

VCU HEALTH SCIENCES

# PIPELINE

*2021 Annual Report*

**10 YEARS  
OF SAEP**  
THE ART OF PARTNERSHIP

*FINDING SUCCESS  
VIRTUALLY*

**VIRGIE  
FIELDS**

VCU ACCELERATION ALUM  
FIGHTING COVID-19



**VCU**

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Source: Statistics based on Fall 2021 data retrieved from the VCU Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support and reports from the National Student Clearinghouse.

# Welcome

Greetings Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome to the 2021 *VCU Health Sciences Pipeline* Annual Report.

Once again, we were unable to implement our traditional in-person programming format this past year due to limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Pipeline team and our faculty and staff partners reverted to the same virtual model that we established during the summer of 2020, which involved mailing simulation packets to each participant and engaging them in hands-on activities through a variety of distance learning modalities.

Unfortunately, the pandemic generated a host of challenges affecting the entire higher education landscape. Most notably, were the persistent declines in college enrollment over the past two years. Despite this national plight, the *Health Sciences Pipeline* was still able to successfully sustain its mission of providing an array of opportunities and experiences for students from underrepresented backgrounds that help increase their access to the healthcare workforce. As a result, a few of our achievements for 2021 included steady expansion in the number of participants for the *Allied Health Career Exploration* program and the *Summer Academic Enrichment Program*, along with a 50% improvement in VCU enrollment for former *SAEP* participants compared to numbers from the previous fall. In addition, the *VCU Acceleration* program saw an increase in its first-year retention and graduation rates, which were 100% and 76.3% respectively (several percentage points above VCU's averages for both).

On the contrary, the overall number of health professions degrees earned by former participants across *Pipeline* programs continued its state of decline. However, earned degrees in VCU health professions programs were only down slightly after a significant uptick in 2020.

On a lasting high note for 2021, we were able to facilitate several K-12 career exploration events throughout the academic-year using our virtual model, which marked the return of *Health Care Quest* for middle school students in the Richmond City Public Schools, and the launching of our new *Lab Field Trips* for students at multiple high schools with Henrico County Schools. And as COVID restrictions are lifted, we're extremely hopeful that we'll be able to advance these initiatives and create others as we move closer toward returning back to our former interactive learning spaces.

To find out more about our current programs and upcoming events, I encourage you to read our Annual Report and visit the *Health Sciences Pipeline's* website or social media platforms on the back cover.

As always, please contact our office if you have any questions or suggestions, and we thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Adrien DeLoach, Ph.D.  
Executive Director,  
Division for Student Engagement and Impact  
Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences

**The mission of VCU's Health Sciences Pipeline is to diversify the healthcare workforce through pipeline programs and initiatives.**

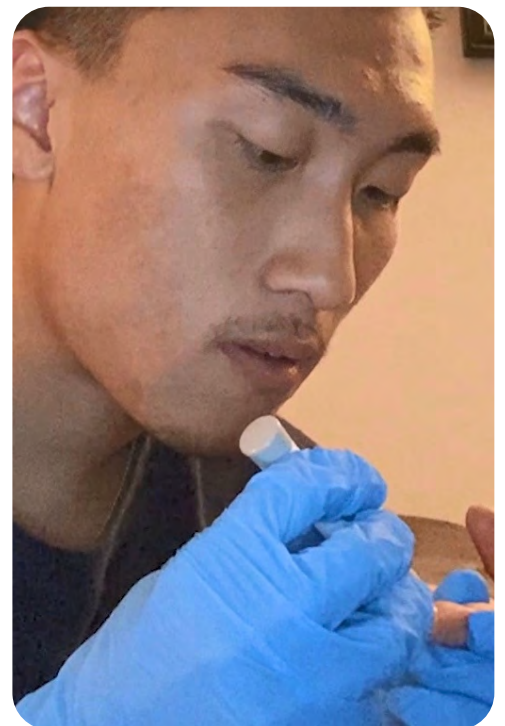
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# Our Mission

We are committed to assisting underrepresented minority students (i.e., racial/ethnic minorities, low socioeconomic status, first-generation, rural, medically under-served communities, etc.) in their interest to pursue careers related to the health sciences.

By offering a vast array of Pipeline programs, we intend to:

- encourage students to explore career opportunities within the profession of health care,
- provide students with access to academic and social resources that contribute to their success in preparation for health professions/graduate school admissions,
- and connect students with a network of health care providers and community partners who support our mission.



# OUR PROGRAMS

## HEALTH SCIENCES ACADEMY

**HSA** is an academic-year program for high school students that offers college-preparedness skills, health careers exploration, and (non-credit) micro credentialing. Participants take a health sciences exploration course that includes interactive lectures from health care workers, mentoring from VCU undergraduates, and field trips to lab facilities at the VCU Monroe Park and VCU Health campuses. Partnering schools include: Cosby High School, Richmond Community High School, and John Marshall High School.

## VCU ACCELERATION

**VCUA** is a four-week summer residential program for incoming VCU freshmen who are interested in pursuing pre-health or pre-professional health concentrations. Participants take non-credit math and science coursework taught by VCU faculty members, attend health career-focused workshops, hospital tours, health professions admissions overviews, and advising in preparation for the fall semester. In the fall, students participate in a living-learning community throughout their freshman year. VCUA participants also take first-year core courses together, engage in community service activities, and receive regular coaching and advising.

### ADDITIONAL PIPELINE PROGRAMMING:

- Health Care Quest (*middle school*)
- Pipeline Informational Sessions
- Pipeline Networking Event
- Lab Field Trips (*high school*)

### VCU SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY PROGRAMS:

- Dental Career Exploration (*high school*)
- VCU Dental Scholars (*high school*)

## ALLIED HEALTH CAREER EXPLORATION

**AHCE** is a two-week summer residential program for college students and graduating high school seniors who are interested in any of the nine health career programs offered by VCU's College of Health Professions. Participants meet for five days each week where they receive admissions information about featured degree programs, engage in hands-on activities within each discipline, and attend workshops on a variety of topics (i.e., current health care issues, interview skills, resume development, etc.).

## SUMMER ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

**SAEP** is a six-week summer residential program for college and post-baccalaureate students that simulates the first-year of a health professions program in dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, or physical therapy. Participants take academically intensive non-credit core-coursework in virtual anatomy, pharmacology and physiology. Participants also attend learning skills and test-taking workshops, mock interviews, professionalism seminars, current health care topics, coaching, and community service activities using an interprofessional framework.

### VCU SCHOOL OF PHARMACY PROGRAMS:

- Pharmacy Explorers (*middle school*)
- Pharmacy Summer Scholars (*high school*)
- Pharmacy Preview Day (*high school*)

### VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE PROGRAMS:

- Project ACEe (*high school*)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing guidelines necessitated a virtual implementation of our programs in 2021 rather than the traditional on-site/residential model. As a result, we are proud to share that our programs were successfully facilitated online both in the Summer and during the Academic Year. We made the transition to virtual programming following the healthcare guidelines mandated by VCU in accordance with the Commonwealth of Virginia. Regardless of the programs' format, we diligently ensured that participants had valuable and transformative experiences during the past year.



# *HSA*

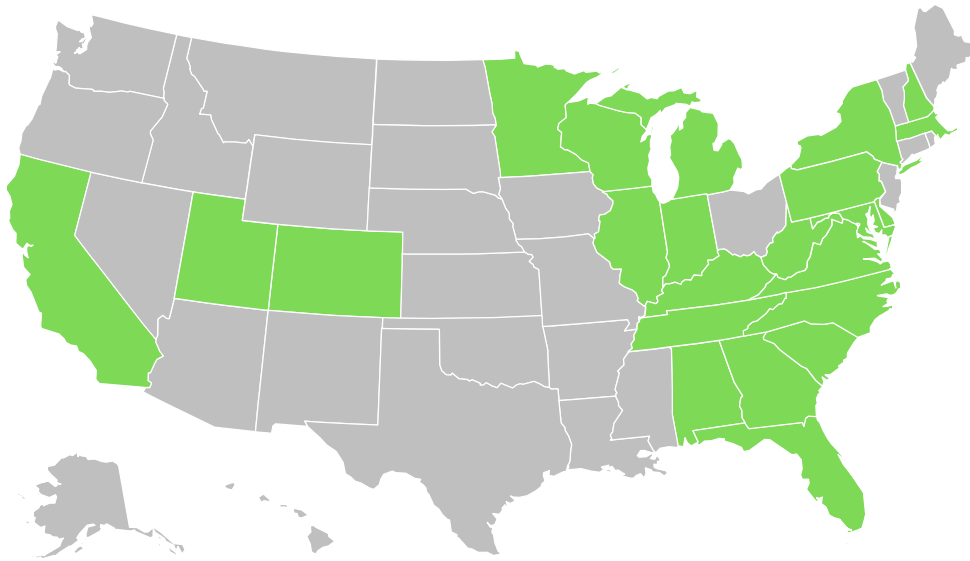
HEALTH  
SCIENCES  
ACADEMY

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**By Ayonden Coleman**

*I joined HSA in 2018 during my sophomore year of high school at Richmond Community. Lab days were my favorite part of the program, because it was interactive and engaging. I was presented the opportunity to become a mentor for the program in Spring of 2021. I enjoyed sharing knowledge and experience as an alumni, which guided my mentee to select her dream career pursuing pediatric dentistry. Currently, I am a sophomore at VCU majoring in Health Science on a pre-med track.*

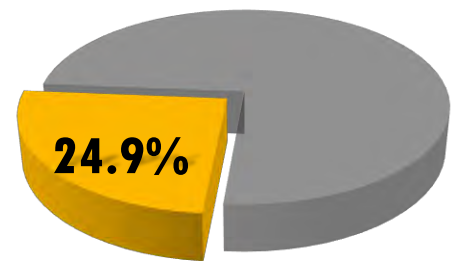
# Health Sciences Academy – Enrollment



**States where former HSA participants were enrolled in Fall 2021**



**1 in 4 participants went to VCU.**



**One-fourth of HSA participants were enrolled in a health professions or health sciences-related program at VCU.**





## Program Enrollment: 89 participants

- **During the Fall 2021 semester, 377 former HSA participants were enrolled at 91 different postsecondary institutions across the nation.**
  - 13 were enrolled at a community or technical colleges.
  - 28 were enrolled at a historically Black college or university.

## Community Partnerships

- **Partnering schools include: Cosby High School, Richmond Community High School, and John Marshall High School.**

## VCU enrollment by health professions tracks:

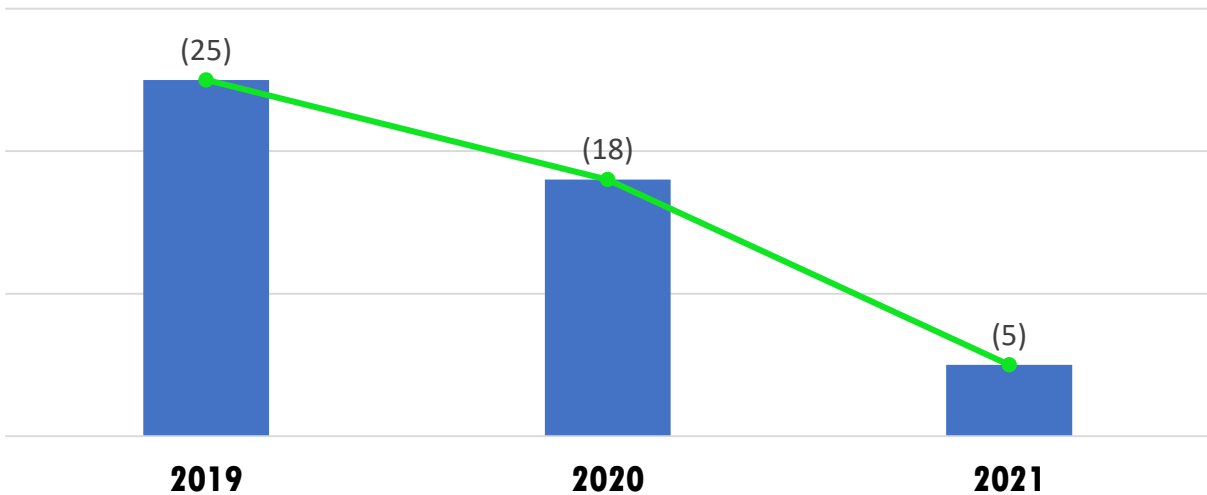
 <b>Nursing</b>	<b>5</b>
 <b>Medical Laboratory Sciences</b>	<b>2</b>
 <b>Pharmacy</b>	<b>2</b>
 <b>Physical Therapy</b>	<b>1</b>

# Health Sciences Academy – Degrees Earned

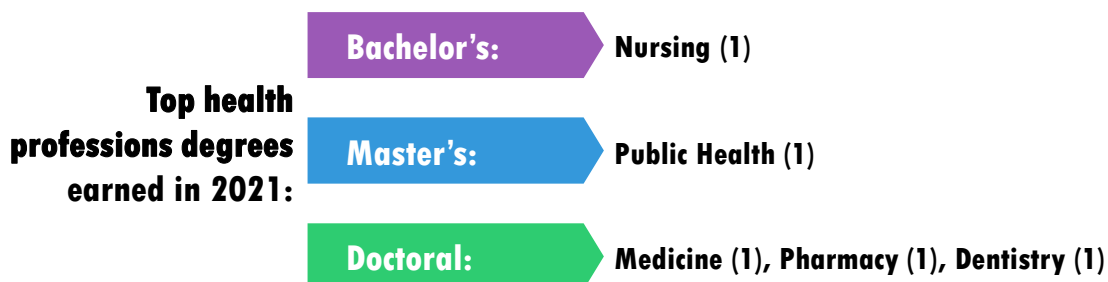
Program: Health Sciences Academy	2019	2020	2021
Degrees Earned at VCU	4	5	2
Degrees Earned at Non-VCU institutions	21	13	3
<b>Total Degrees Earned</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>



**40% of the health professions degrees earned by HSA participants in 2021 were awarded at VCU.**



**The number of HSA participants who earned health professions degrees declined significantly by 80% over the past 3 years.**







# AHCE

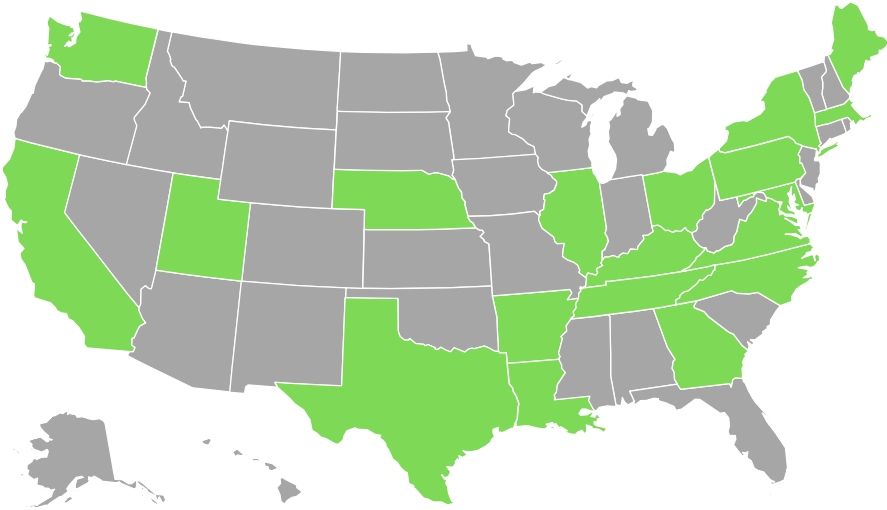
ALLIED  
HEALTH  
CAREER  
EXPLORATION

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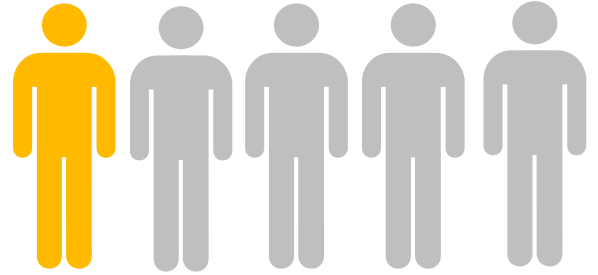
**By Justyce Falkenberg**

*I enjoyed my time at VCU's Allied Health Career Exploration for a multitude of reasons. This was my first internship, and I was ecstatic to be in a program that clearly cared about my experience as a pre-health professional and person. I learned so many things related to allied health professions than I had my entire life. Although it was virtual, they made sure to keep us engaged, up to date with their facilities state of the art technologies, and fun! This internship has definitely made an impact on me, and how I navigate as a health professional.*

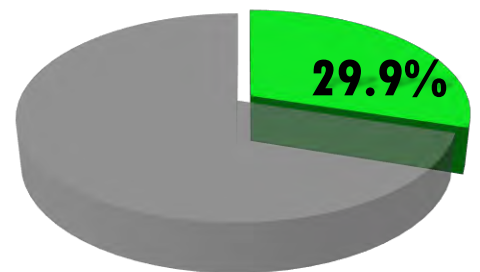
# Allied Health Career Exploration - Enrollment



■ States where former AHCE participants were enrolled in Fall 2021



**1 in 5 participants went to VCU.**



**Over one-fourth of all AHCE participants were enrolled in a health professions or health sciences-related program.**

- Program Enrollment: 32 participants**
- During the Fall 2021 semester, 87 former AHCE participants were enrolled at 64 different postsecondary institutions across the nation.**

## Enrollment by health professions tracks:

	VCU	Non-VCU
<b>Nursing</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Physical Therapy</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Dentistry</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Occupational Therapy</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Medicine</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1*</b>
<b>Radiation Sciences</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

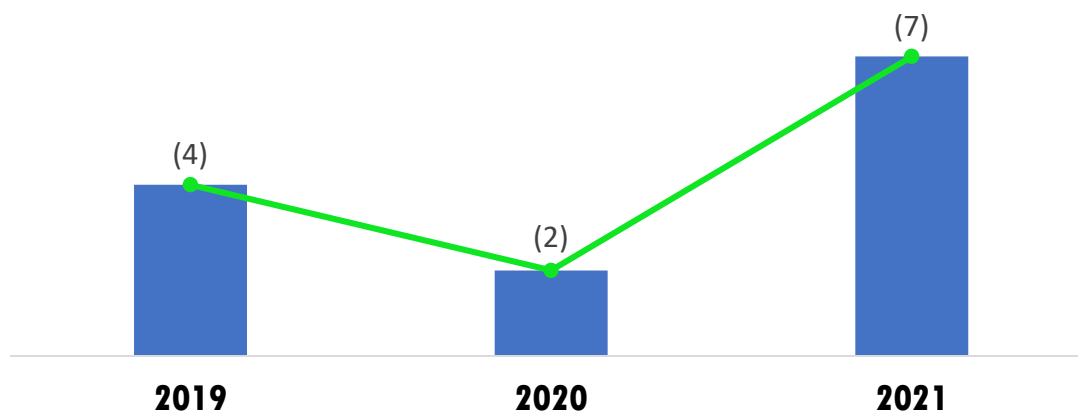
\*Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine

# Allied Health Career Exploration – Earned Degrees

Program: Allied Health Career Exploration	2019	2020	2021
Degrees Earned at VCU	2	1	2
Degrees Earned at Non-VCU institutions	2	1	5
<b>Total Degrees Earned</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>



**About 1 in 4 of the health professions degrees earned by AHCE participants in 2021 were awarded at VCU.**



**The number of AHCE participants who earned health professions degrees increased by 75% over the past 3 years.**

**Top health professions degrees earned in 2021:**

- Bachelor's:** Medical Laboratory Sciences (2)
- Master's:** Nursing (1), Health Administration (1)
- Doctoral:** Physical Therapy (2), Occupational Therapy (1)



# VCUA

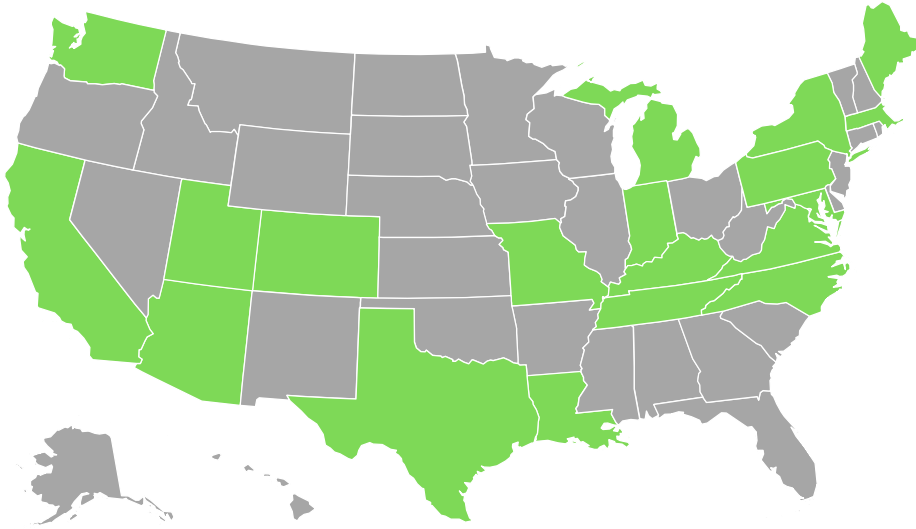
VCU  
ACCELERATION

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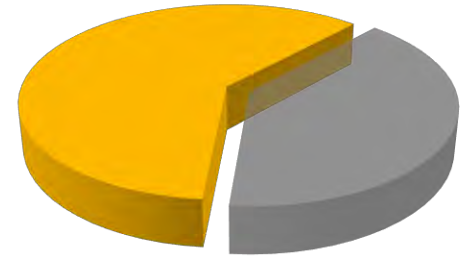
**By Holberg Perez Santeliz**

*VCU Acceleration has been key for my success in college. During the summer, the program provided me with knowledge and guidance about different pre-health professions as well as preparation for the classes that I will need to take during the fall semester. I had the opportunity to expand my opportunities by increasing my social network, as well as meeting very good contacts who have guided and helped me through my college journey. The program prepares you well to be better in your professional life and it gives you a good head start in your pre-health journey.*

# VCU Acceleration – Enrollment



**States where former VCUA participants were enrolled in Fall 2021**










**60.5 % of former VCUA participants were enrolled at VCU.**



**1 in 7 participants were enrolled in a health professions or graduate program related to health sciences.**

- **Program Enrollment: 19 participants**
- **During the Fall 2021 semester, 190 former VCUA participants were enrolled at 53 different postsecondary institutions across the nation.**

## VCU enrollment by health sciences and health professions tracks:

 <b>Nursing</b>	<b>6</b>
 <b>Medical Laboratory Sciences</b>	<b>4</b>
 <b>Pharmacy</b>	<b>2</b>
 <b>Medicine</b>	<b>2</b>
 <b>Addiction Studies</b>	<b>1</b>
 <b>Health Administration</b>	<b>1</b>
 <b>Rehab Counseling</b>	<b>1</b>

## Graduation and Retention Rates

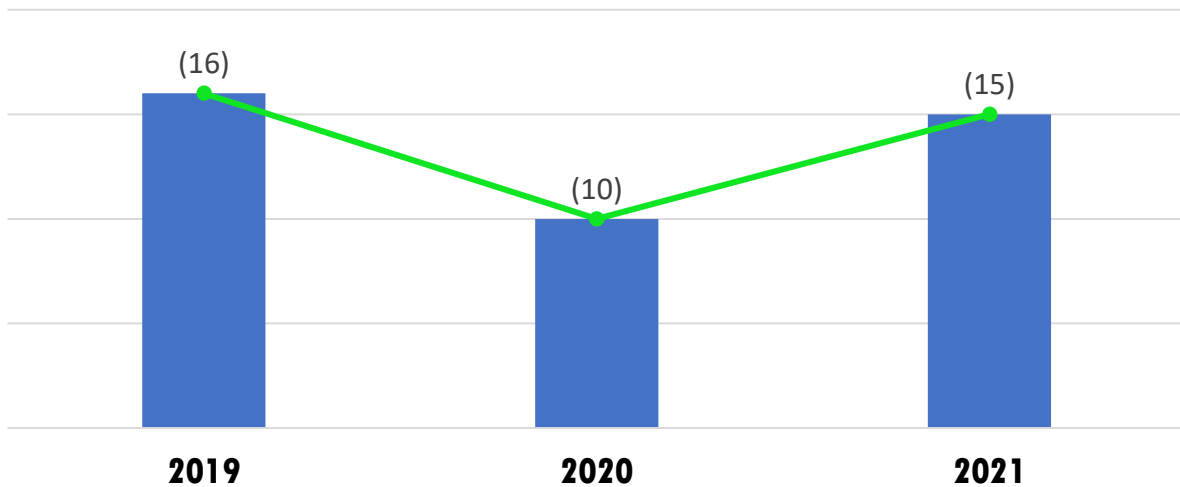
Academic Unit	Six-Year Graduation Rate		First-Year Retention Rate	
	2015 Cohort	Fall 2020	2015 Cohort	Fall 2020
<b>Acceleration</b>	<b>76.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		
<b>VCU Overall</b>	<b>67.8%</b>	<b>83.9%</b>		

# VCU Acceleration – Earned Degrees

Program: VCU Acceleration	2019	2020	2021
Degrees Earned at VCU	12	7	8
Degrees Earned at Non-VCU institutions	4	3	7
<b>Total Degrees Earned</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>



**Slightly more than half of the health professions degrees earned by VCUA participants in 2021 were awarded at VCU.**



**The number of Acceleration participants who earned health professions degrees averaged around 14 students over the past 3 years.**

**Top health professions degrees earned in 2021:**

- Bachelor's:** Nursing (4), Dental Hygiene (2), Medical Laboratory Sciences (1)
- Master's:** Nursing (1), Health Administration (1), Physician Assistant (1), Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics (1)
- Doctoral:** Pharmacy (3), Nursing Practice (1)



**100%**  
OF PARTICIPANTS  
WOULD  
RECOMMEND SAEP.

**97%**  
OF PARTICIPANTS FELT  
THAT SAEP PREPARED  
THEM FOR  
PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL.

# SAEP

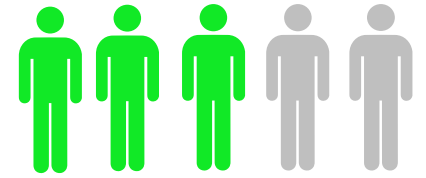
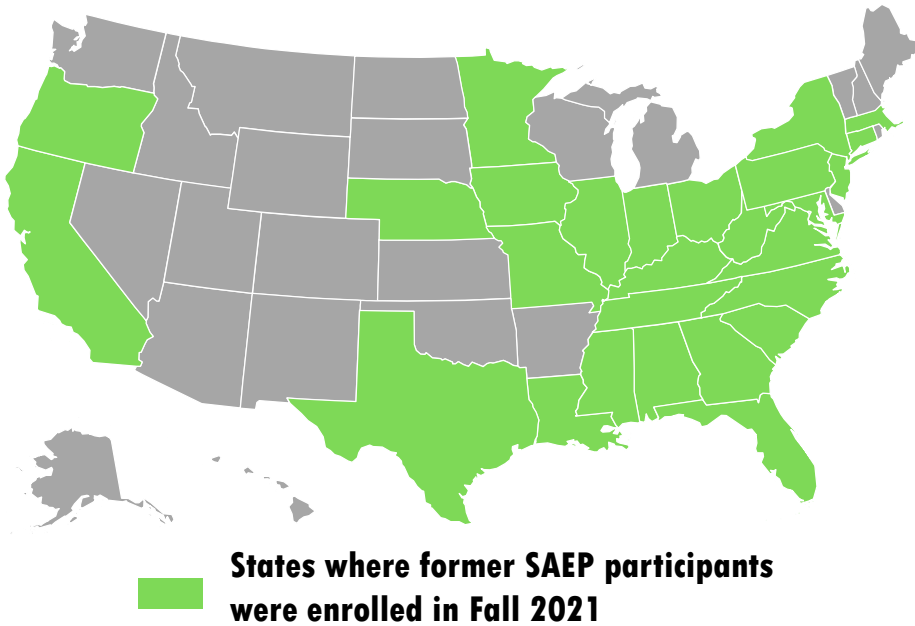
## SUMMER ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

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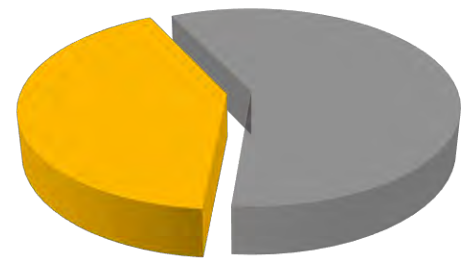
By April Lynn Ruiz

*SAEP not only helped me prepare myself mentally for the academic rigor of graduate school, but it also helped me gain greater confidence in myself. Getting to know faculty and some of my current physical therapy school classmates through the program also helped me facilitate connections and community even before entering PT school here at VCU. As a current 2nd year PT student, I have seen how the tools and experiences I had through SAEP have helped me to transition into my program and manage the workload more easily so that I can be successful in the field.*

# Summer Academic Enrichment Program – Enrollment



Over half of SAEP participants were enrolled in a health professions or graduate program related to health sciences.



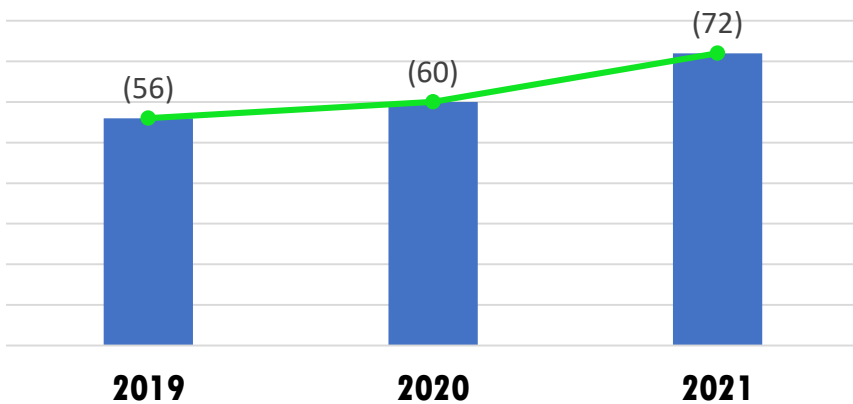
41.4% of SAEP participants were enrolled at VCU.

- **Program Enrollment: 57 participants**
- **During the Fall 2021 semester, 210 former SAEP participants were enrolled at 79 different postsecondary institutions across the nation.**
- **15 former participants were enrolled at a historically Black college or university.**

## Enrollment by health professions tracks:

	VCU	Non-VCU
Pharmacy	25	9
Medicine	16	11*
Physical Therapy	16	8
Dentistry	15	17
Occupational Therapy	-	1
Optometry	-	1
Physician Assistant	-	1

\*Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (2)







The number of SAEP participants enrolled in a health professions program at VCU increased roughly 30% over the past 3 years.

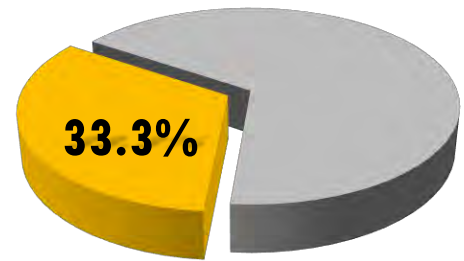


# Summer Academic Enrichment Program – Earned Degrees

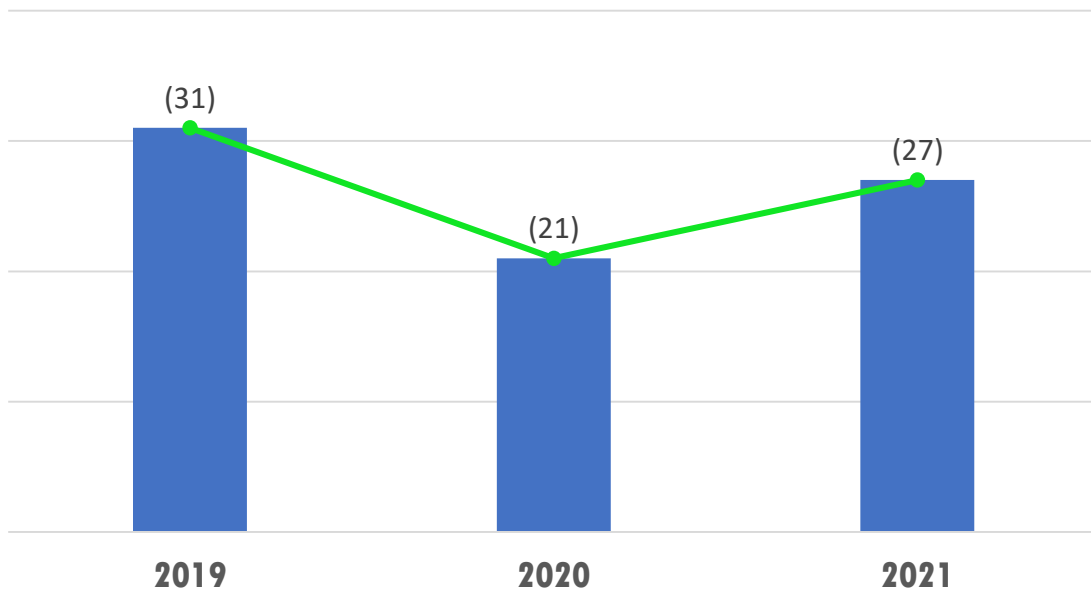
Program: Summer Academic Enrichment Program	2019	2020	2021
Degrees Earned at VCU	10	14	9
Degrees Earned at Non-VCU institutions	21	7	18
<b>Total Degrees Earned</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>

## Top health professions degrees earned in 2021:

	VCU	Non-VCU
 Pharmacy	5	1
 Medicine	2	1
 Physical Therapy	1	6
 Dentistry	1	10



One-third of the health professions degrees earned by SAEP participants in 2021 were awarded at VCU.



The number of SAEP participants who earned health professions degrees averaged around 26 students over the past 3 years.



A health sciences summer pipeline program offers undergrads from across the country a six-week slice of life as a graduate health professional student — and connections to last a lifetime.

## 'I COULD REALLY SEE MYSELF HERE AT VCU'

By Mary Kate Brogan, University Public Affairs, published on 9/1/2021  
Photographs by Tom Kojcsich, University Marketing

Aspiring pharmacist Angela Gates joined the Summer Academic Enrichment Program at Virginia Commonwealth University to get a better understanding of what pharmacy school would be like. She came away with a dental mold of her teeth, a tube of lip balm, a paint-by-numbers portrait and friendships and connections from across VCU's campuses and the country.

"I honestly had no idea what to expect from grad school and, before this program, had no idea all the work that these students put in and the amount of studying," said Gates, a senior majoring in professional science at VCU's College of Humanities and Sciences. "Grad school might not even be as fast-paced [as this] because this was a six-week program."

Few undergraduate students have the experience of what graduate health professional school will be like before they ever set foot on campus. Even fewer are paid a stipend to find out. But every summer for the past decade, faculty and staff at VCU have immersed hundreds of college students in an intensive six-week experience called the Summer Academic Enrichment Program. It simulates what students can expect from graduate health sciences field of dentistry, medicine, pharmacy or physical therapy — and helps them prepare for the admissions processes they may face.

"I experienced and learned a lot about pharmacy, more than I had originally known," Gates said. "Now that I have even more information about it, it makes me want to pursue pharmacy even more than before."

The Summer Academic Enrichment Program, which celebrated its 10th year this summer, is one of several initiatives through VCU's Division for Health Sciences Diversity that brings together students of different races, ethnicities, genders and socioeconomic backgrounds to foster their interest in, and understanding of, the health sciences. It's part of a larger effort to increase diverse representation in health care, which public health researchers cite as a critical factor in reducing health disparities that have disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S.

From a health sciences boot camp to clinical opportunities and academic courses to social activities, the unique program gives students a taste of what lies ahead and a boost on their resume as they prepare for graduate health professional school.

### An approach like no other

The division, led by director Adrien DeLoach, Ph.D., focuses on engaging with the community through health career exploration programs for K-12 students in Richmond and the surrounding area, health sciences (cont'd)

pre-admissions programs for college students in Virginia and beyond and a living and learning community, called VCU Acceleration, for undergraduate students who enroll at VCU with interests in health sciences and pre-health concentrations.

“That’s what is so essential in helping students succeed at VCU: It starts before they get to college, but it’s truly about guiding students all the way through their academic experiences,” DeLoach said. “That’s one of the things that we really take our pride in is not working in isolation but doing a good job to collaborate and pull together all the parts that students need to know to reach their chosen or preferred academic or career destination.”

In 2020, Rayallan Fredericks, the division’s marketing and program coordinator, and Lorayah Lenore, the division’s assistant director, even launched a podcast to inspire budding health sciences students with stories of pipeline program alums and guests from all walks of life.

The Summer Academic Enrichment Program was one of the division’s first ventures. And those who have worked with the program since its beginnings in 2011, such as **Cheryl Ford-Smith, D.P.T.**, have seen the merits of an approach like VCU’s.

As director of special programs for student recruitment and retention and an associate professor in the **Department of Physical Therapy at the VCU College of Health Professions**, Ford-Smith created a physical therapy-focused high school program in the 2000s and was used to managing every aspect of a pipeline program, from recruitment to education of participants. When VCU established the Division for Health Sciences Diversity and its pipeline programs, Ford-Smith could put her focus back on what she does best: establishing relationships with pre-health students and educating them about the profession and VCU’s program.

The benefits were apparent when Ford-Smith spoke on a panel with several other universities about pipeline programs a few years ago; she said other panelists were amazed by VCU’s multifaceted approach.

“There are people out there that say, ‘Oh, pipeline programs are just not successful,’ but I haven’t heard of a pipeline program that does what we do,” Ford-Smith said. “I would rather spend more time doing what we do — being able to work with the students that we want to see be successful in the future — and the division allows us to do that with their support.”

The program helps students enhance their study skills and competitiveness in admissions pools and gives them a chance to decide which path is right for them. A modest stipend is provided, which, DeLoach said, is intended to encourage students not to take on a summer job or take other courses. “We pay you to be a student and give us your undivided attention,” DeLoach said.

Participating in the program pays off in other ways too. From 2017-20, 89 Summer Academic Enrichment Program graduates earned advanced health sciences degrees, nearly half of them at VCU, and 186 program graduates were enrolled in postsecondary education in fall 2020. In recent years, the class size has grown, this year enrolling 61 students from across the country and U.S. territories.

Kaylah Beharrie, a second-year physical therapy student, knew she wanted to come to VCU for physical therapy and applied for the Summer Academic Enrichment Program while she was an undergraduate at James Madison University. She wasn’t sure what skills she needed to strengthen her application, but the instructors’ guidance and the faculty recommendations that came out of the Summer Academic Enrichment Program helped make her goal of coming to VCU a reality.

“I could really see myself here at VCU because of that,” Beharrie said.

And, she said, the experience saved a few of her Summer Academic Enrichment Program peers some heartache later. One classmate realized she did not want to pursue the track she was on but discovered, instead, she was interested in dentistry. Ford-Smith said that’s the benefit of covering multiple areas in one program.

“You’ve saved someone from spending thousands of dollars to get in a program and then feel like, ‘Oh gosh, I don’t want to be here,’” Ford-Smith said. “People will come into SAEP, and they’ll switch to pharmacy or to something else, and we consider that a win. You’re never going to not benefit from this education.”



#### **‘It gave me confidence’**

Beharrie is not the only program graduate who has found the experience fulfilling.

Ashley Williams, M.D., a pediatrician in Atlanta, was part of the first cohort of Summer Academic Enrichment Program students in 2011 and part of VCU School of Medicine’s 2017 M.D. class.

“Having allies and people to support me through my medical school journey was really helpful, and I built those relationships through the SAEP program,” Williams said in an interview earlier this year with the VCU School of Medicine.

Like Williams, Gabe Thomas said he built connections with Summer Academic Enrichment Program faculty such as Donna Jackson, Ed.D., assistant dean for admissions and director of student outreach in the School of Medicine, who encouraged him to apply early decision to VCU. He got in last fall and this year became one of six students to earn a School of Medicine Dean's Equity Scholarship.

"The most beneficial thing about SAEP was it gave me confidence," said Thomas in an interview this summer with the School of Medicine. "I made so many connections and started building relationships; I knew VCU was where I wanted to be."

Jonathan Mack, a second-year VCU physical therapy student and graduate of Hampton University from Virginia Beach, didn't have any health care professionals in his family and found the Summer Academic Enrichment Program a refreshing way to learn about careers in the health sciences. As a teaching assistant, the program has continued to offer new avenues for his career.

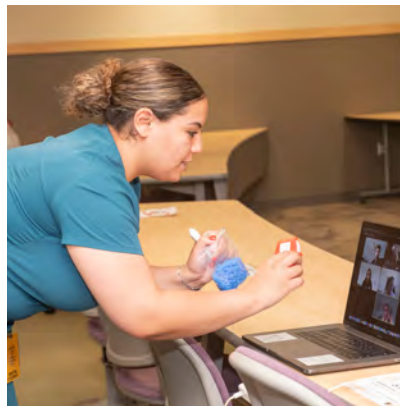
"This summer, being able to start to teach students and help people to see that light bulb go off, it's something that I will keep in my back pocket now," said Mack, who is the Doctor of Physical Therapy program's Class of 2023 president. "Who knows? Maybe I'll go into education down the road after I practice."

Mack and other graduates of the program returned this summer to serve as teaching assistants for the virtual program. While their experience may have differed in terms of in-person interaction and volunteer opportunities, such as **Remote Area Medical** clinics and foot examination clinics at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, they had the benefit of offering insights into what VCU was actually like in between virtually walking students through clinical skills practice and exam preparation.

Sara Najah, a third-year VCU School of Dentistry D.D.S. student from Arlington and fellow teaching assistant this summer, said the program demystifies some of the admissions process.

"SAEP really tried to immerse you as a student, not just academically but also socially. You got to meet people who would literally determine your future and made you feel super welcomed because you were here for six weeks and you weren't just a face or like a random ID number. They actually truly got to know your personality," Najah said. "You knew that at the end of the day, if they chose you for their program, it's because you deserved that spot."

While earning her B.S. in biology on the pre-dental track at VCU, Najah learned about the program from a student completing an internship at a Richmond-area pharmacy. The student said the program was the reason she was admitted to VCU School of Pharmacy.



"When I got into SAEP, I was like, 'This girl was not lying,'" Najah said. "It was the golden ticket into the program for whatever field you're trying to get into." Mack described the program as a road map to graduate health professional school, with help along the way from admissions leaders such as Ford-Smith, Michelle Whitehurst-Cook, M.D., senior associate dean of admissions at the School of Medicine; Tiffany Williams, D.D.S., director of student recruitment at the School of Dentistry; and K.C. Ogbonna, Pharm.D., associate dean of admissions and student services at the School of Pharmacy.

"For me, it was really just an opportunity to visualize yourself in your future professional field," Mack said. "To also be in an environment where you were able to get that taste — without necessarily having the full pressure of being a professional school student — really was a great key and really helped me make my transition into graduate school so much easier."

### 'It's not a matter of if you get in; it's when'

This summer, Angela Gates participated in the pharmacy track. In between evening activities of painting and virtual lip-sync competitions, in-class activities of creating molds of her teeth and learning about health disparities, and study sessions to learn the material for her anatomy, biochemistry and physiology courses, Gates bonded with the students who might become her peers someday. "My dream school is VCU pharmacy school," Gates said. "Making connections with the students who also want to be at the school and some of the [teaching assistants] and coaches helped me realize that I can use them in the future. The students, I can make a group chat with them and we can all study together. And I won't feel alone my first year because I have met students who want to go to VCU."

Her approach to studying was one lesson learned, sharing that the six weeks were some of the toughest she's faced academically. Her hard work hitting the books paid off though during the closing ceremony when she heard her name called as one of the two highest-performing students in the pharmacy track: Gates would be one of two students to be awarded a new scholarship, totaling \$50,000 over four years, contingent upon her acceptance into VCU School of Pharmacy.

Hearing from teaching assistants and recent graduates about their experiences in her future field helped assure her she was on the right path. Getting to learn a few things firsthand, like how to make lip balm, didn't hurt either.

"I was able to kind of see: You can make it, you can make it through and you can be OK," Gates said. "Like, there's people out there who are doing the same thing you do, and you're going to be fine."

Ogbonna at the School of Pharmacy, who served as this year's Summer Academic Enrichment Program steering committee chair, reflected on the accomplishments of the program's graduates during a closing ceremony.

"Aside from the academic accomplishments, I'm most proud of the personal growth that each of our participants has shown. Whether it's gaining additional confidence, refining study skills, improving public speaking or simply expanding one's network, you all are leaving the program with valuable insights about yourselves," Ogbonna said. "My challenge to all of you is to take this experience and multiply it five times over because your potential is limitless, your opportunities are endless and you have shown that you have what it takes."

Ahlia Moone, who participated in the medicine track of the program, was the ceremony's class speaker and addressed just how welcome they'd all felt as they continued their education toward future careers in the health sciences.

"I have never seen a program that roots so hard for student success like you all have done for the past six weeks," Moone said. "The constant reminder that the fact of us being here means that you want us to join you all at VCU is so profound."

As one of the advisers said, Moone recounted, "it's not a matter of if you get in; it's when."



# CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SAEP

# BREAKING BARRIERS

An excerpt from *Breaking Barriers* by Joan Tupponce, published by VCU News on 2/22/2022



Photo of Virgie Fields courtesy of Kevin Morley, University Marketing

## Virgie Fields: 'Mentoring is a great way to give back'

Virgie Fields loves effective data storytelling, presenting information in a simple way to help users understand and interpret the data to inform evidence-based decisions.

"The user could be leaders within an agency, community, or state, or members of the general public. Everyone makes decisions based on their knowledge, experiences and influences," said Fields, who worked as a health care associated infections epidemiologist for the Virginia Department of Health before taking on a new position with Lantana Consulting Group. "Giving people the information they need can help inform the decisions they make that not only impacts themselves but impacts others."

During the pandemic, for example, a lot of her work focused on long-term care facilities. Nursing homes are required to report weekly COVID-19 related data to a national surveillance system and that data also is shared with the Virginia Department of Health.

"I created and updated every week an internal interactive dashboard that visualized the nursing home COVID-19 data. Staff at local health districts were able to view this dashboard and

determine which facilities needed additional resources and support. Some of this information was also shared with other internal and external partners that helped provide additional technical assistance and resources," she said.

Her work has centered on infections that a patient can get while receiving care in a health care facility.

"As part of the team, I helped facilities assess their data as well as their infection prevention and control practices and provided recommendations to address any gaps," she said.

Interested in health and medicine from a young age, Fields graduated from VCU in 2013 with a bachelor's in biomedical engineering before receiving her master's in epidemiology from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Fields participated in the VCU Acceleration program during the summer before her freshman year. She also took part in the Center on Health Disparities' Initiative for Maximizing Student Development Scholars Program for undergraduates.

"During the program, we learned from graduate and professional students as well as professors to get a feel for our freshman year classes," she said. "It was an invaluable experience that gave us access to many resources to pursue a health sciences career."

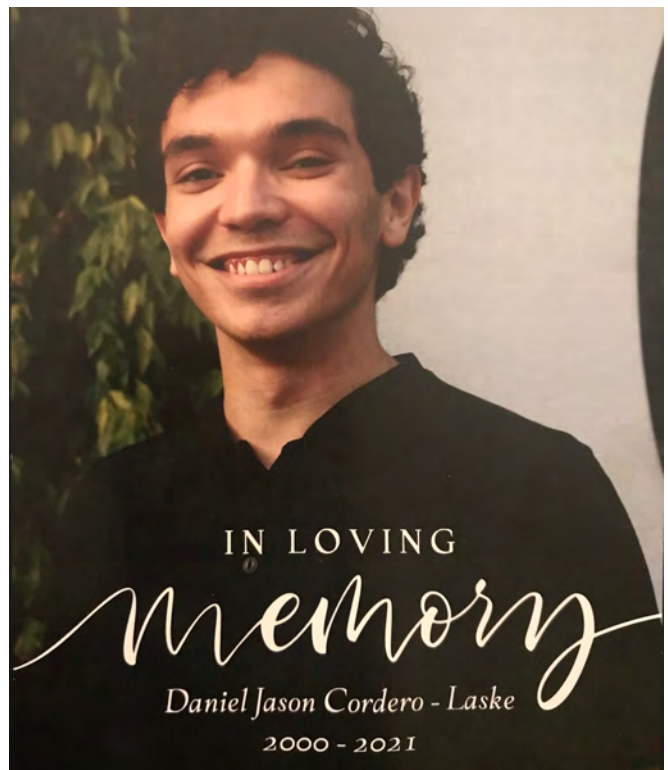
While she was working at the Virginia Department of Health, the agency implemented a focus on health equity, incorporating it into various functions within her office.

The pandemic has highlighted the inequities and injustice that many communities of color, including the Black community, experience daily. Health equity can be achieved by understanding and addressing the needs of all populations, Fields said.

"Utilizing data can help determine what needs are not being met. Data can be used to provide actionable insights so that we can target resources and effective education where they are needed," she said. "Ultimately, my work helped various stakeholders understand where the gaps were in our health care facilities and where the resources needed to go. A good number of the patients and residents receiving care in Virginia's health care facilities are Black, so we want to make sure that each facility has all the resources they need to give each patient the best care possible."

# Dedication to Daniel Cordero- Laske

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The Health Sciences Pipeline lost one of its brightest stars on February 26, 2020 when Daniel Cordero-Laske, an alum of the VCU Acceleration program (2018), passed away unexpectedly after falling ill from contracting the coronavirus.

Daniel was charming, intelligent, and an extremely witty student who could light up a room with his smile and was known for his sense of humor. He initially began pursuing career interests in bioinformatics and biomedical engineering, but later changed his major to political science, as he had aspirations of combining his love of medicine along with his passion for politics. At the time, he wasn't quite sure where that would take him, but little did he know that he was blazing a new and uncharted path for future health science students at VCU.

In addition, Daniel was also involved with VCU's student government association, the Wushu dancing club, the Catholic campus ministry, and was elected by his peers in the VCU Acceleration program to serve as executive co-chair for their cohort's student leadership council. He was a huge advocate for volunteerism as well, and wanted to use his degree to help the communities back in his hometown of Bronx, NY and the City of Richmond during his enrollment at VCU. At the time of his passing, Daniel was working as a medical assistant for an urgent care facility in the Bronx, with the goal of making the world a better place. And although he has left us, Daniel will forever be remembered by his Pipeline family at VCU. This is but one memorial that we offer in his honor.

# THANK YOU



Association of Black Cardiologists  
Capital Area Health Education Center  
Chesterfield County Public Schools  
Henrico County Public Schools  
Petersburg Public Schools  
Richmond Public Schools  
Virginia Department of Education  
VCU College of Health Professions  
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VCU School of Education  
VCU School of Medicine  
VCU School of Nursing  
VCU School of Pharmacy  
VCU Strategic Enrollment Management  
and Student Success  
VCU Division of Student Affairs

Now, more than ever, we are reminded of how truly thankful we are for our campus and community partners, as well as anyone who has supported our mission to diversify the VCU community and the healthcare field. This year, your support helped us provide quality education, service learning, outreach, and clinical exposure for over 500 students from highly diverse backgrounds. These are resources that students might not have access to outside of the Health Sciences Pipeline.

We know VCU will remain a purveyor of difference and genuine interest – the heart of diversity – because you make up the VCU community, and your voices shape what we do. We thank you for taking a step forward with us in 2021, and continuing to support us as we aim even higher next year.

**We thank you for taking steps to assist us in moving forward in 2021, and continuing to support us as we aim even higher next year.**

## Special Thanks to:

**Mary Kate Brogan** for 'I could really see myself here'  
Photographs by **Tom Kojcsich**  
**Olivia Libbey and Pamela Arnold** for cover graphic  
**Joan Tuppence** for Breaking Barriers article



# WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE

You can help us advance diversity in health care by:



## STRENGTHEN

Community partnerships strengthen our programs by leveraging resources, making them available to our students, and furthering our cause and visibility in the community at large.

If your organization, department, school, or business aligns with our mission, and you'd like to support our students by volunteering as instructors, mentors, and/or speakers, please contact [dhsd@vcu.edu](mailto:dhsd@vcu.edu).

You can now make charitable monetary donations to VCU Health Sciences Pipeline through our online giving form. Just log on to [dhsd.vcu.edu](https://dhsd.vcu.edu), click on the 'Give' tab at the top of the page, and follow the prompts to make your secure, tax-deductible donations through the Medical College of Virginia Foundation.



## SUPPORT



## SUSTAIN



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From volunteer opportunities to pipeline application updates, connect with the Pipeline Team on social media to stay updated.



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