Dear Friends,

I’m proud to share with you the Fall 2022 edition of Wilder School in Action magazine. The Wilder School continues to excel in academics, research and experiential learning opportunities to help transform our world.

This includes $3 million in funding we recently received from the commonwealth of Virginia to enhance the work of our Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE). As a hub to facilitate research to reverse social inequities, RISE is uniquely positioned as a national thought leader and research enterprise focused on equality for all Americans.

Led by inaugural director and Wilder School faculty member Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, RISE will further create new academic opportunities for historically underrepresented students, a lifelong commitment that the 66th Governor of Virginia, L. Douglas Wilder, shares within these pages.

This year, I’ve also had the honor and privilege to serve as the president of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), which is the world’s preeminent organization dedicated to public policy and public affairs education and includes 327 institutional members and universities across the globe.

After a two-year in-person hiatus, the NASPAA annual conference returns in Chicago, Illinois, this fall. Themed “The Time is Now: A Bold and Noble Public Service for All,” I’m grateful to lead the efforts of so many talented educators and organizations dedicated to advocating for the vital role of public service education in policy and political spheres. We do this work to improve society as a whole and because we have a responsibility to do our part.

Evidence of the Wilder School’s distinctive reputation grows each year. The Wilder School continues to be the top public affairs graduate school in Virginia and is now ranked 35th in the nation according to U.S. News & World Report. We are also recognized nationally as 29th in public management and leadership. These distinctions mark the school’s highest rankings yet and place it within the nation’s top 15% of schools.

We continue to innovate our program offerings to meet students’ ever-evolving needs and schedules, like our award-winning Master of Public Administration program, which can now be completed entirely online, in addition to the traditional in-person format.

So many avenues of transformational change advance the collective work underway at the Wilder School. Never before have we been better equipped to make societal impacts. It’s an amazing journey and I invite you to join us.

Best regards,

Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D.
Dean
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
Virginia Commonwealth University

Stay up to date with the Wilder School at our news page at: http://q-r.to/wildernews

@VCUWilderSchool

Wilder School in Action
Dean Susan Gooden is the president of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), the world’s largest accrediting body for public affairs programs. With 327 institutional members across the globe, the network advances public service through education advocacy in the policy and political spheres. We sat down with Dean Gooden to talk about NASPAA and its 2022 conference to be held on Oct. 18-23 in Chicago.

What can you tell us about the changes underway at NASPAA during the past year and how they align to support the future of public affairs education?

It’s been a momentous year for NASPAA, which welcomed a new executive director, Dr. Angel Wright-Lanier, in September of 2021. Dr. Wright-Lanier is a pleasure to work with and brings a wealth of leadership experience to local government to our efforts. One of the things that she immediately brought to the board was the need to update NASPAA’s strategic plan. This work is now underway with multiple focus groups capturing perspectives of key constituents. Their informative input will bring critical voices in developing NASPAA’s strategic plan.

NASPAA also began implementation of a comprehensive diversity, equity and inclusion initiative framework and action plan this year. Initiated prior to my presidential term by colleagues Drs. Laura Bloomberg and Brandi Blessett, the new framework informs our strategic plan and emphasizes action areas that we’ll be highlighting for member schools throughout our annual conference. Our focus this year has been action-oriented in aggressively implementing the diversity, equity and inclusion framework that was adopted last year.

NASPAA will resume an in-person format in Chicago this year after nearly two years of virtual programming. What can you tell us about the theme of this year’s conference, which you selected, and what that means practically for the agenda?

The theme for this year’s conference is “The Time is Now: A Bold and Noble Public Service for All.” It’s a charge that evokes a broad agenda squarely on confronting big problems in a brave, creative and innovative fashion. I also wanted to underscore the idea that public service is an inherently noble and impactful work. Whether we’re talking about education, housing, crime, immigration or water safety, there is public service that citizens in an equitable, effective and efficient manner.

We received more than 150 proposals from 500 unique presenters for the 2022 conference — a record-breaking number of entries. That’s a strong indication of the excitement and enthusiasm that exists among our participants to network and compare approaches to pedagogy.

I also want to acknowledge the outstanding work of my conference programming co-chairs, Drs. Brandi Blessett and Sean McCandless, and all of the members of this year’s conference committee who had the very challenging work of selecting panels from an inordinately high volume of submissions. Special thanks are also due to our local hosts: the University of Illinois Chicago, Northern Illinois University and the University of Illinois Springfield.

Are there specific aspects of the programming that you want to highlight?

There are two. The first is our “Institutionalizing Equity and Justice” track, which ties back to implementing the action agenda related to the DEI framework that the task force put together. From our keynote speakers to our conference sessions, attendees will notice broad inclusion and focus on HBCUs and MSIs. The second is a brand-new track, “Uplifting the Infrastructure of Our Programs.”

For many years, NASPAA did an excellent job of attracting deans, administrators, faculty and students who are on the job market to the annual conference. Where we were less effective, however, was in attracting our infrastructure support — student services, communications, development and finance professionals, for example. All of these functions are critical in delivering a high-quality public service education.

This year, we intentionally reached out to them and encouraged submission of conference proposals. I’m delighted that we have been very intentional in trying to broaden our outreach. With this new focus, we’re going to be engaging all of the support systems who are integral to our success. Our DEI and infrastructure groups will be able to exchange ideas about best practices while extending their network specifically within public affairs schools.

NASPAA lost a global ambassador for the network in March, Dr. Nadia Rubaii. What can you tell us about the legacy of Dr. Rubaii and how she will be commemorated at the conference?

We all were deeply saddened by the sudden loss of Dr. Rubaii. Besides having served as a NASPAA past president and accreditation chair, Nadia was a tremendous colleague who made transformative contributions to the international public service community. We at NASPAA have really taken her death as a challenge to continue the legacy of her work.

To that end, I’m very pleased to announce the establishment of the Nadia Rubaii Distinguished Service Award, which will recognize members who have made outstanding contributions and exhibited leadership to NASPAA and the field through service that spans years and committees.

We’ll also present sessions during the 2022 conference that will be specifically devoted to honoring and reflecting upon the legacy of Dr. Rubaii.

Bold and noble: Susan Gooden leads NASPAA to new heights

Welcoming new Wilder School faculty

We are proud to introduce the newest faculty members of the Wilder School family:

• Rohade Barry-James, Ph.D., senior associate dean of faculty and academic affairs
• Robert “Brad” Lehmann, Ph.D., instructor, criminal justice
• Anthony Starke, Ph.D., assistant professor of public administration

Susan Gooden and Angel Wright-Lanier, executive director of NASPAA

Wilder School in Action
Governor’s Voice
Fighting for people of color through education and opportunities

Few in the political landscape have been more outspoken on the subject of the funding gap between Virginia’s Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) than our own Distinguished Professor L. Douglas Wilder. In June, Gov. Glenn Youngkin signed a Virginia state budget fulfilling a campaign promise to support the state’s HBCUs. The budget provides almost $900 million in funding to Virginia’s HBCUs and $100 million to launch lab schools within community colleges and HBCUs.

We sat down with Governor Wilder to get his thoughts on the new budget and his experiences as the 66th Governor of Virginia in securing resources for HBCUs.

Governor, you, along with your former Education Secretary Jim Dyke, called on a bipartisian group of legislators to provide federal funding to HBCUs from the American Rescue Plan last year, stating that significant investment was needed to redress the "long-standing denial of education opportunities" of Black Virginians. This call was essentially answered in June with the passage of the new budget. What does this victory mean for you?

To the extent HBCUs have been ignored for decades by those in authority and systemically disadvantaged by underfunding and fewer resources, this is a start, not a conclusion. Leveling the field for HBCUs, which have and continue to play a disproportionate role in educating underserved communities, will require eternal vigilance. It is not a problem that we can simply throw money at. Lawmakers and the citizens who elect them will need to evaluate the performance of these and other investments to ensure that HBCUs continue to flourish for generations to come.

As a Virginia governor, you were able to secure support for capital projects and expand the state’s tuition assistance grant program to include residents attending private colleges and universities, a significant coup for the state’s private HBCUs. What were some of the challenges you faced in meeting the needs of HBCUs during your administration?

I was left with no money in my administration; in fact, I was left with a deficit of $2.5 billion. Yet, I was able to include two of the HBCUs, Norfolk State and Virginia State, in the largest capital bond referendum in our state’s history. I secured agreement with the legislature for new buildings on their campuses. I stressed the need to reevaluate the needs of Virginia Union and Hampton universities. I felt there were no constitutional restraints against state funding for Virginia Union and Hampton universities.

Beyond the events of 2020, to what do you attribute this groundbreaking political support for HBCUs?

The old expression still holds true: The wagon that makes the noise gets the grease. There really is no groundswell. In fact, Virginia is still not in compliance with the Adams case decided in 1977. Some people have looked back at the outcome of our 2020 statewide elections, which were not projected to be a sweep for Republicans, and are perhaps beginning to see the Black electorate as consequential. Democrats cannot win elections without the support of the Black electorate. While I certainly hope that this recognition is not part of a political calculus, it might well be the impetus for change.

Wilder School graduate leads HBCU support in the White House

Dietra Trent (’95 MPA & ’07 PPA) has been appointed by the White House and the U.S. Department of Education as the new executive director of the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (WH-HBCUs). In her new role, Trent is continuing her work as an advocate for educational innovation and funding support for students.

Trent, who earned an undergraduate degree in sociology and criminal justice from Hampton University, knows firsthand the positive impacts HBCUs make in the lives of students. Appropriately, she began her role in February on the last day of Black History Month.

She has dedicated her career to promoting equity in public policy and educational reform for minority students, bringing longstanding experience to the position. Trent served as Virginia secretary of education and deputy secretary of education (vice), director of constituent services and director of the Council on Human Rights. Trent has kept her relationship with the Wilder School close, previously working as senior director for equity research and training.

HBCUs emerged as a response to racist segregation laws that prevented Black students from attending colleges and universities, which were almost exclusively reserved for whites before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 2020, nearly 280,000 students were enrolled across 101 HBCUs throughout the United States, which conferred approximately 48,200 degrees in the 2019-20 academic year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.
Investigating Richmond’s history of displaced communities

LaToya Gray-Sparks’ “Planned Destruction” catalogs the voices and experiences of once-vibrant Black communities displaced through a 1946 urban planning project.

in digitally reconstructing and repopulating Richmond’s lost communities, Gray-Sparks hopes to lead the charge in “centering the experiences of marginalized communities while reclaiming and preserving a part of African American history that has been forgotten.”

“Maps are powerful,” said Gray-Sparks, who believes that cartography can be an important tool for reversing the negative impact of redlining. “Maps can be used to promote and elevate a space or omit and destroy a space.”

Her research began as an “outlet for grief, anger and a feeling of powerlessness” after the 2017 death of her cousin in Richmond’s Whitcomb Court neighborhood. Around that time, Gray-Sparks was part of the Richmond 360 advisory council drafting the city’s latest comprehensive plan. She learned how Whitcomb Court’s development was “rooted in urban planning theories and schemes that were discriminatory and patriarchal.”

Gray-Sparks’ story map is dedicated to her cousin and other childhood friends who lost their lives to violence in Richmond. They were young Black men “whose lives were cut short due to boundaries and restrictions created and implemented by people who did not value Black lives,” she said.

“Maps are powerful,” said Gray-Sparks...
Leah Fremouw from the corner office

Leah Fremouw (B.A./08/H&S; M.P.A./10/GPA) has always preferred the view at the ground floor. Perhaps that’s why she’s made a career of tackling startup roles and initiatives in organizations like CarLotz, Virginia Community Capital, TEDxRVA and Impact 100 Richmond.

She recently embarked on her boldest move yet as the new CEO of Bridging Virginia.

Bridging Virginia is an emerging community development financial services institution (CDFI) that specializes in providing qualifying small businesses in the metropolitan Richmond area with low-interest, long-dated loans as well as other capital and services.

The organization began in 2020 as an effort to provide financial services to Black-, women- and minority-owned small businesses that had been disproportionately hurt by the pandemic.

“Bridging Virginia works to address longstanding disinvestment by investing in people and communities that have been left behind by mainstream finance,” said Fremouw. “The national call for economic justice, which has become louder and more pronounced by the pandemic, has made our work, and the work of all CDFIs, more salient than ever.”

Fremouw assumes the helm of Bridging Virginia following a highly successful tenure as the senior vice president and director of innovation at the region’s behemoth CDFI, Virginia Community Capital. Established in 2006 with a $15 million seed investment from then-Gov. Mark R. Warner, VCC managed over $486 million in assets and drove an estimated $1.8 billion in economic impact in the commonwealth in 2021.

At VCC, Fremouw’s responsibilities included leading a lean but mighty team of experts delivering specialized financial and technical assistance to individuals, organizations and nonprofits in a highly entrepreneurial role.

“Leah is a powerhouse of energy and talent who is driven by an unswerving social consciousness,” said Wilder School Dean Susan Goodwin. “Whether she is pumping weights or pumping ideas, Leah always hits the mark. I remember her as a student in our MPA program and one of our early Wilder Fellows in 2008. She epitomizes the best of Wilder School alumni and I look forward to following the rise and impact of Bridging Virginia.”

Her plans for Bridging Virginia include expanding the organization’s services beyond collateral enhancements to include direct lending of up to $50,000 to small business owners in the early phases of business development.

Fremouw also hopes to add real estate financing to Bridging Virginia’s suite of services and to expand its clientele to include burgeoning industries in the region.

“Then, of course, there’s the prospect of staffing. As Bridging Virginia’s first full-time employee, Fremouw will have the opportunity to leave her imprint on virtually every aspect of the organization.

“It’s the perfect opportunity for a self-described ‘builder’ who has fully embraced the CDFI industry and her unique role as a community leader within it.

“Sometimes, the challenge is in adjusting expectations and in helping the partners to understand that in the same way that when an industry like coal leaves a region and the economic forecast worsens gradually, progress is likewise incremental.”

She counsels that many factors must align to make a community investment successful, and the most important of these is consistency in focus and action.

— Leah Fremouw

Facilitating change in this industry is hard work. When we set a goal as bold as transforming a community, the expectations from funders and partners can sometimes be immediate.

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The Wilder School produces outstanding scholarship, service and leadership — locally and nationally.

Dean Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D., offered the keynote address at the 2022 Equity Summit hosted by the Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration (JSERA) and the University of Virginia’s Frank Batten School of Leadership in Montpelier, Virginia, on Oct. 6-8. The event featured contributing authors to the inaugural edition of JSERA, a peer-reviewed, multidisciplinary, open-access journal sponsored by the American Society for Public Administration Section on Democracy and Social Justice, which is dedicated to “all issues related to social equity in the pursuit of public purposes.” Published twice a year, the first volume will appear in 2023.

Benjamin Teresa, Ph.D., was promoted to the rank of associate with tenure in July. Teresa, who serves as assistant chair of the urban and regional planning program and co-director of the RVA Racial Lab, a nationally recognized community-responsive research hub, was recognized by the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association for his dedication to community-engaged research and teaching in 2018.

Demetries ‘Mitch’ Melis (BA’03/GPA; MVPA’99/Cert’03/GPA) has been appointed the director of the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR). The agency issues professional credentials — licenses, certificates or registrations — through 18 regulatory boards serving more than 300,000 individuals and businesses. Melis, who served most recently as the director of regulatory compliance for the Virginia State Bar, has worked in the occupational licensing field for over 16 years. He is a 2011 alumnus of the Commonwealth Management Institute.

Wilder School alumni dominate VCU’s 10 Under 10 Awards

Three Wilder School alumni are among VCU’s 10 Under 10 this year. The awards program honors alumni who earned their first degree — undergraduates, graduate or professional — from the university within the past decade and who have made important contributions to their community and locally supported the university.

Dhara Amin (M.S.’14/GPA, Ph.D. ’19/GPA & Wilder Fellow) is a senior research analyst and coordinator of external research at the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, where she designs and evaluates supportive programs for youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. In her spare time, Amin serves as an appointed member of the Institutional Review Board of the Virginia Department of Social Services helping to safeguard the rights of vulnerable populations who volunteer to participate in research.

Curtis Brown (Cert.’15/GPA; MA’17/GPA) is a nationally recognized emergent professional. His previous roles have included state coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, deputy secretary of public safety and homeland security, regional emergency management administrator for the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and professional staff on the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security. Brown is the co-founder of the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management (IDEM), a data-driven nonprofit dedicated to increasing the diversity of emergency managers and the promotion of practices that improve disaster outcomes among vulnerable communities. He is a senior practitioner in residence at the Wilder School.

Darrion Holloway, Esq. (B.S.’13/GPA) is an associate attorney at Shane Smith Law in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he represents clients in actions for personal injury and property damage. While at VCU, he served as president of the Theta Rho chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. Following graduation, Holloway attended North Carolina Central University School of Law and graduated magna cum laude in 2017. He was admitted to the North Carolina Bar and began his legal career in Charlotte as an assistant public defender, representing indigent individuals who faced criminal charges in Mecklenburg County. As a public defender, he tried over 100 criminal trials and became an experienced litigator.

Darrion Holloway, Esq. (B.S.’13/GPA)

Shelley Smith (B.S.’14/N; M.S.’18) is a doctoral candidate in public policy administration, and has been appointed to the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority (VHWDA) by Gov. Glenn Youngkin. Smith, an associate professor of nursing, will contribute her expertise in rural health workforce development of a statewide health professions pipeline that educates and retains a diverse, culturally competent and geographically distributed workforce for all Virginians. Smith is an alumna of the Translational Research Fellows program.

Shelley Smith (B.S.’14/N; M.S.’18)

Shajanna Isom-Payne, Ph.D. (B.A.’98/H&S; M.Ed.’03/E; Ph.D.’02/E), assistant dean of student success, received the 2022 Outstanding Advocate for Academic Advising Award for Region 2. Presented by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the award recognizes extraordinary commitment to student success among academic advisors and administrators in the Mid-Atlantic. Isom-Payne, who has served in her current role since 2018, was selected for her leadership in driving significant counseling and structural changes in advising at the Wilder School.

Shajanna Isom-Payne, Ph.D.

Keandra Davis, a doctoral candidate in public policy and administration, received an inaugural Kijakazi Research Fellowship with the National Academy for Social Insurance (NASI) this past summer. NASI is a Policy Think Tank centered around social insurance policy, with a strong focus on race and wealth inequality. The fellowship is funded for Kilolo Kijakazi, an acting commissioner for the Social Security Administration.

Keandra Davis

Bradley Corallo (MPA’17/GPA) is the co-author of a recent study that explores how enrollment in Medicaid changed during the pandemic and lays out the stakes for the impact of an expiration requirement that prevented states from disenrolling recipients. The report, “Fiscal and Enrollment Implications of Medicaid Continuous Coverage Requirement During and After the PHE Ends,” estimates between 5.3 million and 14.2 million Americans could lose coverage. Corallo is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation’s Program on Medicaid and the Uninsured (KPMU). He conducts quantitative analyses of Medicaid administrative data and assists on projects related to community health centers.

Bradley Corallo

Wilder School alumni

Seesta Joi Moon heads U.S. House diversity office

Wilder School alumna Seesta Joi Moon, Ph.D. (B.A. ’02/H&S; M.S. ’10/GPA) has been named the director of the U.S. House of Representatives Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Moon, who served previously as the chief diversity officer and director of diversity, equity and inclusion at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, will lead the recruitment, retention and development of the House workforce and efforts to increase awareness of diversity issues among House staff. Congress established the nonpartisan, independent office in 2019.

Moon is a native of Richmond, Virginia, and the co-creator of the JFK Project, a nonprofit dedicated to contextualizing the legacy of Lincoln. Moon also founded the Family Planning and Early Childhood Development Project. The project seeks to leverage historic preservation “through restoration, site-holding and interpretive storytelling in order to excavate, elevate, and educate.” (WC:136)

Seesta Joi Moon

Shelley Smith (B.S.’14/N; M.S.’18)

Wilder School in Action

Plan-Off 2022: Wilder School Master of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning students envision the future of communities

More than a hundred students, faculty, planning professionals, and friends and family gathered for the 2022 Plan-Off annual competition for Master of Urban and Regional Planning students on May 1. A perennial favorite, the event featured second-year students pitching their solution to a real-world planning problem before a panel of professional planners. Finalists were selected in progressive rounds, with the final presentation rounds determined by associate professors Meghan Gough and Ben Teresa.

Gabrielle Dean won first place with her presentation, “Revitalization Strategies for Downtown Elkton, Virginia,”Dean, who hails from Elkton, focused her presentation on analyzing existing conditions and highlighted the need to mitigate business vacancies, adjust zoning codes to increase walkability and use placemaking strategies to create a sense of community.

Gabrielle Dean

Other finalists: Charlie Wilson (*Growing Small: Design Overlay District Planning for Highland County and the Town of Monterey, Virginia) and Neal Friedman (*Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan*) and Anna Weidhaas (*Northern Neck Economic Development Plan: Improving Regional Connectivity Within the Food Industry*), who received the Overall Best Plan Award. The event was sponsored by the Virginia Planning Division of the Virginia Association of REALTORS, Kim Chen and Lory Markham.

Plan-Off 2022: Wilder School Master of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning students envision the future of communities

Plan-Off Finalists (left to right): Annie Weidhaas (Overall Best Plan Award), Charlie Wilson, Gabrielle Dean (Grand Prize) and Neal Friedman
The Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE) has received $3 million from the commonwealth to expand racial and social equity research, academic scholarship and public engagement. “VCU’s role as a public research university means we take the lead in asking difficult questions and finding answers about the most pressing issues facing our society,” said Michael Rao, president of VCU and VCU Health System. “The RISE program’s research and engagement work furthers a deeper understanding of social inequities and their impacts and identifies paths to greater social equity. We are grateful to the legislature and the governor for state budget funding that will help expand that vital work, and it was my privilege to advocate for RISE as one of our top five priorities this legislative session.”

The two-year funding enables the Research Institute for Social Equity to expand its research across many policy issues affecting social justice reform across the United States to promote education, economic security and development on behalf of all Americans. “Funding for the Research Institute for Social Equity is appreciated, welcome and needed,” said Gov. L. Douglas Wilder. “America is in the throes of social upheaval, with problems emanating from times of disunity and social inequality involving race, status and education. No place is more suited to address these issues than the Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.”

Funding will support key research areas in Virginia public policy analysis and reporting, public outreach and workforce development, and educational resources to further position VCU as a champion voice for transformation. “For decades, our researchers have worked to develop policy solutions to address fundamental issues of equity and access for underrepresented populations,” said Susan Gooden, dean of the Wilder School. “This funding amplifies our focused efforts at the Research Institute for Social Equity as a national thought leader on social justice and racial equity.”

Leading the way for marginalized voices

The goal of the Research Institute for Social Equity is to become the national leader in advancing and informing public policy, governance and practice to improve conditions for marginalized voices within society, including communities of color, LGBTQIA individuals, people with disabilities, incarcerated populations, survivors of domestic violence and women. It’s a call to action that the Wilder School and VCU are uniquely positioned to answer, as a top-tier research university.

Meet Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, director of RISE

Nakeina E. Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D. who has served as the interim director of RISE since its founding, has been selected as the permanent director. In her role, she oversees and supports key research areas in Virginia public policy analysis and reporting, public outreach and workforce development, and educational resources to further position VCU as a champion voice for transformation. Douglas-Glenn’s recent work includes leading a team of researchers to produce the Ensuring Language Equity in Virginia Government Services report and serving as an editor of the Virginia Department of Health’s Vaccine Equity Report, which the Wilder School produced monthly during 2021 under the supervision of the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and the Equity Leadership Task Force. She previously served as the director of The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute. Active in community and professional organizations, Douglas-Glenn is an elected member of the American Council on Education’s Virginia Network executive board. She is also a member of the board of directors for the Health Brigade Charitable Clinic (formerly the Fan Free Clinic) and SARA360, which supports individuals and families with the real-world challenges of living with a disability.

“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to lead the Institute in this RISE in this era-defining moment,” said Douglas-Glenn. “I believe RISE is positioned to advance its vision through transformational research and a timely suite of services to help decision-makers and public service providers do their best work to increase access, opportunity and equity for all members of our communities.”
The new funding will fuel capabilities, collaboration and engagement to help position RISE as a one-of-a-kind national research leader.

Steven Keener (M.S.'13/GPA, PPAD '17/ GPA) is the co-founder and inaugural director of the Center for Crime, Equity, and Justice Research and Policy at Christopher Newport University, which brings students and faculty together with local and state leaders, as well as community activists, to conduct research projects and produce policy recommendations.

Keener, who launched the center in September 2021, said it sprang from a desire to build upon the expertise of his faculty — those within criminology and outside of it — who were engaged in helping nonprofits, policymakers and other organizations in the Hampton Roads community with similar projects.

In the short time since its establishment, the center has attracted considerable visibility.

“We have many excellent researchers who are working with nonprofits, policymakers and others to build research projects,” Keener said. “With the creation of the center, we wanted to send the unequivocal message that this work and its impact on the greater community is valued at CNU,” said Keener.

Keener was raised in the Allegheny Highlands of Clifton Forge, Virginia, a quaint town (population: 3,444) known for its pristine waters, trout streams and breathtaking mountain views of the Virginia-West Virginia border.

Only about 9% of Clifton Forge residents have attended college, but Keener, a talented high school student and baseball player — a Louisville Slugger pre-season All-American who was twice named Virginian Review Player of the Year — was privileged to grow in the shadow of parents with high expectations.

“My father, Gary, is a career higher education administrator, and it was he who predicted that I might be a professor,” Keener said. “He saw, well before anyone, that the flexibility and autonomy of teaching and controlling my research tracked with my personaliry.”

After high school, Keener attended Christopher Newport University (CNU), where he majored in political science and played as a starting infielder for the Captains. By happenstance, his political science program at CNU housed criminal justice courses at the time. A mentor suggested he take a few courses in criminology, which ignited a passion that once and for all set the path toward his future as a college professor. Soon thereafter Keener began his graduate studies at VC3, and the rest, as they say, is history. “I fell in love with VC3 and Richmond right away,” Keener said.

In recent years, Keener’s own research has focused on the structural barriers to re-entry for previously incarcerated parents and the intersection between mental health and the criminal justice system. He also teaches an enormously popular immersive course on mental health and criminal justice. Undergraduate students in the course engage with local mental health advocates and shadow a behavioral health doctor in Newport News, one of just 13 in the state, to better understand the structural inequities within the penal system. Students even debit with General District Judge Matthew W. Hoffman, who presides over the docket.
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 by contacting Stevan Dzuicer, the Wilder School’s director of development, at dzuicer@vcu.edu or (804) 828-6205. For more information, please visit us at support.vcu.edu/give/wilder.

Why I give to the Wilder School

Larry Bowman creates opportunities for criminal justice students

For Larry Bowman (B.S.’73/GPA, M.S.’82/GPA), advancing the field of criminal justice begins with investments in talented students and transformative ideas. This is the inspiration behind the Lindsey and Larry Bowman Scholarship in Criminal Justice and Innovation in Criminal Justice Fund.

The initiatives work to expand opportunities at the Wilder School and beyond. The scholarship provides financial assistance to undergraduate students in criminal justice, especially those who are first-generation, demonstrate financial need or are pursuing careers in law enforcement.

The Bowman fund promotes community-engaged projects such as internships, courses, research, lecture series and more.

Most recently, the fund has fueled real-world research at the Chesterfield County Jail. Graduate teaching assistant Samantha Wright (’22 M.S.) has teamed up with Amy Cook, Ph.D., and Nancy Morris, Ph.D., associate professors of criminal justice, to examine drug addiction, overdose and recovery.

“The primary goal of our research study is to prevent drug overdose among formerly incarcerated people,” said Wright, who also holds a Post-baccalaureate Graduate Certificate in Public Management from the Wilder School. “The opportunity to work with Dr. Cook and Dr. Morris on this research project truly enhanced my education and cultivated my interest in research. I believe this research has the power to transform people’s lives, which is so exciting and meaningful. This experience challenged me to step outside my comfort zone and build upon the knowledge and skills I’ve learned in the classroom. I have developed a passion for helping people struggling with addiction, and I hope to continue this work in my future career.”

These life-changing learning experiences define Bowman’s contributions to the Wilder School. Originally from the Richmond area, Bowman earned an undergraduate degree in administration of justice and public safety at VCU while serving as a campus police officer. While completing his graduate degree in the same program, Bowman served with the Virginia State Police and the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program. These formative years established his strong personal connection to his alma mater and field of study.

Bowman and his wife, Lindsey, understand the financial barriers that can keep higher education out of reach. Today, Bowman is the founder, president and CEO of Management Solutions of Virginia, which specializes in quality improvement initiatives and laboratory information management solutions. “Our alma maters were of great benefit to us both professionally and personally. We want to help others who are creating their own personal journeys but need financial assistance to help them achieve their goals,” he said.

Bowman is a passionate advocate for progress, and preparing students for dynamic careers is a key motivator for his generosity. Together with the Wilder School, Bowman is ringing in the future of criminal justice leadership.

— Larry Bowman

Lindsey and Larry Bowman.
66th Governor of Virginia L. Douglas Wilder and Wilder School Dean Susan Gooden (center) pose with the 2022 Excellence in Virginia Governance Award honorees.