As a planning student at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University, Ryan Rinn learned how to create a quality of life plan for Richmond’s Highland Park neighborhood. He didn’t do this by stringing a classroom; he was part of an 11-member team that went into the community. Ultimately, Rinn—a 2012 graduate of the Wilder School’s Master of Urban and Regional Planning program—launched an award-winning project into a profession, bringing his passion to revitalize Richmond as the executive director of A Streetfront for Community Design.

The nonprofit seeks to invigorate Richmond through planning and design, working to build community connections, expand youth programming and spur economic growth. Every day Rinn puts into practice what he learned at the Wilder School, making a positive difference in the community.

That’s our mission at the Wilder School. We prepare tomorrow’s leaders through education, research and training that encourages public service and the importance of partnerships. We’re a leading-edge school of government that emphasizes learning by doing.

Every year Wilder School students and faculty work with state agencies, local governments, nonprofits and community organizations across Virginia on dreams of research projects offering innovative solutions to today’s public policy issues. We’ve done that for decades.

Recent examples include students in an emergency management graduate course training emergency operations plans for small localities in Virginia, and public administration students developing a plan for state education and veterans agencies to help prepare veterans for employment.

We must dear of partnership. We believe that high-quality research, creative thinking and collaboration will ultimately produce the best public policy.

The legacy of Governor L. Douglas Wilder

We’re proud to be named L. Douglas Wilder, the 66th governor of Virginia and the first elected African-American governor in the United States. This followed a distinguished legal career and luminous public service in the Virginia Senate and as lieutenant governor.

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After leaving the Executive Mansion in 1994, Governor Wilder was invited to come to VCU’s Department of Political Science and Public Administration, where he taught classes in governmental and public policy as the Distinguished Professor. He has continued in that role and is still teaching at the school that was named for him in 2004. Many of his students have gone on to successful careers in public policy, business and elected office.

In 2003, he led a successful campaign, with former U.S. Rep. Thomas J. Bliley Jr., to change Richmond’s charter to allow an at-large elected mayor, and was then elected in 2004 the first at-large mayor in more than a half-century. The Wilder School embodies the values of state and local leadership and service championed by the governor.

Alumni network
You’ll find our approximately 10,000 alumni across the public, private and nonprofit sectors, from the halls of Congress—U.S. Rep. Bob Wittman of Virginia’s First District earned his doctorate in public policy and administration from the Wilder School—to the nation’s ninth largest transit system, where Keith T. Parker leads the Metropolitan Richmond Rapid Transit Authority. Parker, who holds a master’s in planning, is also a member of the VCU Board of Visitors.

Our graduate work in law enforcement offices across the country, including as police chiefs and correctional facility directors, in the armed forces, in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and at FBI and bureau Special agents. Likely every country and city in Virginia has Wilder School graduates serving the community, whether as sheriffs, planners or administrators. Alumni are also in the private sector as financial analysts and business owners. The Wilder School has helped prepare leaders throughout state and local government, including state Sen. Roslyn B. Dance of Petersburg, an alumnus who holds a master’s in public administration, and Diane F. Lott, Virginia’s Secretary of Education, who earned her M.P.A. and Ph.D. here.

Hands-on learning
The Wilder School offers graduate and undergraduate degrees and certificates in public policy and administration, criminal justice, homeland security and emergency preparedness, urban and regional studies and planning, nonprofit management, geographic information systems, urban revitalization and gender violence intervention.

Our programs blend classroom theory with hands-on practice and field-based courses, so students learn skills they’ll use on the job. Also, Wilder students intern with state and local government agencies, nonprofits and businesses—opportunities that prepare them to be successful in the workplace.

L. Douglas Wilder, the 66th governor of Virginia and a distinguished professor at the school that bears his name, speaks at The Wilder School’s spring graduation on May 12.

Rabin McGough, Ph.D., faculty director of the Wilder School’s Office of Public Policy Outreach, announces the results of the 2016-17 Commonwealth Education Poll to the General Assembly’s House Education Committee.

VCU Wilder School:
Teaching state and local leadership today
The prestigious VCU Wilder Graduate Scholars Fellowship gives top students professional work experience at a host employer. The Virginia Capital Semester program lets students intern in positions with members of the Virginia General Assembly.

For 30 years, Wilder School students interned at organizations across Virginia and beyond, including the National Academy of Public Administration, the Young-Pogson Sheriff’s Office and the New York City Housing Association’s Office of Emergency Management.

Taylor Lewis, a senior majoring in criminal justice, spent the summer working in the sexual assault unit of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia.

Lewis, an aspiring special agent for a federal investigative agency, saw her experience last year in Henrico County’s Summer BaseJake Academy, held in partnership with the Wilder School, position her for the competitive internship in Washington. The Jake Academy lets criminal justice students earn college credit while becoming certified criminal defendants. Last year, Lewis worked 12 to 24 hours a week at one of the county’s two jails while going to school full time.

John Dunning, a homeland security and emergency preparedness major, put his skills to use while interning in the anti-money-laundering department at Capital One, an opportunity that “turned into a full-time contracting position while he completed his final edd before graduating this December.”

The Wilder School also draws top students from around the world. Southema Chunda, a native of Zambia, brings a wealth of experience to her studies. Chunda came to the Wilder School as an M.P.A. student after a prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship brought her to VCU last year. She was country director of Diakonia, a Swedish international nonprofit organization based in Zambia, and is now pursuing her doctorate with us.

Acclaimed faculty

Our faculty enjoy national and international reputations for their research, including housing and neighborhood development, cyber security, sexual assault, human trafficking, social equity in public and nonprofit organizations, immigration policy, alternative energy, environmental policy, anti-poverty strategy and workforce development policy.

Faculty bring professional expertise to the classroom, sharing knowledge they gained while serving as top government officials and business leaders. John Accordino, Ph.D., became skirt of the Wilder School in March after more than 30 years as a professor of urban and regional planning. His expertise includes community revitalization and regional economic development.

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