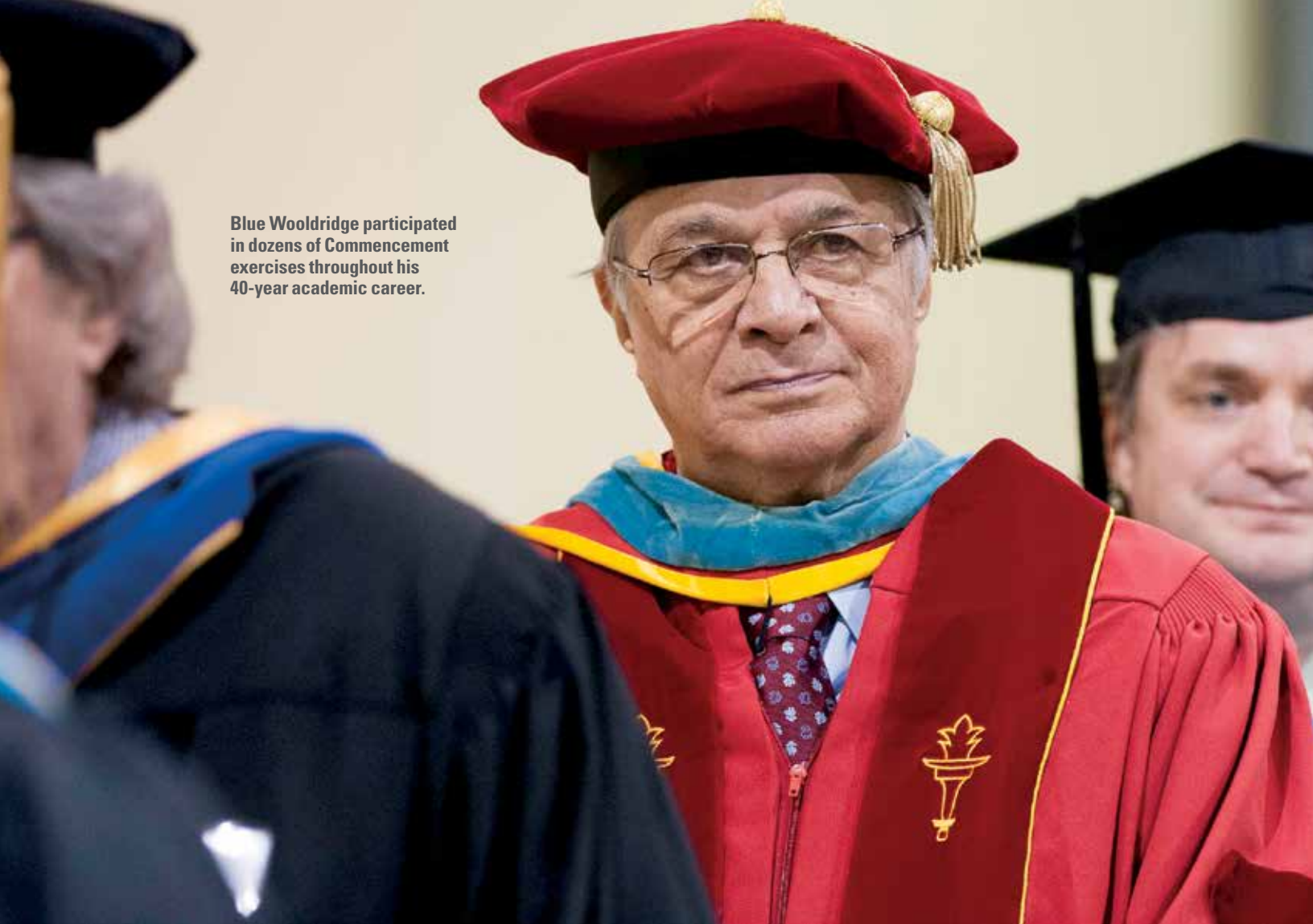
Wooldridge was known as a supremely collaborative and talented instructor, often engaging graduate public-sector students in scholarly work resulting in publication while supervising at least 25 dissertations. Alumni from his courses work in a diverse array of public organizations and include a U.S. Representative, city and county administrators, state legislators and faculty members in institutions around the world.

“Blue has been a force in public affairs education, and through his leadership in this field he has also been an extraordinary ambassador for VCU around the world by building lasting personal and professional relationships with colleagues,” says Laurel McFarland, executive director of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration. “He is a living testament to the power of cultural competence, and he has demonstrated a steady, unwavering commitment to inclusivity and cultural competence in students, faculty, curriculum — and deeply into the educational process itself.”

Faye Z. Belgrave, Ph.D., a professor in VCU’s psychology department and director of the Center for Cultural Experiences in Prevention, has worked with Wooldridge for more than 20 years. “I can think of no other person at this university who has worked so fiercely to address equity and justice for underrepresented groups on campus,” Belgrave says. “Through purposeful action and demonstrated commitment, Blue has challenged

AT A GLANCE

Blue Wooldridge’s service to the Wilder School and the university is legendary. He served several terms as president of the Black Education Association, as a member of VCU’s Council on Inclusive Excellence and Equity, a member of the VCU President’s Action Group for Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board, and was the chair and a member of the Wilder School Diversity and Equity Committee. A longtime member of the VCU Faculty Senate, including serving as its president, he also served on the University Council and on the university’s Executive Budget Committee. Wooldridge was also director of the Faculty Assistance and Mentorship Enhancement Program for junior black faculty and chaired the Committee on Professional Development of the Virginia Association of Black Faculty and Administrators.



Blue Wooldridge participated in dozens of Commencement exercises throughout his 40-year academic career.

the status quo and encouraged people to speak up and let their voices be heard.”

Advancing public administration

Outside of VCU, Wooldridge’s deep and far-reaching contributions to the discipline’s leading professional associations are arguably his greatest achievement. In the past two decades, Wooldridge has held positions on either the board of directors or national council of the American Society for Public Administration; National Academy of Public Administration; Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration; and International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration. Wooldridge has used his leadership roles in various professional associations as a platform to strengthen the focus of equity in public administration scholarship and practice.

Wooldridge’s accomplishments have garnered numerous awards, including

“He embodies the characteristics of a model citizen, colleague, scholar and teacher.”

— Susan T. Gooden, interim dean, Wilder School

the Social Justice Curriculum Award from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration. In 2018 he was recognized with the Paul P. Van Riper Award for Excellence and Service by the American Society for Public Administration. The award honors an ASPA member who has made significant contributions both as an academic and practitioner.

Wooldridge has also received many departmental and university recognitions at VCU. In 2018 alone, he was the recipient of the Wilder School’s Excellence in Service award, the VCU Black Education

Association Outstanding Contributions award, and the university’s Distinguished Service Award. This fall, VCU named Wooldridge a Distinguished Career Professor.

Starting a new chapter

Now a professor emeritus of public administration and policy, Wooldridge does not plan to slow down in retirement. He talks enthusiastically about a new research idea — identifying attributes of successful online students — and continuing to write and present papers at conferences with former students and colleagues. He and his wife, Annie, also plan to travel and enjoy having more time to spend with their grandchildren.

“I have no doubt that in retirement Blue will continue to have a tremendous impact on the field of public administration,” Gooden concludes. “Everyone at the Wilder School looks forward to continuing to work with Blue in his new role as professor emeritus.” 📖



**Damian Pitt, Ph.D., atop
his energy-efficient
Richmond home**

Helping create a sunny future

Wilder School professor and researcher focuses efforts on sustainable energy

Damian Pitt, Ph.D. practices what he preaches. The associate professor and chair of the Wilder School's urban and regional studies and planning program has spent his career researching and teaching the intersection of urban planning and energy and climate policy. He and his wife have a small 2.7 kilowatt solar installation on the roof of their Museum District home in Richmond. The installation supplies about 30% of the family's electric needs through net metering, a system that connects the homeowners' solar panels to the power grid.

Pitt not only lives and teaches in Richmond, but also is helping the city plan for a sustainable future. He is an appointed member of the Richmond 300 Advisory Commission, and is co-chairing the commission's environmental working group. The commission is a group of 21 people who represent all walks of life in Richmond. Pitt brings nearly 20 years of professional expertise and research to the commission, which is working to draft a long-range master plan that will take the city to 2037, the 300th anniversary of Richmond's founding. Pitt also works with the city's Office of Sustainability to help the city manage its energy use and carbon footprint.

"Damian Pitt is a valuable contributor to the Richmond 300 process," says Brianne Mullen (M.U.R.P.'13), coordinator of Richmond's Office of Sustainability. "In addition to his role on the advisory council, his extensive knowledge of and support for policies promoting renewable energy and energy conservation will help to ensure that the new master plan

"Urban planning students need to understand the impact planning has on energy use and climate change."

— Damian Pitt, Ph.D.

strengthens the community's environmental, social and economic well-being."

Pitt's research and expertise is also serving the broader commonwealth. In summer 2018, he was appointed by Gov. Ralph Northam to a four-year term on the Virginia Solar Energy Development and Energy Storage Authority. The authority's charge is to explore expansion of solar energy in the commonwealth. "I'm pleased that the authority is also tackling the complex issue of energy storage," Pitt says. "Virginia is doing a good job on large-scale solar installations, but is very far behind when it comes to smaller-scale distributed solar energy systems. Having the right solutions for storage is important to support the integration of those small-scale solar systems to the grid." Pitt recently released two reports that address policy issues around smaller-scale distributed photovoltaic energy systems, like the one on his home.

Pitt's work outside the university helps him keep his class content contemporary — with the use of local and real-world examples. His classes often include a service-learning project, where students go out into the

community to apply the concepts they've learned in the classroom.

"Urban planning students need to understand the impact planning has on energy use and climate change," Pitt says. "Getting them out into the community helps them see that connection."

Pitt is also a translational research fellow through the Wilder School's Office of Public Policy Outreach in the Center for Public Policy, which connects faculty members from across VCU with state lawmakers to explain their research and its public policy implications.

Pitt's wife, Trieste Lockwood, also works on environmental sustainability issues as a senior policy adviser at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Pitt and Lockwood have a new reason for their hard work. In late 2018, they welcomed their first child, daughter Siena. Pitt observes, "Now we have a personal reason to help policymakers and citizens focus on sustainable energy solutions for future generations." 🏠

ACCOLADES

In September, Damian Pitt, Ph.D., and Gilbert Michaud (Ph.D.'16/GPA) were recognized by the Association of Energy Engineers for their article, "Non-Utility Photovoltaic Deployment: Evaluation of U.S. State-level Policy Drivers." Michaud and Pitt received the Best Article of the Year award at the AEE World Conference in Washington, D.C. The article was published in the winter 2019 edition of *Strategic Planning for Energy and Environment*.



21 universities represented at Wilder School PPIA Public Service Weekend

Strategic partnerships help Wilder School recruit exceptional students

Even at an urban school of public affairs renowned for its racial and economic diversity, Victor Yau is a standout graduate recruit.

A self-confessed B-boy who has dreamed of launching his own dance studio since childhood, Yau (pictured on our front cover) spent more than seven years as a competitive dancer before pursuing an undergraduate degree at the University of Houston. While there, he earned a national scholarship that allowed him to travel overseas to pursue an interest in Korean cultural studies. That experience steered him toward a career in diplomacy, a path Yau pledged to leverage “to build bridges between international communities through art.”

Yau has already been accepted into the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs at Princeton University and the Rangel Graduate Fellowship, an elite program administered by the U.S. State Department for students who aspire to join the U.S. Foreign Service. In June, he participated in another rigorous program at the Wilder School — in hopes of getting an early start on preparing for entry into a doctoral degree program.

Despite their prodigious talent, the odds tend to be stacked against students like Yau, who are black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American. In many instances, minority students are the first in their families to go to college, can’t afford expensive graduate educations and have little help navigating the route to an advanced degree.

“It can be hard to get into graduate school, particularly in programs like

Black and Hispanic students in particular remain underrepresented in graduate schools.

international affairs or public policy because the path to get there can sometimes seem like a secret that’s only given to certain people,” says Yau, who is Asian-Canadian and grew up in the racially and economically diverse cities of Dallas and Houston. “If you don’t have guidance or mentorship from people who’ve done it, it can be difficult.”

Black and Hispanic students in particular, remain underrepresented in graduate schools. About 12 percent of graduate students were black and about 11 percent Hispanic in the fall of 2017, and about 15 percent of all doctorates awarded

by U.S. universities went to Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans in 2016, the most recent periods for which these figures are available, according to a survey sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools and the Graduate Record Examinations Board.

That’s lower than their proportions of the population, which U.S. Census Bureau estimates put at about 35 percent of the population, collectively.

Against those challenges, the Wilder School has developed a strategic relationship between the Public Policy & International Affairs Program and the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration to recruit exceptionally talented students like Yau.

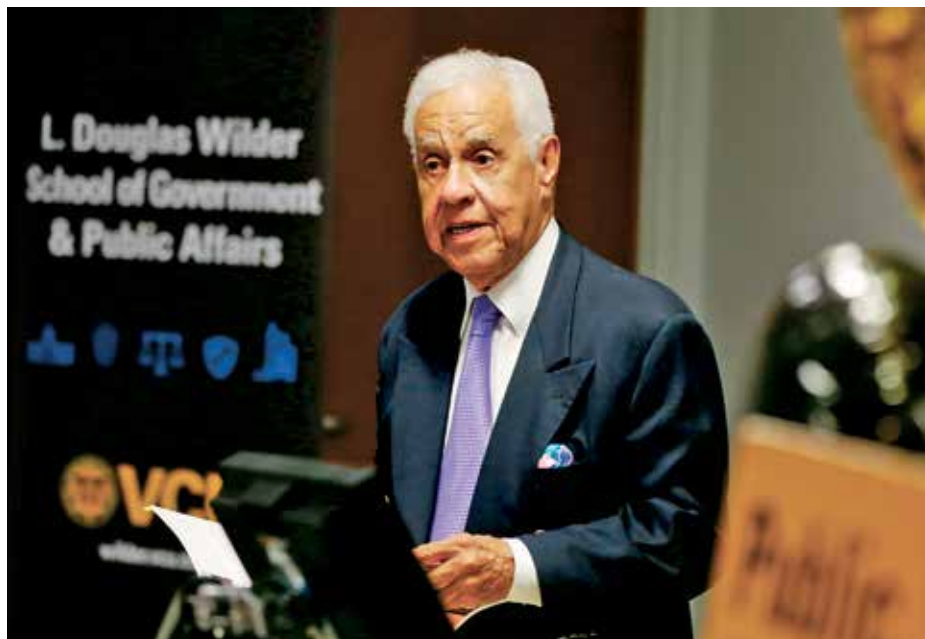
The school’s flagship initiatives are its participation in the PPIA Public Service Weekend and its membership in the PPIA Graduate School Consortium. The first recruits promising undergraduates from PPIA’s established network of more than 4,000 alumni. PPIA alumni are high-achieving students from across

Opposite page: PPIA participant I'anna Barker considers the impact of social and economic disparities in the field of emergency management during a tour of Virginia's emergency operations command center. Top photo, this page: Virginia governor and distinguished professor, L. Douglas Wilder, addresses PPIA participants. Middle photo: Participants learn about the Virginia State Capitol building. Bottom photo: Yomna Nassar, a University of Maryland student, reviews an emergency operations manual during a tour of Virginia's emergency operations command center.

the country who receive access to a host of experiential programs and professional development opportunities such as the Public Service Weekend (PSW), which exposes selected participants to the rewards of a public sector career through an intensive three-day conference. The idea is not so much to get students to go to the participating institution (though it is understood to be a recruitment opportunity), but to give them background knowledge and preparation for wherever they land following an undergraduate degree.

The first Wilder School PSW was an enormous success and attracted two dozen students from 17 states and 21 universities. Highlights of the weekend included a keynote address by Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder; a tour of the Virginia Capitol; and meetings with alumni, and state and local policymakers. Students also attended technical and professional development workshops hosted by research faculty from the Wilder School's Center for Public Policy.

The second membership initiative, the PPIA Graduate Consortium, offers participating schools a direct pipeline to exceptionally qualified PPIA alumni through recruitment events and special admission incentives. In exchange, the Wilder School provides waived application fees for especially qualified recruits and pledges a guaranteed minimum, one-time financial award of \$5,000 to accepted students. The two pipelines are separate but connected — as they are both administered by the school's recently restructured Office of Student Success — which encompasses outreach, recruitment, admission and retention. 🗣️



Wilder School alumna embraces public service

Dietra Trent serves others to make a difference

Dietra Trent (M.P.A.'95/GPA; Ph.D.'07/GPA) earned both a Master of Public Administration and a doctorate in public policy and administration from the VCU Wilder School. Trent, who is currently chief of staff at George Mason University, has led an accomplished career as a public servant, having served as secretary of education under Gov. Terry McAuliffe, deputy secretary of education under Gov. Tim Kaine and director of constituent services under Gov. Mark Warner. Prior to working for Gov. Warner, she was the director of federal relations under former VCU president Eugene Trani, Ph.D.

Tell me about your early years.

I grew up in a close-knit rural community in Halifax County on a farm where my family grew everything. We raised pigs, chickens and a cow, and had a big cherry tree in the backyard. Looking back, it was a remarkably idyllic childhood. It was also a place where hard work was admired and expected.

Tell me about your parents.

How did their values and personalities shape you?

My mother was an extremely faith-centered person. Christianity, love and forgiveness were a huge part of the value system of our home. My father valued faith, but also believed in a good fight — an instinct that was tested as an African American who faced racial discrimination as a federal employee in the 1970s. When he was fired unjustly, he fought it for 10 years and eventually won. He never gave up.

As a result, I think it is fair to say that I've had these two angels on my shoulders my whole life: one that says pray in the wake of injustice and the other that says it's time to fight. I still get that feeling today when I go into a classroom full of underrepresented kids, and I know they don't have the resources they need to have a good life.

The other person that really shaped my values was my grandmother, Faustina. She was a first-grade teacher. In fact, she was my first-grade teacher, and she

devoted more than 40 years of her life to educating the children of Halifax County. After she retired, she spent the next 20 years of her life volunteering with Save the Children Federation, an organization that matches children living in poverty with sponsors across the country who would help meet their needs. It was my grandmother who would take me around town on her missions and really taught me the value of public service.

Tell us about your time at VCU, both as a student and an employee.

I graduated with a degree in sociology and criminal justice from Hampton University thinking that I wanted to be a lawyer, but quickly realized that I could be a difference-maker in the world without a law degree. Soon after graduating, I landed a position as office director for Rep. Bobby Scott's first congressional campaign.

While working at the Capitol, I continued my education and earned master's and doctoral degrees in public administration and policy at VCU. I thought being a part of Bobby Scott's campaign had prepared me for anything, but when I left his office to become the director of federal relations at VCU, I realized that was definitely not the case. I had so much to learn, and my time at the university was one of the most formative periods in my life.

Working for President Trani was a career-making experience. Gene was

a force for transformation and one of the most singularly focused leaders I have ever worked for. It was while working in this capacity that I also met then Gov. Mark Warner, whom I would later work for.

What advice would you give young people starting off, particularly those who are moving in the kind of storied legislative halls that you have moved in.

That it's not about you. Service is about using power in a way that elevates others. It is never about you or the influential policymakers that you represent — that doesn't legitimize you or the work. Many of the bright young people that I started my career with felt that way and flamed out, primarily because that kind of motivation will never sustain you.

You also have to be willing to let your career unfold. Don't be afraid if you don't know exactly where you are headed. Just have confidence that the next step is the right step. In my experience, even a misstep can be the first step to getting where you need to be.

Key leadership lesson?

Leadership isn't about titles; it's about posture. And it is only when you assume that posture to serve others that you can really be a difference-maker. It is certainly not about trying to climb this rung or that rung. Leadership is about continually asking yourself what can I do to serve the least advantaged among us? 🏛️



Former secretary of education and Wilder School alumna Dietra Trent visits a music education class at Stonewall Elementary School in 2016.

Addressing cybersecurity

Wilder School faculty member co-authors book that fills important research niche

A new book, “Understanding Cyber Warfare: Politics, Policy and Strategy” provides an accessible introduction into the historical, technical and strategic contexts of cyber conflict for graduate and undergraduate students.

The work is co-authored by Wilder School assistant professor of homeland security and emergency preparedness Christopher Whyte, Ph.D., and Brian Mazanec, Ph.D., a professor of cyber warfare at George Mason University.

“There’s not much in this field that you can actually take and hand to an undergraduate or a graduate student,” he says, as cybersecurity is still a relatively new field of research.

Whyte describes this book as an “intermediate resource” that fills a niche in the study of cyber-criminal conflict. This book incorporates international relations and political science theories into the topic of national security.

“I wanted to make sure that we provided the resources to students,” Whyte says, “so that they could effectively frame these concepts in relatively simple terms.”

The first chapters of the book explore the historical trajectory of cyber warfare, beginning with World War I and World War II, and development of code makers. This continued with the Enigma machine, invented by German engineer Arthur Scherbius at the end of WWI.

“Things that were so sophisticated on the Allied side,” he says. “We literally had to build the first computers to actually combat the ability of the Germans and other Axis powers.”

Later on, the text explores a project of the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency that led to the internet. Whyte describes this as “the most dynamic information revolution in human history.”

“Information revolutions lead to broad-scope global conflict,” Whyte says. This speeds up the pace of society, which results in an “increase in class conflict, in political conflict, in social conflicts and economic contestation.”

Whyte says the important thing to understand is that cyber warfare is not static. “Every few years since about 1986, we come across a new flavor of cyber threat.” The shape of that threat changes each time.

“We are increasingly viewing states as not fighting with each other in the traditional sense, but rather as a constant form of low-level pressure,” he says.

Whyte says that students are most interested in how cybersecurity fits into the global context and international relations. With an undergraduate degree in international relations and economics, Whyte has the knowledge to frame these issues effectively for his students.

He became interested in cybersecurity while completing his master’s degree in political science at George Mason University. In his second year, he served as a junior research assistant to Irving Lachow at the Center for a New American Security. It was then he realized the vital role it plays in national security.

He describes how systematic shutdown of cyber capabilities could greatly diminish national power, “without a shot being fired.”

“It’s not esoteric,” Whyte says. The next generation of students can confront these threats, “with a basic knowledge of foundational concepts and principles, and some history as well.”

This is precisely what Whyte aims to do. 🍷



An interest in cybersecurity led assistant professor of homeland security and emergency preparedness Christopher Whyte, Ph.D., to write his new book.

Lifelong connections and legislative experience

Virginia Capitol Semester offers rewarding internship with policymakers

In 46 days, three Virginia Commonwealth University seniors have gained experience that will last them a lifetime.

Jesiah Hoskins, Feven Negussie and Jacob Parcell spent the winter at the Capitol writing speeches, researching bills and meeting with constituents.

These are just three of 25 VCU students enrolled in the 2019 Virginia Capitol Semester Program.

"I would recommend the program to anyone," says Parcell, who is an anthropology major with a minor in business. "It's an eye-opening experience on how government works, how laws are made and how that translates to your life."

Virginia Capitol Semester is a six-credit course. Students also carry an academic load of six to nine additional credits. Students from all majors can apply. Lawmakers ask the program for interns each fall and students serve the General Assembly in the spring.

Students attend a weekly three-hour seminar Monday nights in the General Assembly Building. Guest speakers include lawmakers, lobbyists and state policymakers who share their expertise and knowledge.

Parcell had the opportunity to work with Speaker of the House Kirk Cox.

He said he was a little apprehensive at the beginning of the program, not coming from a political science background. However, he quickly overcame his nerves and fit right into the team.

"Just watching the speaker talk with



From left: Virginia Capitol Semester students Jesiah Hoskins, Feven Negussie and Jacob Parcell

"This role is a big responsibility, but there is always someone there to support you."

— Feven Negussie

people and seeing the time he takes to analyze every issue helped me with my own leadership skills."

When Parcell graduates in December he plans to pursue an M.B.A. or M.H.A. program in health care administration. He thinks this is the best way to impact changes in policy and help others.

Hoskins learned about the program from Keith Westbrook who struck up a conversation with Hoskins while he was working. Hoskins is completing a double major in criminal justice and psychology, along with working 20-30 hours a week at a local drug store.

Westbrook is a legislative assistant for Del. Delores McQuinn (D-Richmond). She has served in the General Assembly for 10 years and is a graduate of VCU.

"She's been a great mentor to me," Hoskins says.

Hoskins says McQuinn is passionate about uplifting African Americans and really cares about her constituents. "She tells us we need to focus on our goals and

be patient," he says, "because it's not going to happen overnight."

Hoskins will graduate this spring and plans to take a gap year and visit his uncle in Nashville while he studies for the GRE and applies to graduate school.

"I'm usually quiet," Negussie says, "but this internship gave me the opportunity to step out of my shell in a comfortable environment."

Negussie works at a hotel in downtown Richmond and is completing a bachelor's degree in homeland security and emergency preparedness with a minor in Spanish. She is also president of the Eritrean Student Association and a member of VCU Globe living-learning community.

During the 2019 session she worked with Del. John Bell D-Loudoun. "He's here for the right reasons," she says. "He takes the time to talk to us and breaks down each bill."

She says the most rewarding part of the internship was seeing a speech she had drafted read in committee.

"This role is a big responsibility," Negussie says, "but there is always someone there to support you."

When the session ended, Negussie said she had only one plan: "Sleep!"

For more details about Virginia Capitol Semester, view the informational webinar, or contact Ashley Harrison at usinternship@vcu.edu. 🏛️

Analyzing dental care among immigrants

Identifying barriers to services draws on the expertise of the Wilder School

On a gray winter day, two patients canceled their morning dental appointments at a charitable clinic that serves a large number of immigrants.

It happens often, and Sarah Raskin, Ph.D., M.P.H., wants to know why. Is it cultural? Is it related to transportation needs?

“Economic status is a major predictor of oral health,” she says. “And dental problems will worsen without treatment and lead to other medical problems.”

Raskin, assistant professor at the Wilder School and a member of the VCU Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation’s Oral Health Core, is also a medical anthropologist who examines health problems and health care access and use among historically marginalized populations. She teaches across all programs at the Wilder School, including graduate-level courses on public health preparedness and research methods.

Collaborative study

She and Aderonke Akinkugbe, Ph.D., — an assistant professor of oral health promotion and community outreach in the VCU School of Dentistry, an epidemiologist and also a member of the iCubed Oral Health Core — have teamed up to study the underutilization of dental services by low-income immigrants at CrossOver Healthcare Ministry, which operates two clinics: one in Henrico County and one in Richmond.

Raskin and Akinkugbe received a grant for the 18-month study last summer from the VCU Center for Clinical and Translational Research. Underutilization of dental services is

defined as a failure to make or keep appointments for recommended preventive care and treatments.

“We want to understand why underutilization of dental services persists among patients who visit clinics where services are provided free of charge or on an income-based sliding scale,” Raskin says.

Improving service delivery and maintaining volunteer enthusiasm among clinicians is also important, she says. They’re surveying and interviewing clients, analyzing electronic health record data, and observing service delivery.

Serving those in need

CrossOver is among five “dental safety clinics” in Richmond and one in Petersburg. CrossOver, founded 35 years ago, provides comprehensive services, including primary care, specialty care, vision, dental, HIV/AIDS care, medications, mental health services and social work, helping more than 6,500 uninsured clients last fiscal year. Sixteen dentists volunteer their time between CrossOver’s two clinics, which have a total of more than 600 volunteers.

“CrossOver is excited to be a part of this research project. The research will identify barriers to our patients’ utilization of dental services at CrossOver and compliance with their dental treatment plans,” says CEO Julie Scott Bilodeau. “It will facilitate the development of pathways for improvement, resulting in better oral and overall health for our patients.”

Both clinics are located along bus lines for clients. The Henrico office on

Quioccasin Road is near Regency Square Mall, while the Richmond clinic in the city’s Manchester section is on Cowardin Avenue.

About 80 percent of clients are immigrants, the majority of whom speak Spanish, though CrossOver treats patients from across the world, including Asia and the Middle East.

“Dental health is a major public policy issue and much more urgent than people realize.”

— Sarah Raskin, Ph.D., M.P.H.

“We’re trying to understand how their experiences with dental care in their home countries influence their use of care here. Did they grow up with it? Was it feared? Are there any stigmas? What is their oral health knowledge, and how do they take care for their teeth? What foods do they eat?” Raskin says. “These answers will drive service delivery improvements that will help patients feel more comfortable.”

Raskin hopes the study’s results will be presented to the General Assembly to help strengthen the dental safety net for all Virginians.

“Dental health is a major public policy issue and much more urgent than people realize,” she says. “VCU has a strong commitment to public health and community dentistry, and this is very gratifying.” 🍵



Sarah Raskin, Ph.D., M.P.H., observes as a patient receives care from a CrossOver volunteer dentist working with a staff dental assistant.



Undergrad profile: Samantha Kaputa

Learning through criminal justice,
Quidditch and Hyperloop at VCU

Samantha Kaputa wants a job where she doesn't have to sit behind a desk and can make a difference in the community. Whether it's her studies, playing on the VCU Quidditch team or working on Hyperloop at VCU, Kaputa is learning invaluable skills to help her succeed after graduation.

Criminal justice appealed to her, the Wilder School senior says, because she can serve the public. A criminal justice major, she has a concentration in forensic crime scene investigation and has interests in corrections and drug rehabilitation. She is also minoring in psychology.

"Law enforcement is mentally and physically challenging," says Kaputa, who's from Alexandria, Va. "You have to be pretty fit to be in law enforcement."

Quidditch team

Kaputa stays in shape as an active member of VCU's Quidditch team, the sport based on a fictional game invented by author J.K. Rowling in the Harry Potter series. Quidditch features two teams of seven players each mounted on broomsticks played on a hockey rink-sized pitch.

She is the president of the Wizengamot Quidditch Club, and plays the positions of seeker and chaser. The team plays other university teams from Pennsylvania to South Carolina.

"It's a full-contact sport that's co-ed, very physical and very competitive," she says. "I had never even read any of the Harry Potter books before I started playing, though I saw the movies. But once I started, I became absolutely fanatical."

"The school prepares you
well for your career."

— Samantha Kaputa

Hyperloop at VCU

Last summer Kaputa served as treasurer of Hyperloop at VCU, part of an international contest to design and build the best pod for Hyperloop, a high-speed ground transport concept by SpaceX founder Elon Musk. She also helped with public relations, serving as spokesperson and liaison with sponsors and other partners. While most of the team members were students in the College of Engineering, she was recruited by the team's founder, a friend from freshman year.

Amy Cook, Ph.D., chair of the Wilder School's criminal justice program, described Kaputa as "a conscientious and dedicated student. She works hard and seems to embrace the opportunities that come her way."

Kaputa appreciates the faculty.

"I am thankful to the Wilder School for the opportunities I have been given that have allowed me to succeed," she says. "There are so many great programs, like the internships, and the school prepares you well for your career." 🏆

Support the Wilder School

Your gifts support our students, faculty and staff to inform and transform public policy. All donations, regardless of size, make a positive impact.

There are many ways to give back while supporting tomorrow's leaders. Learn how you can help us by contacting James Wasilewski, the Wilder School's director of development, at wasilewskijr@vcu.edu or (804) 828-6205, or Laura Pond, development coordinator, at pondlj@vcu.edu or (804) 828-6706; or you can visit us at support.vcu.edu/give/wilder for more information.

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Four faculty openings!

The Wilder School is hiring four faculty who will contribute to its scholarly and pedagogical focus in a variety of areas, including the following positions:

Tenure track

- Criminal justice, assistant professor
- Public administration/public policy, assistant professor
- Urban/regional studies and planning, assistant professor

Non-tenure track

- Homeland security and emergency preparedness, assistant professor

We are particularly interested in candidates who demonstrate through teaching, research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or public engagement, the richness of diversity in the learning experience through integrated intersectional approaches and perspectives.

All applications must be completed online at vcu.jobs.com. Submissions should include a cover letter, a detailed CV with the names and contact information of three references, one example of scholarship and evidence of teaching effectiveness.

Priority review will begin on Oct. 15, 2019, and continue until each position is filled. For more information about the school, please visit our website at wilder.vcu.edu.



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PPIA Public Service Weekend

Gov. L. Douglas Wilder and Interim Dean Susan Gooden celebrate a successful Public Policy & International Affairs Program Public Service Weekend with the two dozen participants representing 21 universities from across the country. The VCU Wilder School was one of five universities selected to host a 2019 summer conference.