

Virginia Foundation
for Independent Colleges



2025 IMPACT REPORT

Opportunity
Starts Here

VISION

Academically qualified college-bound students can access personalized, values-based higher education at VFIC colleges and universities, regardless of their financial situation.

MISSION

To secure financial support that enables college-bound students to access and graduate from outstanding Virginia independent higher education institutions.

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Since joining the **Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges (VFIC)** in early 2024, I have had the privilege of traveling across Virginia and visiting many wonderful people who share a common goal: ensuring that qualified students have the opportunity to attend and succeed at VFIC schools.

I have witnessed firsthand the excellence of the education our schools deliver, an excellence driven by the dedication and strong commitment to students that is embedded in the DNA of the schools’ leaders, faculty, coaches, and staff. They are deeply committed to each student’s success, and it comes across loud and clear when you spend time with them.

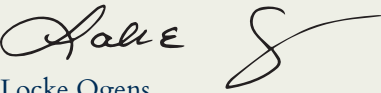
I am grateful for our VFIC donors who share the same commitment. Thank you for your generous response to our new fundraising focus on scholarships and other student support. You contributed \$3.6 million in support during FY25, a significant increase from the \$1.9 million raised the previous year.

Our work is just beginning. Our ambitious goal is to raise a total of \$20 million in student support by July 1, 2027. We will continue to focus on scholarships and the Home Stretch Fund, which helps students in their junior or senior year navigate unexpected roadblocks that, through no fault of their own, could prevent them from staying in school and graduating.

To leverage the power of the VFIC platform, we are developing plans to establish the VFIC Presidential Scholars program with student cohorts at each school. VFIC presidents will identify students with financial need who demonstrate exceptional academic promise and leadership after their first year. Students will receive scholarships for the balance of their undergraduate education and, with their cohort, will have access to career and leadership development opportunities and mentorships. They will come together with their peers across Virginia to develop enduring relationships. Our hope is that these students will “pay it forward” to those who follow in their footsteps.

The VFIC’s mission is a noble one, investing in an education that changes lives, often for generations to come. The benefits go beyond the students—extending to Virginia’s workforce and the civil fabric of the Commonwealth. I appreciate your confidence and willingness to come alongside us.

With gratitude,


Locke Ogens
President



ECONOMIC IMPACT

VFIC schools contribute approximately \$1.5 billion annually in spending to Virginia’s economy.

Over 70% of students remain in Virginia after graduation.

The Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG) represents only 5% of Virginia’s higher education expenditures, but Virginia’s independent colleges and universities educate 1/3 of Virginia’s undergraduates.

Passport to Prosperity

OUR HISTORY

The **Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges (VFIC)** is a private nonprofit organization founded in 1952 to raise funds in support of Virginia’s independent colleges.

Today, VFIC schools educate over 35,000 students, providing an exceptional education in a highly personalized setting. Students benefit from liberal arts and skills-based education opportunities that value and encourage ethical leadership and responsible citizenship.

Supporters have expanded over time to include not only corporations but also individuals and foundations. In 2024, the VFIC embarked on a mission to significantly increase student scholarships and other financial support, launching a fundraising initiative to raise \$20 million.

Thousands of students have been given a passport to prosperity and thousands more will follow. Our strong endowment fully funds our operational costs. 100% of donors’ dollars go directly to schools for student support.

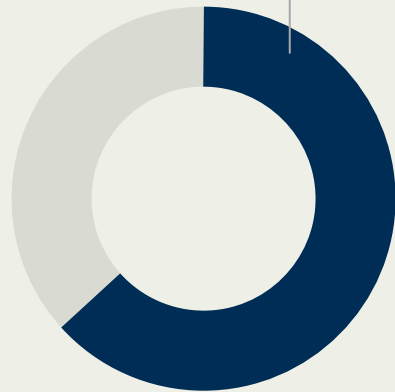
DEMOGRAPHICS

35,454

students attend VFIC schools located across the Commonwealth in urban and rural locations.

62%

of undergraduate students at VFIC schools are eligible for need-based aid.



40%+

of students are Pell Grant eligible, first generation, or from underserved communities.

Proportionally more VFIC students are recipients of Pell, federal, and local grant aid than students at public schools.



FAST FACTS

\$140M

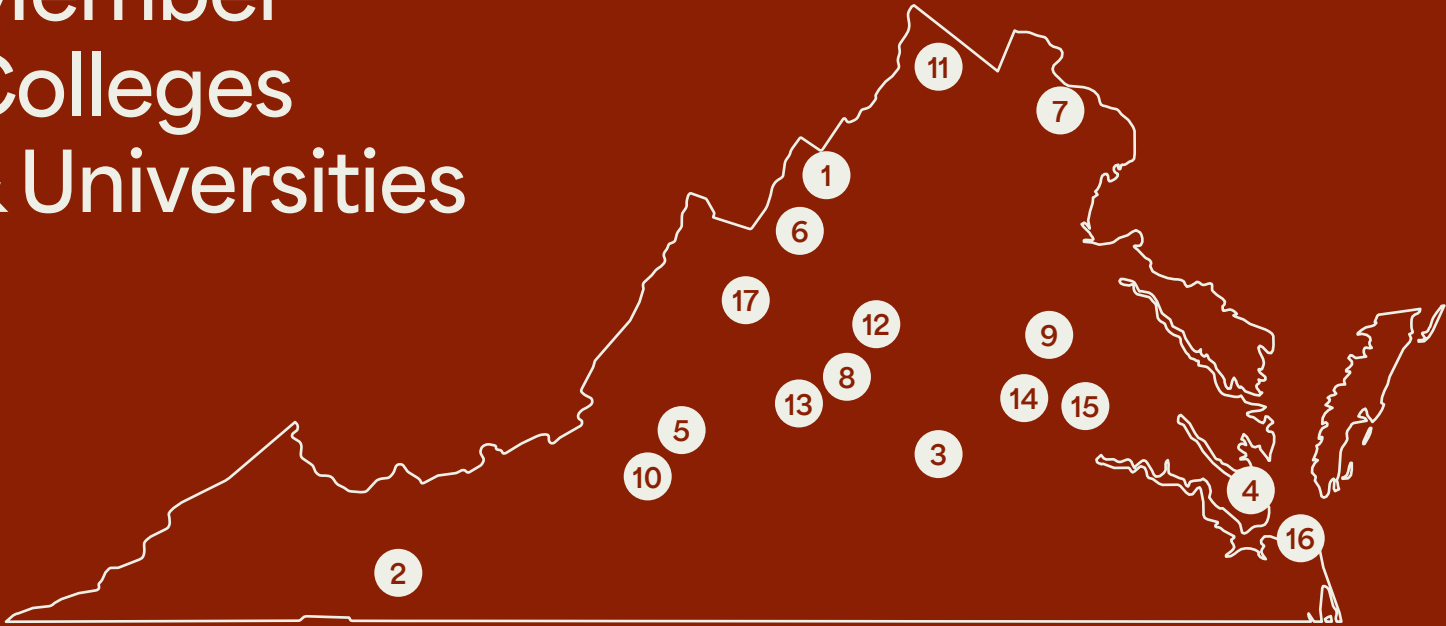
Distributions to VFIC schools since our inception in 1952

\$39M

VFIC Endowment



Member Colleges & Universities



1 Bridgewater College Founded: 1880 Location: Bridgewater, VA President: David W. Bushman bridgewater.edu	7 Marymount University Founded: 1950 Location: Arlington, VA President: Irma Becerra marymount.edu	13 University of Lynchburg Founded: 1903 Location: Lynchburg, VA President: Alison Morrison-Shetlar lynchburg.edu
2 Emory & Henry University Founded: 1836 Location: Emory, VA President: Louise Fincher emoryhenry.edu	8 Randolph College Founded: 1891 Location: Lynchburg, VA President: Sue Ott Rowlands randolphcollege.edu	14 University of Richmond Founded: 1830 Location: Richmond, VA President: Kevin F. Hallock richmond.edu
3 Hampden-Sydney College Founded: 1776 Location: Hampden-Sydney, VA President: John Lawrence Stimpert hsc.edu	9 Randolph-Macon College Founded: 1830 Location: Ashland, VA President: Michael E. Hill rmc.edu	15 Virginia Union University Founded: 1865 Location: Richmond, VA President: Hakim J. Lucas vuu.edu
4 Hampton University Founded: 1868 Location: Hampton, VA President: Darrell K. Williams hamptonu.edu	10 Roanoke College Founded: 1842 Location: Salem, VA President: Frank Shushok, Jr. roanoke.edu	16 Virginia Wesleyan University Founded: 1961 Location: Virginia Beach, VA President: Scott D. Miller vwu.edu
5 Hollins University Founded: 1842 Location: Roanoke, VA President: Mary Dana Hinton hollins.edu	11 Shenandoah University Founded: 1875 Location: Winchester, VA President: Tracy Fitzsimmons su.edu	17 Washington and Lee University Founded: 1749 Location: Lexington, VA President: William C. Dudley wlu.edu
6 Mary Baldwin University Founded: 1842 Location: Staunton, VA President: Todd Telemeco marybaldwin.edu	12 Sweet Briar College Founded: 1901 Location: Sweet Briar, VA President: Mary Pope M. Hutson sbc.edu	

Bill Van Buren

VFIC Chair 2024-2026

What Sets VFIC Schools Apart

Significant attention has been given to the value of higher education over the past year, with questions about the relevance of a college degree and whether students are being taught what to think rather than how to think for themselves. In these times, VFIC schools stand out as excellent examples of quality education. Students learn both critical analytical skills and the importance of civil discourse. They are part of a close-knit community that provides support while also demanding accountability and personal responsibility. Students are guided by faculty and coaches who know them personally and are genuinely invested in their individual goals and paths to success. The mission of these smaller institutions is to educate the whole student and prepare them to graduate fully equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities and workplaces.

Vision: Qualified Students Can Attend a VFIC School

Our vision is that all qualified students can have the opportunity to attend one of the VFIC schools, regardless of their financial situation. Independent colleges and universities are often seen as a haven for the children of wealthy families. Despite this perception, the reality is that more than 40% of VFIC students come from underrepresented or underserved backgrounds. Many of these individuals are first-generation, Pell-eligible, or adult learners, including veterans, seeking to continue their education. The VFIC is dedicated to creating opportunities for students that might otherwise be out of reach, enabling them to pursue productive careers and successful lives.

Research shows that students tend to thrive in close-knit communities where they are known and supported. For this reason, the VFIC has shifted its focus to raising funds for the scholarships and other financial support necessary to provide access to education for these underserved students.

I am grateful to you, our donors, who made a record fundraising year possible in fiscal year 2025. We significantly exceeded our goals and raised a total of \$3.6 million. Thank you for your generous support and confidence in our mission.

To reach our ambitious goal of securing \$20 million in support by June 30, 2027, we need your help. Take time to learn about new initiatives, including the VFIC Presidential Scholars program. Introduce us to other like-minded individuals who see education as a powerful tool for creating opportunity and changing lives.

With your help, we can change the lives of thousands of students. They will enter Virginia's workforce well prepared to lead in their businesses and communities thanks to a VFIC education. This benefits each of us: employers, local communities, and the Commonwealth.

GOAL

\$20M

by June 30, 2027

IMPACT

Establish and sustain a cohort of VFIC Presidential Scholars at each VFIC college and university.



A high-impact, outcomes-driven scholarship and leadership development initiative

The **VFIC Presidential Scholars** program is for academically strong, financially challenged students who have demonstrated leadership potential in their early college careers.

VFIC
PRESIDENTIAL
SCHOLARS



Core Elements:

Comprehensive Support

Renewable financial aid, leadership development training, and academic enrichment to ensure timely graduation and career readiness.

Cohort Model

Cross-institutional cohort promotes a shared identity and purpose.

Leadership and Career Readiness

Opportunities for mentorship, coaching, community service, and career preparation.

Data-Based Outcomes

Student success will be tracked during college and after graduation.



Removing Roadblocks to Graduation

George Y. Birdsong, Birdsong Peanuts

“Just imagine,” begins George Birdsong, CEO of Birdsong Corporation and longtime VFIC leader and financial supporter.

“You’ve successfully completed three years of college, and you’re about to begin your senior year, when the unforeseen happens. A parent gets ill or passes away. The person who pays the bills loses a job. Or, if you’re the one paying for school, your car breaks down, so you can’t get to the job where you earn money to pay your tuition. Where do you turn when the only thing standing between you and your college degree is a few thousand dollars that you don’t have to pay the final bill?”

With seed money from an anonymous donor, the VFIC established the Home Stretch Fund to address this very real crisis. Schools can apply to the VFIC to request support for upper-class students who are making the grade but have hit a financial roadblock that prevents them from graduating. For nearly 30 years, Birdsong and his family—through the channel of Birdsong Peanuts—have generously supported the VFIC, hoping that their gifts would one day make a substantial difference in the lives of students across Virginia. Today, their fund totals \$500,000, and has been endowed as the Birdsong Home Stretch Fund.

“Our family has always been committed to supporting education,” says Birdsong, “and we’re especially eager to support VFIC schools. I attended Washington and Lee University. Members of our family are graduates of 11 schools in the consortium, including Randolph-Macon, Sweet Briar, Hollins, and Randolph-Macon Woman’s College (now Randolph). We have a shared vision that education benefits everyone. And for that reason, we’re committed to supporting the VFIC. Establishing the Home Stretch Fund is one way we can do that.”

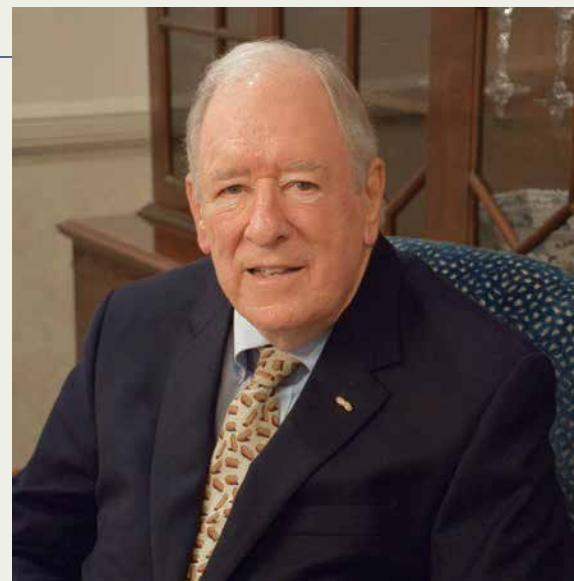
What makes the VFIC schools and independent education so important?

“At VFIC schools,” says Birdsong, “students can take advantage of smaller class size and personal relationships with faculty. They also have more opportunities to play sports and take on leadership roles in extracurricular activities. And these schools are affordable. For the right student, VFIC schools are the perfect match and the preferred choice for their college education. We’re proud to support this mission.”

“Where do you turn when the only thing standing between you and your college degree is a few thousand dollars that you don’t have to pay the final bill?”

PHOTO BY VIRGINIA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

THE HOME STRETCH FUND



Crossing the Finish Line

Brooklynn Greenwade, Shenandoah University

“When I completed an associate’s degree and my family mentioned Shenandoah University as a possible next stop, I started looking at different programs there,” says Brooklynn Greenwade, a biology major graduating in December ’25. “Their pharmacy early assurance pathway got my attention because I wanted to become a pharmacist. My goal is to help people, so I thought, ‘That’s it!’”

Brooklynn excelled, earning a 3.9 GPA. But her life changed about a year ago.

“Last December, I was shocked to learn that my mother had been diagnosed with cancer. Despite her trying to shield me from the pain of knowing, I found out, and we hugged each other and cried.”

Brooklynn completed her spring semester, and during that time, her mother underwent radiation and chemotherapy, with all the associated challenges and expenses. Over the summer, as she was lining up the financing to pay for her final semester, Brooklynn discovered that her mother’s parent loan application had been declined.

“I was devastated,” says Brooklynn. “I didn’t know what to do. I called the school to see if someone there could help me find the money I needed to pay for my final semester of school. I didn’t have the resources to finish.”

Without funding, Brooklynn was preparing to find a job, sit out a semester, and save money. On top of that,

she’d have to figure out how to take out another loan or get on a payment plan. But that didn’t happen. In late July, Shenandoah’s financial aid director emailed Brooklynn: “I need to talk to you.”

“I was like, ‘Oh Lord, what now?’” says Brooklynn. “I was a little scared. But when I spoke with her, she told me I had received money from the VFIC’s Home Stretch Fund, and that would cover my bill. I was shocked, happy, sad. I was feeling all these emotions. When she ended the call, I started crying. I couldn’t believe it.”

Thanks to the Home Stretch Fund, Brooklynn is on schedule to complete her degree this semester.

“When I graduate in December, I’d like to go to Shenandoah’s School of Pharmacy,” says Brooklynn. “And I’d like to focus on oncology. I’ve always wanted to help others, and my experience has made me want to do that more than ever. I want to repay kindness with kindness.”



PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE MILLER, SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY

The *Place* I Ought to Be

Evan Old, Hampden-Sydney College

“In high school, I thought about the sort of experience I wanted to have in college,” says Evan Old, a Hampden-Sydney College (H-SC) senior who will graduate in spring 2026 with a double major in biochemistry and philosophy. “A couple of larger flagship state schools were on my radar, but I went to a small high school in Virginia Beach and enjoyed the culture we had there. Making the decision to attend Hampden-Sydney was easy.”

Evan’s goal was to become a physician. Before enrolling, he met with Professor Kristian Hargadon (’01), director of the pre-med committee, to talk about guaranteed admissions programs established with local medical schools.

“Even before I arrived on campus,” says Evan, “Hampden-Sydney was doing everything it could to help me succeed. Early on, faculty were willing to take me under their wing and help me acclimate. And on top of that, older students who themselves took time to adjust were committed to making sure incoming students would thrive and achieve academic excellence.”

“Students select us,” says Dr. Marc Hight, Thompson Professor of Philosophy, “because they want a small, high-touch liberal arts environment. Because of our unique offering, we have a student body that’s motivated and committed to both an academic culture and a culture of brotherhood. It’s a learning community where students help one another. We get our fair share of top students, but what makes our high-touch mentoring environment truly special is the way our program nurtures the intellectual growth of students who may not be at the top of their class.”

One experience Evan considers enormously valuable is the opportunity to participate in undergraduate research. At large institutions, research labs are typically staffed by graduate students. At Hampden-Sydney, professors recruit undergraduate students they know personally to work with them in their labs.

“A couple of professors approached me,” says Evan, “and the timing couldn’t have been more perfect. I was trying to decide whether to pursue an M.D. or a Ph.D., and having research experience was the only way for me to differentiate my two interests.”

Dr. Michael Wolyniak, McGavacks Professor of Biology and Director of Undergraduate Research, attributes much of the success of H-SC’s research program to the personal relationships faculty have with their students. Students grow as scholars, and working side by side with a professor helps them develop valuable soft skills that lead to success regardless of what they choose to do once they graduate.

“We want to give our students the best advantages possible when they apply for jobs, graduate schools, professional schools... wherever their path leads.”

The value of personal relationships also comes into play when finding outside research opportunities. Dr. Wolyniak taps into the H-SC network to find alumni in STEM fields with access to a lab or other opportunities. A formal internship program or financial resources to support students is not required; the school can provide that.

“We just need alumni who are willing to give their time to actually work with a student,” says Dr. Wolyniak.

“I’ve done two clinical research internships at Mayo Clinic. I got those connections through an alumnus who was willing to take me on—twice,” says Evan. “The experience gave me an opportunity to work not just with a Hampden-Sydney alum and the Mayo Clinic, but also with a wide array of medical specialists. I got to explore neurosurgery, some cardiology, and a bit of hepatology—all interesting fields of medicine. And that was a real blessing.”

As Evan reflects on his time at Hampden-Sydney and the opportunities the school and faculty afforded him, he



“Early on, faculty were willing to take me under their wing and help me acclimate.”

knows he made the right decision. He is also clear about his responsibility as a graduate.

“Thinking back on my decision to attend, I realize those older students and engaged professors were the ones who made the connection for me,” says Evan. “Now, it’s my turn to carry that torch for the younger men at the school and to be an alumnus quick to serve others as they have served me.”



PHOTOS BY HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE

The Human Connection

Excellence in Teaching

Are VFIC schools and their liberal arts traditions unique? Why would students attend a VFIC school rather than a larger public institution that seems to have more to offer?

According to Edward L. Ayers, president emeritus at the University of Richmond and acclaimed historian, the VFIC advantage is intangible: “Our schools provide the human connection.”

“Education, despite the noisy headlines, is quiet, hidden, behind closed classroom doors, in hushed libraries, or labs intent with close attention,” says Ayers. “Often, the most powerful education comes from a single conversation that no one else hears. VFIC colleges have been built and sustained to create those conversations. Being smaller makes us larger in the ways that count in students’ lives.”

There may be no better testament to this strength of connection than The Harris Family Faculty Awards, which were generously created through endowments by the Harris family. These awards recognize faculty members “whose professional history reflects a strong, clear, and abiding commitment to excellence in classroom teaching within the undergraduate liberal arts and sciences.”

The selection process is rigorous. For each of the three distinct Harris awards, VFIC schools nominate one faculty member. Applications consist of a letter of recommendation from the school’s chief academic officer, as well as letters of support. Nominees must also submit personal statements. Winners are chosen based on their impact on student learning and development, as well as their teaching philosophy.

On November 7, 2024, six faculty members were recognized at the VFIC’s annual fall luncheon for their dedication to higher education and student success. Each received a stipend to support their scholarly research and professional development.



2024 Harris Family Faculty Award Recipients

The Libby and Hiter Harris Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching

Elizabeth Malcolm, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science,
Virginia Wesleyan University

Alison Ridley, Ph.D.

Professor of Spanish,
Hollins University

Harris Rising Star Award

Brett Frye, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biology,
Emory & Henry University

Kimberly Garza, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Public Health Studies,
Roanoke College

Harris Award for Excellence in Instructional Technology

Sara Hanson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Marketing,
University of Richmond

Wendy Traynor

Instructor of Mathematics,
Emory & Henry University

The Discipline of Being Ethical

Life is about making choices, many of which have ethical implications. Choosing well requires following a moral compass. Following that compass requires having one.

The VFIC Applied Ethics Bowl, established in 1997, grew out of the belief that our colleges and universities have a responsibility to help students develop an ethical framework for making decisions.

“If VFIC schools are serious about their mission to educate tomorrow’s citizen leaders—and they are—they must provide students with opportunities to examine ideas, explore ethical nuance, and exercise discernment when making decisions about right and wrong, good and bad,” says Locke Ogens, president of the VFIC. “In the end, the decisions students make affect not only them, their friends and family, but also their coworkers and communities.”

The Applied Ethics Bowl is a premier event where student teams from each of our 17 member colleges present arguments based on case studies that address contemporary ethics-based subjects. These “Ethics and” topics have varied over the years to include subjects such as politics, healthcare, the environment, higher education, and sports, to name a few. Teams prepare for several months before the event, learning to navigate complex moral dilemmas that foster critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and public speaking.

Business leaders serve as judges and provide participants with valuable feedback. Students also have the opportunity to network over lunch with the judges and ask questions about career paths.

Thanks to lead sponsor TowneBank and others, all costs for participating students are covered. The result? Students benefit from a rigorous educational experience that complements in-class instruction and instills cognitive skills that last a lifetime.



The 2025 Applied Ethics Bowl topic was “Ethics and Artificial Intelligence.” The University of Richmond won the championship. The event, presented by TowneBank, was held at the University of Richmond.

NEXT EVENT

2026 Applied Ethics Bowl

University of Richmond
Friday, February 13, 2026
Ethics and Business

Sentara Health and the VFIC Partner to Strengthen Virginia's Healthcare Workforce

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

The healthcare industry faces ongoing challenges. A 2021 Mercer study projects a nationwide shortfall of 3.2 million healthcare professionals by 2026, with demand still rising.

Higher education and training aim to address staffing shortages; however, many talented individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, lack the financial means to take advantage of these opportunities. Without education and opportunities today, access to care declines tomorrow.

Sentara Health is committed to addressing workforce gaps through strategic investments and partnerships across the Commonwealth. By collaborating with organizations such as the VFIC, Sentara is exploring innovative ways to address healthcare needs and support students in developing into healthcare professionals. Through investments in people, education, and opportunities, Sentara is creating a sustainable pipeline of qualified healthcare professionals ready to serve Virginia's communities.

"Sentara's partnerships with educational institutions aim to inspire more students to enter healthcare and healthcare-related fields of study and provide stronger support along their educational journeys," says Iris Lundy, Sentara's VP of health impact and engagement. "Our goal is to help remove financial barriers for students and empower them to further their education with a focus on healthcare."

Sentara is taking a deliberate and strategic approach to their partnership to address the healthcare needs of the community. Financial support, along with training and mentoring opportunities, will help ensure a strong healthcare workforce capable of meeting the growing needs of the community.



"Our relationship with Sentara," says Locke Ogens, president of the VFIC, "is based on leveraging our platform to support Sentara's focus on healthy communities by helping to meet their workforce needs. Sentara is focused on building a diverse, highly skilled workforce. VFIC schools can help provide the workforce they need."

There is more to the relationship than just improvements in medical care and greater access to it in communities. Along with growing the base of medical professionals and healthcare administrators, this partnership helps strengthen the economic foundation of communities across Virginia. That's transformative economic health.

"Our hope is that the collaboration between Sentara and VFIC schools will be able to benefit from internships, clinical placements, and other opportunities that will lead them to careers at Sentara," says Ogens. "Our vision is long-term, and it's scalable."

Committed to Healing People at Home

Amiyah McCoy, Mary Baldwin University

"My Granny Lena was my inspiration when I was deciding what to study in college," says Amiyah McCoy, a 2025 graduate of Mary Baldwin University and Sentara scholarship recipient. "When I was just 13, her oldest daughter—my aunt—suffered a heart attack at home, several miles from the nearest hospital. Despite the paramedic's best efforts, she didn't survive. The event was heart-wrenching for everyone, especially my grandmother, who has struggled to trust the medical system ever since. It opened my eyes to a profound need in rural communities."

Amiyah found her way to Mary Baldwin "thanks to" the disruption caused by COVID at the end of the 8th grade. She was 14. "The thought of online high school didn't appeal to me at all," says Amiyah. Her mother enrolled her in the Program for the Exceptionally Gifted (PEG) at Mary Baldwin, a program where younger students can start their undergraduate experience early.

Amiyah is currently earning her master's degree at Mary Baldwin to become a physician assistant (PA). At the same time, she's working at Raphine Medical Associates. There, she helps serve the acute care needs of long-haul truck drivers as well as people from Rockbridge and Augusta counties.

"The loss of my aunt made me realize that access to healthcare is not just about availability," says Amiyah.

"It's about building trust, making a connection, and meeting each patient where they are. Expanding healthcare access goes beyond simply placing clinics in underserved areas. It's about helping people like my Granny Lena change their perception of medicine by making them feel comfortable seeking care. For me, that means being a person, not just a provider."

That's why making healthcare more approachable and accessible has become Amiyah's life's mission. She feels that becoming a PA is the first step toward bringing that mission to life. PAs complement physicians and other healthcare workers to make care accessible to more people, especially in medically underserved rural areas.



"More than ever, rural communities like mine need primary care providers who are not just willing but eager to practice," says Amiyah. "Becoming a PA will allow me to make sure patients receive the care they deserve. When I return home as a PA, I want to be one of the providers that ensures that people like my Granny Lena—and all the many others in my community—are not just seen, but heard, counted, and cared for."

PHOTOS BY MARY BALDWIN UNIVERSITY

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Building *on* Momentum

There are many good reasons to invest in the VFIC

Convenient, Efficient Platform

One gift impacts 17 schools and 35,000 students while endowed operations means 100% of donations go directly to schools for student support.

Access for Qualified Students

VFIC schools enroll a higher proportion of Pell students than public institutions, creating positive ripple effects that extend from first-generation graduates to their families and communities.

Pipeline of Talent

VFIC schools' traditional liberal arts education prepares students for meaningful life at work while curricula reflect market demands in their region.

Economic Health of the Commonwealth

Over 70% of VFIC graduates stay in Virginia, contributing directly to the local economy and making a significant positive economic impact, particularly in rural communities.

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Learn more at vfc.org



