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WHY I GIVE:
CHRIS GROSENICK

Wilder School *in Action*

Spring 2025



L. Douglas Wilder
Sergeant First Class U.S. Army
1952 - 1954



PRESERVING A LEGACY

Wilder Collection goes digital



Wilder School *in Action*

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Letter from the dean

Dear Friends,

At the Wilder School, we study leadership — what it looks like, how it's built and, most importantly, how it's used to serve others. In this edition of "Wilder School in Action," you'll see leadership in its many forms: in government, in research, in crisis response, and in the students and alumni shaping the future of public service.

One of the most significant projects we highlight in this edition is the launch of the Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection. A partnership between the Wilder School's Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE) and Virginia Union University, this initiative ensures that Governor Wilder's groundbreaking leadership and policy achievements are not only preserved but accessible — so that his legacy can continue to inspire and inform.

We also explore the nature of leadership in action. This year's Virginia Capitol Semester welcomed its largest-ever cohort, giving students an up-close look at how policy is shaped at the highest levels of Virginia government. Meanwhile, Dr. Jay Albanese, a renowned expert in international crime, is challenging global perspectives on organized crime and corruption. And in "Governor's Voice," Governor Wilder offers his perspective on what it takes to govern — insights that feel especially timely as Virginia prepares for its next gubernatorial election.

Public service is about people stepping up when it matters. Dr. Luísa Nazareno's research into artificial intelligence raises important questions about the future of work and how technology will reshape society.

And then there is a focus on a few of the many leaders we are proud to call our own. Sarah Abubaker, who earned a Master of Public Administration in 2013, is breaking new ground as a member of the Richmond City Council. Ashley Van Buskirk, who received a Bachelor of Arts in 2024, made a bold shift from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy to the Virginia Army



National Guard, finding her calling in public service.

Finally, we take a moment to reflect on leadership across generations. Dr. Laurin Henry, a scholar of executive power and the first dean of VCU's School of Community Services — which later became the Wilder School — sat down with our doctoral students for an extraordinary conversation about governance, service and the lessons of history. As we were finalizing this magazine edition, we were saddened to learn of Dr. Henry's passing at age 103. The opportunities he provided to our students and his experiences and reflections remind us that leadership is not just about the positions we hold — it's about the impact and legacy we leave behind.

We also pause to honor the lives of two beloved members of our Wilder School community — Dr. Richard Huff and Dr. Blue Wooldridge. Both were longtime faculty members in our public administration program, distinguished scholars and deeply committed mentors. Their commitment to students and to the mission of public service helped shape the Wilder School's values and reach. Their legacy lives on in the many lives they touched and the leaders they helped inspire.

This issue is filled with stories of resilience, responsibility and service. As you read, I encourage you to engage with the Wilder School — whether by exploring The Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection, attending an event or supporting the next generation of public servants. Because in the end, leadership is not about standing still. It's about moving forward, shaping policy and making a difference.

Warm regards,

Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D.

Dean

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Stay up to date with the Wilder School at our news page at: bit.ly/wilderschoolnews



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CONVERSATIONS WITH

GOVERNER WILDER

Leadership and legacy: listen in

L. Douglas Wilder, Virginia's 66th Governor, and the nation's first elected African American governor, shares his experiences and reflections on current events and historic milestones.



bit.ly/wilderpod





Around the world and back again with Jay Albanese

Jet-setter Jay Albanese's three decades of academic research in international crime redefine the meaning of "global research."

BY DAVID SLIPHER

It's been another whirlwind year for **Jay Albanese, Ph.D.**, professor of criminal justice at the Wilder School. When he's called an international researcher, it's no exaggeration — he's literally crisscrossed the globe to share his expertise in international crime studies. From organized crime to corruption and ethics, Albanese is on the front lines of advancing scholarly research in crime prevention and criminal justice.

Albanese has given invited talks in 30 countries over more than 100 trips. For more than three decades, he's been a leading voice in contemporary issues associated with organized crime, including human trafficking; global, environmental and

social changes; and corruption.

"I appreciate the opportunity I have had to impact the lives of students, carry out research with public policy impacts and perform public service to my profession, the government and the United Nations," Albanese says.

Frequent flier miles aside, his dedication to the Wilder School has most recently placed him in the VCU spotlight of excellence with a National/International Recognition Award (NIRA). Now in its second year, the NIRA was created to honor VCU's top talent, as recommended by their dean.

"This prestigious honor reflects Jay's extraordinary contributions to the United Nations, as well as his highly regarded research in the areas of cybercrime, criminal justice ethics and white-collar crime," shares Susan Gooden, dean of the Wilder School.

Albanese's longstanding passion for instruction earned him the VCU



"I appreciate the opportunity I have had to impact the lives of students, carry out research with public policy impacts and perform public service to my profession, the government and the United Nations."

– Jay Albanese, Ph.D.

Distinguished Teaching Award in 2016 and the Commonwealth of Virginia's highest honor for faculty, the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia's Outstanding Faculty Award.

At the United Nations, he serves as vice chair of the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and is a subject matter expert for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. He also serves as UN liaison for the American Society of Criminology and has testified as an expert witness for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Albanese's longstanding passion for instruction earned him Virginia's highest honor, the Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia in 2022 and the VCU Distinguished Teaching Award in 2016.

So what's next for this global educator? It's never a routine travel itinerary.

"The future always brings a mix of hope and concern," Jay remarks. "But it's never a matter of doing more of the same. Instead, it's a matter of seeking out new opportunities to make contributions to knowledge, students, colleagues and the world of policy and practice."

Taking the Capitol steps to success

Virginia Capitol Semester immersive legislative program celebrates a record-setting cohort.

BY CHI DUONG



The record-setting 2025 Virginia Capitol Semester.

The Wilder School Virginia Capitol Semester program continues its signature internship opportunity for students to gain hands-on public service experience directly within the office of a Virginia General Assembly House delegate or state senator. With the state capitol just down the street from the VCU campus, Capitol Semester interns orbit the seat of government across key areas of influence across the commonwealth.

These talented students strengthen their understanding of the legislative processes in action. Taking on integral responsibilities, they examine policy issues as well as collaborate directly with legislators and their constituents. These real-world governmental experiences develop the critical skills for students to move toward career success.

This year, the Capitol Semester program enrolled its largest cohort of more than 50 students.

The unique hands-on experience facilitates a pipeline for networking and permanent employment in state government, and many Wilder School alumni have springboarded careers in public service as a direct result of their work.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

Honors student **Catherine Boynton** is strengthening her career and focusing on government sectors she previously had not known.

"(This internship) has inspired me to focus more on state-level policy work and analysis rather than the federal level. Where I had previously looked at public policies with a nationally focused lens, I am now more inspired to focus on the impact of federal and state policies on individual states."

– Catherine Boynton, Political Science

With law school ambitions, **Samuel Orr** is uncovering new skills and embracing opportunities to prepare for his next steps after college, thanks to the responsibilities he's taken on.

"I spent a lot of my time working with my chief of staff on preparing speeches that my delegate gave, and writing and suggesting productive edits for our weekly newsletters, so on top of school, it's really helped me hone down a professional and well-rounded writing style, something that's extremely important in the legal field."

– Samuel Orr, Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

Sunshine Tomlin continues to develop rich, personal connections as well as mentorship and guidance to support her path to join lawmaking.

"The connections I made throughout the program were able to set me up for success in other parts of my career and future opportunities as well. I was able to talk with many people who had a similar career path as mine, and I was able to get advice on what options I could explore next later on in my life."

– Sunshine Tomlin, Criminal Justice



Watch "Why Corruption Is the Worst Problem in the World"



bit.ly/JayAlbanese

Governor's voice

Listening is key to mobilizing voters

BY DAVID SLIPHER

We sat down with Governor L. Douglas Wilder, our namesake and the nation's first African American governor, to discuss this year's gubernatorial election and what the candidates need to demonstrate to earn Virginians' votes.



Q What essential leadership qualities should the next governor of Virginia possess to effectively address the state's current challenges?

A The next governor of Virginia needs to possess the interest of the people as prime in their mind. By this, you don't listen and watch what the commentators have to say. Weigh issues against what you hear from the people. Don't be afraid to ask them and share with them how you feel about an issue and then see if they can convince you differently. The true "experts" must always be the people.

Q With both candidates aiming to make history, how do you assess their campaign strategies in appealing to a diverse electorate? What approach to leadership will differentiate the candidates from one another?

A I've never run for office appealing to any particular group because of gender or race or even party. When I was running for any office, I'd want everybody to vote for me. Candidates must strictly focus on issues and clearly define where they stand.

Three things that always pop up in my mind are education, health and housing. I ask candidates, what are you going to do for those issues that aren't being done? Why do you think it hasn't been done and what makes you think you can get that done?

Q With President Trump's recent policies affecting federal employment, particularly in Northern Virginia, how might this influence voter sentiment in the gubernatorial election?

A From the Pentagon to naval facilities and more, we have a heavy military presence in Virginia. So the numbers of federal employees in Virginia cannot be underestimated. And most of those people usually participate in government and vote. The question would be, who's making the appeal at the state level that can encourage federal support?

Q In a closely divided legislature, how important is bipartisan cooperation, and what advice would you offer to the next governor to achieve it?

A When we speak of reaching across the aisle, I accept that concept, but practically, I never saw the aisle. There'll be occasions when I might say, "Hey look, I think you might be right. I can adjust." As Lyndon Johnson would say, "Come let us reason together." And I've always thought that was a good guiding phrase. In other words, have a cause to come to the bottom line together. Let us come to justification together. That's what it really means.

Q Given reports of voter fatigue following recent elections, what approaches can candidates take to energize and mobilize the electorate?

A Listening is the most essential way to mobilize people to vote. Tell them, "I'm here to listen to what you have to say." I approach leading as not something set in concrete, nor in sand. The foundation of leading the people is firm but flexible. That's what Virginia is. It's a people state, not purple, not red nor blue, but people oriented.

“Three things that always pop up in my mind are education, health and housing. I ask candidates, what are you going to do for those issues that isn't being done?”

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Blue Wooldridge

(1938–2025)

Distinguished Career Professor and Professor Emeritus

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON



There are people whose presence anchors a place. **Dr. Blue Wooldridge** was one of those people. He moved through the Wilder School with calm purpose — never hurried, always welcoming and always holding space for others. When he passed away on March 22, 2025, at the age of 86, he left behind not just a career, but a constellation of stories, students and colleagues who still feel the imprint of his voice, his values, his way of being.

Dr. Wooldridge's story began in Marseille, France, in 1938, born to Ramona and Samuel Wooldridge — a beginning that marked the start of a path far from linear. During his childhood, he moved from Europe to the segregated American South, where he was raised in the town of Lexington, Virginia. His undergraduate degree was in physics. His early jobs included work in the Peace Corps and directing early childhood programs in the U.S. Virgin Islands. But even then, a thread was forming — an early awareness of systems, fairness and the quiet burdens carried by some people more than others.

That thread would become his life's work.

He earned graduate degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Southern California



and stepped fully into a career in public administration. In 1988, he joined VCU, making what would become the Wilder School his academic home for more than three decades. Over those years, he taught, mentored and guided a generation of public servants. His courses — public budgeting, human resource management and high-performing organizations — were demanding. But what stayed with his students wasn't the rigor. It

was the clarity of his purpose. You knew, in his presence, that equity was not an abstraction. It was an obligation.

Dr. Wooldridge's scholarship reached across disciplines and borders. He authored more than 150 publications and led training for public officials in more than 24 countries. He mentored public servants who now serve in cities, counties, state agencies and nonprofit organizations across the country. He was an elected Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and chaired its Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance. He held national leadership roles with the American Society for Public Administration, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration, and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration. He also served as president of both the Conference of Minority Public Administrators and VCU's Black Education Association. He didn't just study equity — he lived it, taught it, built programs around it and demanded it of the field.

And yet, what defined Dr. Wooldridge cannot be captured in a vitae or a list of titles. He was a storyteller. A world traveler. A teacher who saw the full person in front of him. He had a smile that was more than just kind — it was reassuring. And he believed in you, often before you believed in yourself.

He is survived by his wife, Annie Brittian Wooldridge, by his children and grandchildren, and by the many students and colleagues who carry pieces of his wisdom forward.

At the Wilder School, his voice is quiet now. But his rich echo forever remains — in classrooms, in policy and, most importantly, in people.



Dr. Richard Huff

(d. 2025)

Wilder School faculty, staff, students and alumni reflect fondly on the cherished Richard Huff, Ph.D., associate professor and MPA program assistant chair.

BY PAM STALLSMITH



Dr. Richard Huff, who taught MPA and Ph.D. students for nearly two decades, was quoted as saying, “Professional public administrators work to provide and protect our quality of life every day.”

After high school, Dr. Huff joined the U.S. Air Force, and upon completing his service, he earned a bachelor’s degree in public administration from the University of Arizona and a master’s in social work from Arizona State University. His 26-year career with the federal government included serving as a social work officer in the Army, working in Europe with the executive civil service and serving at Fort Lee in Petersburg, Virginia. While in Petersburg, he earned his Ph.D. from the Wilder School. Dr. Huff began working in the Wilder School in October 1999, as a graduate student. He served as a research assistant, adjunct professor, instructor, assistant professor and associate professor. He also held several administrative roles including chair of the MPA program, assistant chair of the MPA program, director of graduate studies and director of the Ph.D. program.

“

Richard believed in the power of public service — not just as a profession but as a responsibility. He never sought fanfare or recognition. Instead, he led with quiet strength, dedicating himself to the steady and often unseen work of guiding others. He was a teacher in the truest sense — patient, encouraging and committed to seeing potential in his students before they saw it in themselves. His impact wasn’t measured in accolades but in the confidence he instilled, the careers he helped shape and the students he prepared to serve. Richard’s legacy is one of service, wisdom and quiet strength.

– *Susan Gooden, Ph.D., dean of the Wilder School*

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It was evident that he not only cared about each of us individually, but wanted us to feel passionately about the course material and be able to apply it to the community around us. I always respected his ability to empathize with different viewpoints and create a space for productive debate, as well as constructively challenge his students and our opinions.

– *Emery Anderson, MPA student*

“

Richard was the embodiment of a true public servant — one who not only believed in making the world better but actively worked to do so every day. He walked the walk, standing firm in his commitment to equity, education and service.

– *Lindsey Evans (Ph.D., ’17 and MPA ’08), assistant professor*

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I found his humility in our world of academia, and his devotion of self to the greater good, to be exceptionally and refreshingly uncommon.

– *Sarah Raskin, Ph.D., associate professor*

“

He was a package deal: impeccable judgment, calm and unruffled demeanor, award-winning scholar and a manager who could fill just about any role to perfection.

– *Niraj Verma, Ph.D., professor*

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Throughout the semester, he inquired about what was new with me during every class period and made a great effort to remember things I had shared with him. Dr. Huff showed he cared about every student and would exhaust all resources to help those around him.

– *Mitchell Watkins, undergraduate student*

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Councilwoman
Abubaker is sworn
in to office.

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You learn by seeing, by doing and by practice ... if you practice radical honesty and authenticity and choose to walk the hard path, which may mean taking it on the chin every once in a while and accepting criticism. Leaders should have to sit in criticism from those they serve — really sit in it — and say, what about that situation made them say that, and how do I grow from that?

– *Sarah Abubaker (MPA ’13)*



Alumni changemaker: From MPA grad to Richmond City Council

Sarah Abubaker is in pursuit of authentic change.

BY DAVID SLIPHER

Sarah Abubaker (MPA ’13) stands at the front of a packed room, her voice steady. It’s her first all-district meeting as the newly elected councilwoman for Richmond’s 4th District, and she’s determined to shake things up. “We’re going to flip this model,” she announces, signaling her ambition to transform how the government interacts with the people it serves. It’s not just rhetoric; it’s a reflection of her guiding principles — transparency, resilience and a deep commitment to empowering others.

Born to a Libyan immigrant father and a mother from the Rust Belt town of Butler, Pennsylvania, Abubaker grew up at the intersection of two starkly different worlds. Her father, having fled an authoritarian regime, instilled in her an appreciation for democracy and the

opportunities it provides. Her mother, a feminist and intellectual force, taught her to question everything and to stand unwavering in her beliefs.

“I remember being 10 years old, reading *Ms.* magazine with my mom,” Abubaker recalls with a laugh. “I wanted to be the first female president who ushers in global cooperation and security.” Even then, she was crafting the concepts required to lead.

After earning her undergraduate degree at James Madison University and working in state government and politics, she found herself drawn to nonprofit work in Richmond. At the Wilder School, she discovered a blend of rigorous academics and practical application. She praises faculty such as Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Susan Gooden and Nancy Stutts, professors who didn’t

simply teach theory but practiced it regularly.

While working full time, Abubaker completed the program in two years with straight A’s, a feat she now describes as “insane” but great preparation for public office.

She admits that the weight of public service, when done right, can be “overwhelming and crushing at times. But I recognize that the work of the community belongs to the community.” With that philosophy in mind, she’s reimagining how her district engages with local government. She sees herself as a facilitator and aims to provide people with the tools to advocate for themselves while she focuses on fixing systems.

For Abubaker, leadership isn’t about standing in the spotlight; it’s about putting her head down and doing the work. While juggling the roles of mother, communications professional and public servant, she remains grounded in the values that brought her here.

Her journey from a determined young girl flipping through feminist magazines to a city councilwoman redefining community engagement is proof that when passion meets perseverance, change is possible. And for the residents of Richmond’s 4th District, that change is just beginning.

Military pivot: Ashley Van Buskirk rediscovers her love of learning at VCU

Ashley Van Buskirk had been a student at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy for nearly three years when she decided she wanted to take a different path.

BY BRIAN MCNEILL

“I was going to have a Bachelor of Science in marine transportation, but I realized marine transportation wasn’t a field I was actually interested in. ... I felt a little bit hopeless and a little bit scared for my future,” says **Ashley Van Buskirk** (’24 B.A.). “So I knew that I wanted to transfer, and I decided to apply to one school and one school only. I knew I wanted to go to VCU.”

Van Buskirk had a longtime interest in homeland security and international affairs, so she decided to enroll in the Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness program, which is ranked No. 6 in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*.

“The transfer process was seamless,” Van Buskirk says, noting that the Merchant Marine Academy “has really weird credits — like celestial navigation or maritime law — but the Wilder School found a way to really make it fit in and help me get the education that I needed.”

At VCU, she says, she “fell back in love with learning. I felt completely supported. The Wilder School really has provided an education that fits my needs rather than me having to change myself.” She earned her bachelor’s degree in December and is

on track to earn her accelerated MPA in the spring.

Van Buskirk also serves as a second lieutenant in the Virginia Army National Guard, having completed Officer Candidate School, a rigorous 18-month program that had a starting cohort of 46 candidates but only 11 who completed it. She recently had her first drill with her new unit, 2-183rd Cavalry, in Virginia Beach.

During her National Guard training, Van Buskirk happened to meet Chernoh Wurie, Ph.D., an assistant professor of criminal justice in the Wilder School who also serves in the National Guard.

“We got to talking, and he told me he was a professor at VCU. I was like, ‘I’m about to apply to VCU. That’s so crazy,’” she says. “He was like, ‘Well, you better minor in criminal justice.’” Van Buskirk took his advice and even ended up taking one of Wurie’s courses in the Wilder School’s criminal justice program.

Van Buskirk says the highlight of her VCU experience has been that the more work she has put in, the more opportunities have presented themselves. She’s the only accelerated MPA student to receive the prestigious Wilder Fellowship.

“The transfer process was seamless,” Van Buskirk says, noting that the Merchant Marine Academy “has really weird credits — like celestial navigation or maritime law — but the Wilder School found a way to really make it fit in and help me get the education that I needed.”

This summer, she’s off to Georgia for the Armor Basic Officer Leader Course and will get Military Occupational Specialty qualified.

“That’s my 50-meter target right now,” she says. “My goal is to become the most efficient soldier I can be.”

Is AI the beginning of the fourth industrial revolution?

How will artificial intelligence impact the future?
What do the economic and social effects, such
as job displacement, skill shifts and worker
opportunities portend for the future?

BY DAVID SLIPHER

Luísa Nazareno, Ph.D., assistant professor at the Wilder School, explores these topics and more in a Wilder School Lunch and Learn virtual session, sharing her expansive research on the convergent impacts of artificial intelligence.

Nazareno shares that technologies often advance in waves, and each industrial revolution drives transformation in the way we structure employment in society, but it also overhauls opportunities for worker advancement.

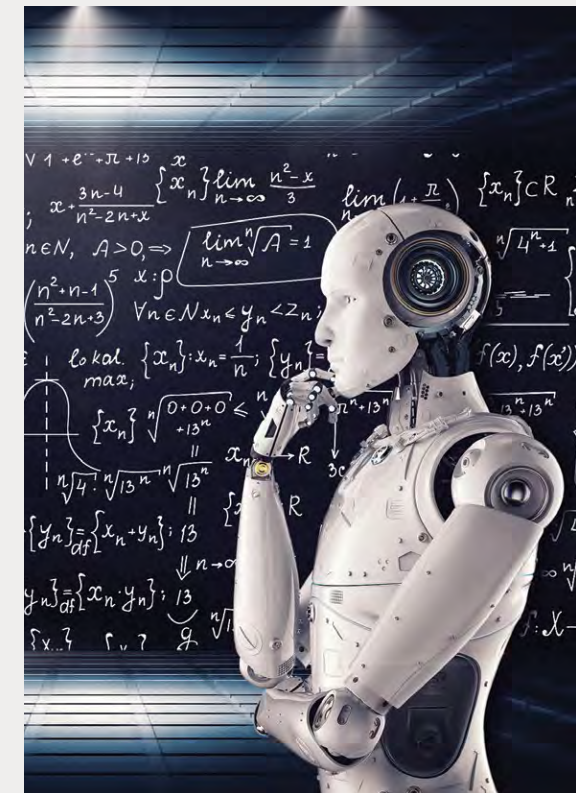
“Certainly, technology does and can eliminate jobs, but it also generates new ones,” she says. “So I’ll start by saying that a jobless future is not something that I anticipate would happen. In all of these waves, it’s also important to notice that technology has led to prosperity and wealth.”

But these technological waves, she

recognizes, while creating better and healthier lives, provide no guarantees that prosperity will be shared equally across all groups. Nazareno views that a conscious perspective about sharing prosperity is vital to ensure that we have equity in our future. Part of this look forward relies on setting predictions, despite the uncertainty of outcomes.

She shares that workers who are impacted by these changes may not be as marginalized as in previous revolutions and that AI might instead enhance their roles rather than replace them. Her research revealed that, unlike former technological waves, AI may present more of a threat to higher-educated workers in many instances.

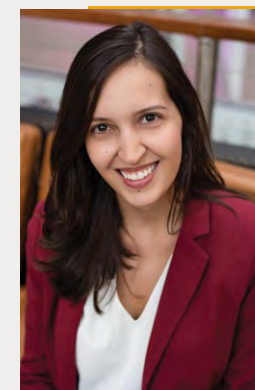
“OpenAI and others have been conducting studies that show that Generative AI specifically [with ChatGPT as the main example] can disproportionately benefit less



experienced workers by making them more productive and helping them compete with the most experienced ones,” Nazareno says.

Nazareno further highlights expectations for the future, as well as the policy responses to help protect workers and ensure equitable adoption of AI. She cites how more than 480 bills related to AI were introduced by legislatures across the U.S. in 2024 alone.

“This should be a conversation where we have people wearing different hats at the same table,” Nazareno says. “And in this regard, my ongoing research is precisely trying to reach out and build bridges between academia and the policy world such that we can bring what we’re talking about and what we’re learning here to people making decisions, and hopefully that will help us make better decisions.”



“The reason why we can think of this moment as a new revolution is because new technologies that are developed and being developed really challenge the notions that we have about what workers can do, what humans can do.”

– Luísa Nazareno

Watch “The
AI Revolution”

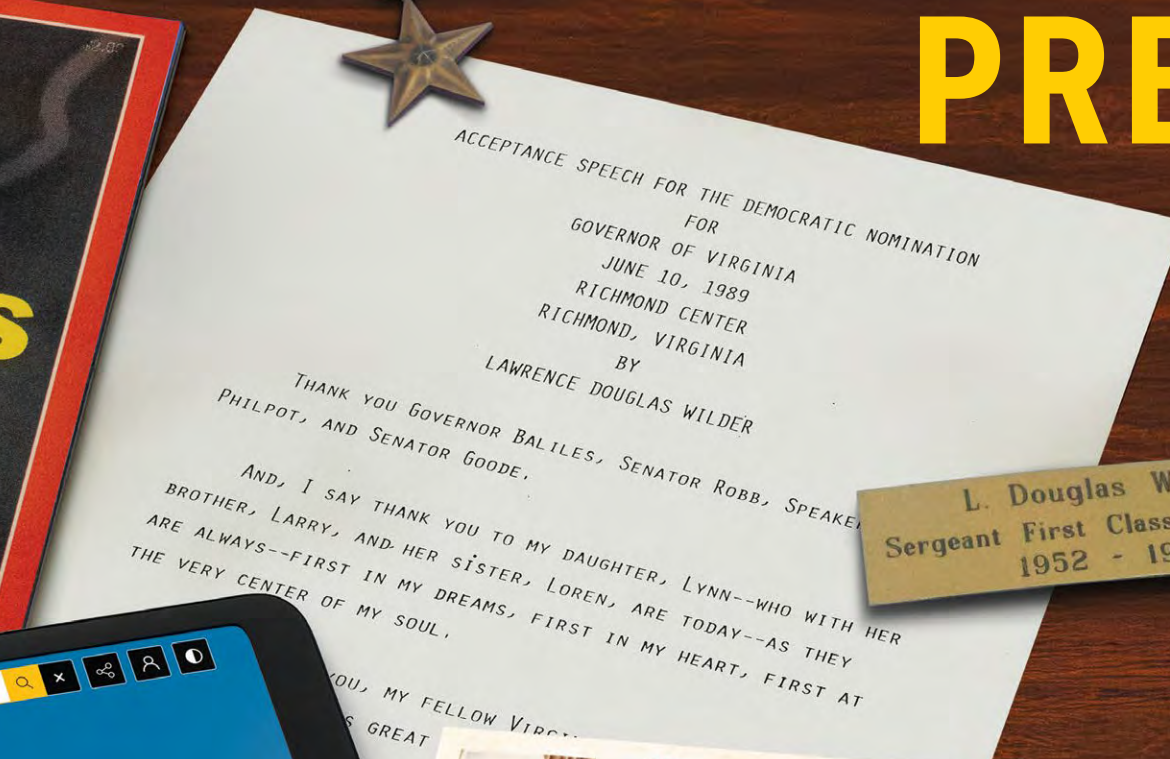


bit.ly/ainazareno

A LEGACY PRESERVED

The Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON



Governor L. Douglas Wilder's contributions to history have left an indelible mark. From breaking barriers as the first African American elected governor in U.S. history to his tireless advocacy for equity and justice, his legacy has shaped generations. Now, a new initiative is ensuring that his impact is not just remembered — but actively explored and studied.

On Jan. 17, in celebration of Wilder's 94th birthday, the Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection was officially launched, marking a major step in preserving and expanding access to his historic contributions. The project is a collaborative effort between the Virginia Union University (VUU) L. Douglas Wilder Library and Learning Resource Center and the Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE) at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D., director of RISE, led the digitization process, ensuring that Wilder's archives would be accessible to scholars, students and the public for years to come.



A VISION FOR PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

The digital collection serves as both a historical archive and an educational resource.

“This initiative not only preserves history but also inspires future generations by showcasing the extraordinary life and work of Governor Wilder. His legacy is a testament to courage, leadership and a lifelong commitment to equity and justice,” Douglas-Glenn says.

The dual-platform approach ensures that Wilder’s story is both deeply researched and widely accessible.

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THIS INITIATIVE NOT ONLY PRESERVES HISTORY BUT ALSO INSPIRES FUTURE GENERATIONS BY SHOWCASING THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE AND WORK OF GOVERNOR WILDER.



Nakeina E. Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D.

”

reach,” Gooden says. “By bringing Wilder’s archives into the digital space, we are ensuring that his vision and leadership are not just remembered but actively studied, debated and applied by scholars, students and policymakers across the globe.”

THE FORCE BEHIND THE IDEA

The idea for the digital collection was the brainchild of **Ameta Cartwright**, director of the L. Douglas Wilder Collection at VUU.

For years, she has worked to document and curate the governor’s letters, speeches, photographs and memorabilia — an archive that offers a personal look at his leadership. But one challenge remained: access.

“We learned during COVID that if something isn’t online, it may as well not exist,” Cartwright says. “We had scholars from England, China and Africa reaching out to access Governor Wilder’s papers, but they couldn’t get to them. Even people in Washington, D.C., had difficulty. Having the Governor’s archives digitized changes everything to foster equitable access for all.”

What stands out to Cartwright the most?

Not the legislative reports. Not the policy memos.

It’s the letters and speeches. “A lot of people don’t realize that Governor Wilder writes all of his own speeches and letters — even today,” she says. “Whether it’s a commencement speech, a student looking for advice or a world leader reaching out, his words show the depth of his leadership and the personal touch he brings to everything he does.”

THE CHALLENGE OF CURATION

Bringing the Governor Wilder Collection to life was no small feat. The effort

required scouring hundreds of artifacts — including speeches, letters, photographs and government documents — to determine how best to categorize and digitally archive them for future generations. Every item had to be carefully reviewed, indexed and digitized to ensure it could be easily accessed and studied by scholars, students and the public.

“We’ve cast a wide net, scanning everything from speeches and thank-you letters to photographs and newspaper clippings — anything that could provide insight into Governor Wilder’s leadership,” Douglas-Glenn says.

The VUU Collection covers Governor Wilder’s civic, military and political career from the late 1950s through 2009. It includes a vast array of materials — papers, photographs, negatives, audio cassettes, video tapes, awards and memorabilia — documenting his decades of public service. Wilder, who graduated from VUU in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science in chemistry, has long credited the university for shaping his early path.

Collaboration with VUU was crucial to making the project a success. **Selicia Gregory Allen**, archivist and special collections librarian, played a key role in organizing and cataloging the materials, ensuring they were carefully curated and digitized. Her expertise in archival preservation and classification was instrumental in shaping how Wilder’s legacy is presented.

BRIDGING THE PAST AND FUTURE

One of the most powerful aspects of the digital collection is how it reflects the themes that defined Wilder’s leadership: courage, equity and justice.

“When you listen to him talk, when you read these documents, you realize the courage it took for him to lead,” Douglas-Glenn says. “Traveling across



A range of awards, accolades and memorabilia are on display at the Virginia Union University L. Douglas Wilder Library and Learning Resource Center.

Virginia — sometimes to places that may not have been immediately welcoming — required an incredible belief in people’s shared humanity.”

The project’s next phase includes curriculum guides and research templates, allowing students and scholars to explore Wilder’s policy initiatives in greater depth.

“We’re also thinking about how to make this experience more interactive — potentially incorporating AI or immersive storytelling in the future,” Douglas-Glenn says.

For Cartwright, one of the next priorities is modernizing the physical exhibit space at VUU.

“Right now, the exhibit space is filled with photos — but without a narrative,” she says. “Visitors see renowned images, but they don’t always know the context, which is crucial to teaching history.”

A LASTING IMPACT

The Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection ensures that

Wilder’s legacy is not just remembered but actively studied, analyzed and appreciated. It is a living resource, evolving with new research and expanding its reach.

Douglas-Glenn sums it up perfectly:

“This isn’t just about Governor Wilder’s story — it’s about making sure that generations from now, people still have access to the lessons of his leadership. His legacy shouldn’t be unique, and yet it remains rare. Our work ensures that his impact continues to inform and inspire the future.”

For those eager to explore the collection, the Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection is now live at archives. wilderlibrary.com, offering a window into history and a bridge to the future.



The unveiling of The Governor L. Douglas Wilder Library and Digital Collection coincided with Governor Wilder’s 94th birthday celebration.



A museum-like library website

Curated exhibits showcase his biography, policy achievements and career milestones, including his successful effort to rewrite Virginia’s state song, which originally contained racially offensive lyrics.



An expansive digital collection

Archival materials, such as speeches, letters, photographs and government documents, are searchable by topic, creator or location.



Multimedia content

Access to his blog, podcast and the Commonwealth Poll, ensuring that the site is not just an archive but a living, evolving hub for scholarship and civic engagement.

“The mission of the library is to support research, promote equity-focused policy and educate future leaders,” Douglas-Glenn says.

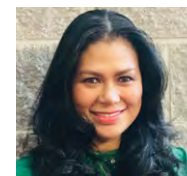
Susan Gooden, Ph.D., dean of the Wilder School, highlights the collaborative effort behind the initiative.

“This project is a powerful example of how institutions can work together to not only preserve history but also expand its

“

WE LEARNED DURING COVID THAT IF SOMETHING ISN’T ONLINE, IT MAY AS WELL NOT EXIST.

”



Ameta Cartwright

Visit the Wilder Collection Library website



archives.wilderlibrary.com

Faculty, staff and alumni achievements

The Wilder School creates transformative impacts through leadership and service — locally and nationally.



▲ The Wilder School’s **Second Annual Legislative Reception** brought together nearly 300 attendees from the public service and legislative sectors, along with talented Wilder School alumni and students shaping public policy and fostering leadership. “Collaborations with legislators and policymakers are critical to the research the Wilder School leads on behalf of the commonwealth,” shares **Robyn McDougale, Ph.D.**, associate dean of research and outreach. “Our goal is to continue to develop impactful partnerships to advance sound governance for Virginians.”



▲ With more than 25 years of service at VCU, including 15 years at the Wilder School, human resources and building manager **Tina Braden** was recognized for excellence with the 2025 VCU Building Manager’s Award. With 25 testimonials in support of Braden’s excellence, she earned the accolade of Building Manager Award for Monroe Park Campus. “Her respect for others and unwavering professionalism set her apart. Tina is a true asset, bringing together expertise and a genuine care for the people and the school’s legacy,” says **Governor Wilder**.



▲ The Wilder School **Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute** proudly recognized graduates of the **Commonwealth Leadership Academy**. The cohort of 30 senior executives from

Virginia state agencies completed an intensive eight-week program designed to enhance leadership and management capabilities while tackling some of the commonwealth’s most pressing challenges. Their immersive curriculum included strategic planning, cultural transformation, innovation in government and change management.

▲ VCU educator and urban and regional planning program co-founder **Morton B. Gulak’s** legacy lives on through the annual **Morton B. Gulak Lecture Series**. Gulak, who died in 2012, taught at VCU for 38 years. He inspired legions of students in the areas of urban design, urban revitalization, physical planning and the application of professional planning methods. This year’s lecture, titled “Car-Optional Neighborhoods for the New Era,” hosted urban designer and planner **Victor Dover**, FAICP, LEED-AP. Dover, whose work spans 22 states and five continents, explored the future of urban design and the potential for a sans-cars society. Through the “Ten Ingredients for Car-Optional Neighborhoods,” Dover outlined the transition to a reduced personal vehicle infrastructure — for both environmental and quality-of-life improvements. Dover’s built-design approach focuses on neighborhood redesign in a way that places communities and neighborhoods as the centers of activity and, consequently, doesn’t require as much transportation to get there.



Watch the Morton B. Gulak Lecture



▲ Criminal justice alumnus **Dre'mon Miller ('15 B.S.)** was recognized with a VCU 10 under 10 award. Miller serves as professor and program head of criminal justice for Reynolds Community College and is also the founder of Street Smartz Over Safety. He and his team lead workshops at schools and community centers on issues such as gun violence, family communication and stress management. Miller hopes he can help kids develop vital life

skills. “If you can prepare for things before they happen, you can manage life no matter where you go,” he says.



▲ **Mary Strawderman**, a public policy and administration student, was awarded the VCU Humanities Research Center Graduate Residential Fellowship for the 2025-2026 academic year. The highly competitive fellowship, selected by a committee of VCU faculty, supports Strawderman’s dissertation research, “Exploring Equity and Excellence: A Mixed Methods Study of Research Funding Disparities and Success Among Women Faculty of Color at a Research-Intensive University.”

▲ What are the best approaches to improving outdoor recreation in Virginia? Detailed outreach conducted by the Wilder School **Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory** provided critical insights into Virginians’ outdoor recreation preferences. Through partnership with the governor’s office, the data helped shape the priorities of the 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan. SERL researchers took a two-pronged survey approach that utilized a probability sample designed to allow for generalizations across the commonwealth as well as crowdsourced opinions via email, the internet and social media. The survey revealed Virginians’ growing public appreciation for outdoor recreation, strong support for protecting natural and open spaces from development, top reasons for recreation and a collective desire to increase natural areas, trails and parks.

▲ The **Virginia Executive Institute** celebrated its second 2024 cohort at the historic Virginia Capitol. This exceptional group of leaders from across the commonwealth’s government agencies spent two weeks honing their leadership skills and evaluating critical challenges in state government. Through group collaboration, program participants tackled key issues such as student mental health, cyberbullying and AI, recycling and waste reduction, and state workforce retention programs.



▲ Associate professor **Christopher Whyte, Ph.D.**, explores the impacts of conspiracy theories, extremist rhetoric and acts of antagonism in his new book “Subversion 2.0,” shedding light on how and why the internet has fueled the rise of far-right extremism in U.S. society. He argues that leaderlessness, driven

A star on the rise

Sesha Joi Moon, Ph.D. ('05 B.A., '08 M.S.), was recognized with the VCU Alumni Stars Award. Moon is a globally recognized thought leader in diversity, equity and inclusion. She served as chief diversity officer for the 117th and 118th Congresses, directing the U.S. House Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

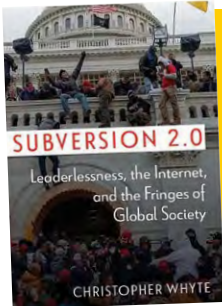
Moon retired from the federal government after 15 years. She now serves as chief strategist for Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett and executive-in-residence for Rep. Stacey Abrams with American Pride Rises through her nonpartisan consultancy, Moon & Associates LLC.

She was recognized by the U.N. as one of the 100 Most Influential People of African Descent and has served on the board of the African American Federal Executive Association and Virginia’s Criminal Justice Services Board. She was named a 2023 Top 40 Under 40 by PBS NPR VPM’s Style Weekly, and Axios named her and her sister, Enjoli Moon, as the second Most Powerful Richmonders of 2022.



by development in socialized web technologies, is the default culprit of subversiveness. A key aim of his book is to help readers develop a greater understanding of how technology affects national security.

“While the average person would probably be unsurprised that the internet is such a powerful enabler of counterculture and subversive intention among society’s fringe elements, existing scholarship actually doesn’t do a good job explaining why,” Whyte says.



Read Whyte’s in-depth book interview



bit.ly/whytesub2

A conversation for the ages: Wilder School students meet public administration giant Dr. Laurin Henry

BY TIFFANY MURRAY-ROBERTSON

There aren't many people who can say they've advised policymakers from the post-World War II era to the present day. Even fewer can claim to have helped shape the foundation of an academic institution. But **Dr. Laurin Henry** can.

At 103 years old, Dr. Henry — former professor and first dean of VCU's School of Community Services, which later became the Wilder School — remains as sharp and insightful as ever. A scholar of presidential power and executive transitions, he spent decades shaping the way governance is understood.

His distinguished career includes serving as a professor at the University of Virginia before becoming dean of the School of Community and Public Affairs at VCU. A respected leader in public administration, he was elected a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and served as president of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). His leadership and scholarship have left an enduring impact on the field.

This past October, a group of doctoral students from the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs had the extraordinary opportunity to visit Dr. Henry at his home. They came prepared to listen, to learn. But what they didn't expect?

He was just as eager to listen to them.

The visit, attended by **Dr. Elsie Harper-Anderson**, director of the Ph.D. program; Director of Development **Stevan Dozier**; and doctoral students **James Lambert**, **Casey Lopez**, **Anila Surin**, **Devin Bowers** and **Zehra Sahin Ilkorkor**, was an exercise in both history and mentorship.

For Surin, an international student, the experience carried more meaning than she anticipated. "It was deeply



A Wilder School delegation of students, faculty and staff visit with Dr. Laurin Henry. As we were finalizing our magazine, we were saddened to learn that Dr. Henry passed away on April 11, 2025 at the age of 103.

meaningful that Dr. Henry took the time to ask about my experience as an international student," she says. "His thoughtful questions made me feel truly seen and valued."

Lambert was struck by Dr. Henry's legacy. "Sitting next to him reminded me that my work isn't just for today — it's for future generations," he says.

And Lopez was struck by something else — his curiosity. "His deep curiosity stood out. He wasn't just sharing his knowledge — he genuinely wanted to hear about our research and perspectives, which made the conversation incredibly meaningful," she says.

A warning for the future

It was just weeks before the 2024 presidential election, and Dr. Henry, having spent decades analyzing executive power, made a striking observation.

"He said we could expect rules to be broken," Lopez says. "That, as public servants, we have to be both vigilant and innovative."

His message was clear: The old frameworks were shifting. Public administrators would need to be ready to

rethink the way governance works, adapting to a world where norms were no longer guaranteed.

When Surin asked how she and her peers could ensure their academic research translated into real-world policy, Dr. Henry's advice was both practical and profound. "You need to step outside the academic world. Meet people. Talk to practitioners. Find those who care about your work, and you'll see its impact grow," he says.

Beyond his scholarship, Dr. Henry's impact is deeply tied to the Wilder School, where he has supported the Ph.D. program for years, creating opportunities for students to engage deeply with public service. For Surin, that dedication stood out. "His compassion for students and public administration's future was incredible. I told my friends, 'He is a national treasure,'" she says.

In the end, the visit was more than an academic exercise. It was a rare glimpse into a living history lesson, a bridge between generations and a reminder that the most important leaders aren't just those who shape policies but those who shape people.

Editor's note: We are saddened to share that Dr. Laurin Henry passed away on Friday, April 11, 2025.

Why I Give: Chris Grosenick

From a founder to the future, scholarship supports a duty to public service.

BY DAVID SLIPHER

At the heart of the Wilder School lies a tribute to one of its earliest leaders, **Leigh E. Grosenick**, who founded the VCU public administration program in 1975. Established in 1999, the Leigh E. Grosenick Scholarship in Public Administration demonstrates the dedication, ethics and lasting influence of a lifelong educator.

"We wanted to not only recognize my father's investment in public administration and the school but also his commitment to the students past, present and future who chose this field of study," **Chris Grosenick** shares.

The students who studied under his father's guidance became integral to the program's success. Their professional and personal lives have remained intertwined with the Grosenick family for years.

Grosenick believes his father would be pleased with the outcomes and the program's evolution. "His most important legacy is that of his ethics education," he explains. "This scholarship serves as a reminder to recipients of their duty in the public sector and the importance of maintaining this fundamental aspect of his work."

Scholarship recipient **Sofia Simmons** ('23 B.A.) is thankful for the opportunity. "I was inspired to pursue this field due to my deep interest in

social change and my desire to contribute to community development through effective policy," she says. "The concepts of civic duty and responsibility were taught to me at a very young age and instilled in me a desire to serve and advocate for others."

"Supporting students in this important line of work provides an extra incentive to become educated and excel," Grosenick says. "These scholarships hopefully take the edge off what is a very expensive endeavor, especially for those who have chosen public service as a career."

Thanks to the scholarship, Simmons was able to focus on extracurricular activities and experiences. She's gained global citizenship perspectives through the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program, held in The Hague, Netherlands; participated in leadership roles with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.; and interned with the Virginia House of Delegates.

To Simmons and future scholarship recipients, Grosenick offers simple yet profound advice: "Stick with

the hard uphill climb that usually comes with this effort." Recognizing that recipients are already highly motivated and intelligent, he encourages them to persevere in their pursuits.

"People don't always think about energy, but everything you do leaves an imprint. You want to be sure it's the best imprint you can possibly leave."

"This support has given me the freedom to pursue my educational goals with greater focus, while also providing the confidence that I have the backing to excel," says Sofia Simmons. "It also encourages me to continue striving for excellence, knowing that there are people who believe in my potential."



Sofia Simmons welcomes Chris Grosenick on a campus visit.



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Congrats to our **17th Excellence in Virginia Government Awards** recipients. These Virginians were celebrated on April 8 for their exceptional contributions to public service and the welfare of our communities and citizens.

2025 AWARDEES

Lifetime Achievement Award:
The Honorable William Ferguson Reid

Community Enhancement Award:
Dr. Tamara Mann, President and CEO, Campagna Center

Grace E. Harris Leadership Award:
The Honorable Eva Teig Hardy

Hill-Robinson Expansion of Freedom Award:
Reverend Tyler C. Millner Sr.

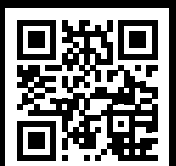
Innovation in Government Award:
Robert David Sr., Violence Prevention Manager, City of Danville

Unsung Heroes Award:
Mark Greenough, Virginia Capitol Building Tour Supervisor



**EXCELLENCE
IN VIRGINIA
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AWARDS**

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