



VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR INDEPENDENT COLLEGES · SPRING 2025 · VOL 23 ISSUE 1

Oh, Shenandoah! The Chimes of Creativity and Compassion

As Virginia's premier location for collaborative performing arts education, the Shenandoah Conservatory at Shenandoah University knows how to create harmony in more ways than one. Through a Suzuki tone-chime choir called the NW Works Chimers, a new type of harmony resonates—one that brings together adult musicians with intellectual disabilities and SU's student volunteers.

"NW Works Chimers is a campus and community partnership between NW Works and the Shenandoah University Music Therapy program," says Fredrica Dooley-Brown, adjunct assistant professor and director of the NW Works Chimers. "Our partnership was established in 2012, but the Chimers have been part of the Winchester community for thirty years. In fact, some of the Chimers in the choir have been with the group the entire time."

This unique musical therapy program consists of twenty-three Chimers, ranging in age from twenty to seventy. As many as twenty-five student volunteers work with them. Together, they create a fusion of beats, playing everything from rock and funk to country and rhythm and blues. Their performances fill the 465-seat Armstrong Concert Hall.

"A lot of our Chimers request their own songs," says Dooley-Brown, "and that's the result of our encouraging them to take ownership of the musical experience. That means

stepping into leadership roles, conducting and supporting each other during rehearsals, and selecting songs that are meaningful to them. This sense of autonomy and self-expression fosters confidence, allowing each Chimer to build relationships not just with their caregivers and SU students but also with the broader community."

Shenandoah's music therapy program has always made it a point to take all comers. But there have been growing pains. Years ago, the program had to secure a grant to buy additional chimes so that everyone could be involved. Today, the program is at capacity; there's even a waiting list. On top of that, the Chimers and volunteers are outgrowing their rehearsal space.

"The Chimers program perfectly embodies Shenandoah's mission to foster creative, ethical, and compassionate leaders," says Dooley-Brown. "We know that's happening because the students who volunteer are passionate about making a difference through music. Their experience is transformative, both for them and the Chimers."

"Our students develop empathy, adaptability, and a deeper understanding of inclusivity through music," Dooley-Brown adds. "Above all, perhaps, they truly enjoy the sense of harmony they experience by serving others and accepting people for who they are."

VFIC Scholarship Program

VFIC scholarships help our seventeen member institutions enroll students who would not otherwise consider independent higher education, and the scholarships help keep them in school until graduating with a degree.

Since 2000, the VFIC has awarded nearly 15,000 scholarships, many to students who are underrepresented and underserved, giving them an opportunity to chart a successful future. We are grateful to the following donors who provided scholarship support in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

*Scholarships are listed in order of generosity.
Fully endowed scholarships are noted in bold.*

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· VFIC STUDENT SPOTLIGHT ·

The Educational Pathway for Emory & Henry Senior Kylie Blankenship



“This May, I’ll be the second person from both sides of my family to graduate college,” says Kylie Blankenship, a history major/English minor at Emory & Henry University. “And in August, I’m heading to Loyola University in Chicago to pursue my master’s in history. I’ve had an incredible educational experience.”

One of eleven grandchildren from a large family in Grundy, Virginia, Kylie knew when she graduated high school that she’d be funding her own education if she wanted to attend college. Meeting that challenge required careful planning, determination, and diligence. To begin her journey, she decided to attend Southwest Virginia Community College (SVCC).

“After completing general education courses at SVCC, I transferred into Emory & Henry thanks to a Bonner Scholarship that made the school meet my budget,” says Kylie.

“While my initial decision was based on affordability, I fell in love with the school instantly. Being from Appalachia, I felt like Emory & Henry was home for me, and I’ve been able to thrive – academically and socially.”

As a history major, Kylie has had the opportunity to learn history from diverse sources. She studied abroad in Germany and England. With a minor in English literature, she has taken courses that strengthen her interdisciplinary experience. She has also had the opportunity to volunteer with the Historical Society of Washington County and the William King Museum of Art—both in Abingdon, Virginia—through the Bonner Scholarship.

“I’ve been gifted with great opportunities and resources thanks to the faculty at Emory & Henry, especially in the history department,” says Kylie. “It’s a small department and personal, and I love that. But it’s diverse in perspective and academically rigorous.”

“Emory & Henry truly feels like a community,” says Kylie. “I’m in a small town, on a small campus, and it has made a big difference in my life. The experiences and the spirit of this place will travel with me when I move to Chicago in the fall to begin my master’s. It’s who I am.”



Randolph-Macon College Graduation

The VFIC Home Stretch Fund

VFIC scholarships help bridge the gap between the cost of independent college and the sum of federal Pell grants and Virginia Tuition Assistance Grants. By bridging this gap, we provide students who could not otherwise afford to attend college with access to higher education.

Still, to make ends meet, many students need to take out loans and get jobs. Balancing all of these demands can be extremely stressful and divert a student's attention from academics. Over the course of four years, circumstances can change. A single, unexpected set-back—a car breakdown, an ailing parent—can cause a student's account to be put on financial hold on the eve of graduation. In the worst-case scenario, a student is forced to leave school with debt and no degree.

To address this problem, an anonymous VFIC donor seeded the "Home Stretch Fund." 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. These one-time grants range from \$250 to \$10,000 and allow deserving students to cross the finish line to a degree. A relatively small grant to bridge a Home Stretch crisis can have an enormous impact on the lives of students and their families.

These student grants also improve schools' graduation rates. The long-term sustainability of a school depends on keeping its students enrolled and thriving. Home Stretch dollars directly and positively address this challenge. One particular Home Stretch recipient expresses the gratitude of all those who receive this grant:

— “ —

"Thank you so much for your generous donation to the VFIC Home Stretch Fund. Because of you, I will be able to accomplish my lifelong goal of finishing college. I will be the first person in my family to do so. This will allow me to make a better life for myself and my family and give more back to my community through my work. I couldn't do it without you, and I am truly and sincerely grateful. Thank you!"

— ” —

VFIC Schools & the Gap in Virginia's Healthcare Workforce



Marymount University Nursing Program

Virginia is experiencing a critical shortage of healthcare professionals in the fields of nursing, primary care, and behavioral health according to the 2023 study conducted by the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority. This shortage affects a diverse range of healthcare settings, further challenging providers to deliver adequate care for residents in need. The study notes that 102 of Virginia's 133 counties are federally designated as Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas.

VFIC schools are addressing this healthcare workforce gap to help ensure more Virginians have access to essential services, particularly in primary care and behavioral health. In 2024, 38 percent of degrees granted by VFIC schools were in the high demand areas of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and healthcare.

Ninety-four percent of VFIC schools offer pre-health, pre-med, and/or nursing degrees and certificates. The following are just a few examples of how VFIC schools are addressing the healthcare professions gap.

- Emory & Henry University offers two paths to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), contributing to the regional healthcare sector of Southwest Virginia and Middle Appalachia: pre-licensure and an online BSN completion program for licensed registered nurses.

- Marymount University's BSN program remains a standout offering, tied for Number 1 among all Virginia private institutions and Number 4 among colleges and universities in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia region.
- In collaboration with student counseling services, Marymount University has a free counseling clinic open to students, staff, and faculty, as well as to the general public, to address the growing mental health needs of the wider community.
- Randolph-Macon College established a master's in physician assistant studies and graduated 22 students in a historic December 2024 ceremony.
- Virginia Wesleyan University offers a joint BSN program with Sentara College of Health Sciences. This program allows students to complete their general education and prerequisite classes at VWU and then complete the BSN requirements at Sentara.

VFIC schools are committed to innovation and leadership when educating students in science and health professions, so our graduates complete their studies with highly marketable degrees. Many of these students will enter graduate programs preparing them for their future careers as healthcare professionals, helping to reduce the healthcare workforce shortage gap.

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University of Richmond Wins 2025 Applied Ethics Bowl

The University of Richmond won the 2025 VFIC Applied Ethics Bowl competition held February 7 on the University of Richmond's campus. Sixteen student teams from the VFIC's consortium of independent colleges and universities located across the Commonwealth deliberated over four rounds of case studies. The ethical dilemma? Artificial intelligence.

"The Applied Ethics Bowl exemplifies the distinctive education that VFIC schools provide," says Locke Ogens, president of the VFIC. "With small classes led by dedicated faculty, students sharpen their critical thinking skills, engage in meaningful civil discourse, and cultivate a strong ethical foundation for decision-making."

University of Richmond's student team won the championship and the Batten Trophy with a victory over Washington and Lee University in the final round. UR's five-student team, all seniors, was composed of Brett Barnes, Ashton Bear, Tommy Bennett, Jonathan Garner, and Caleb Silvergleid.



2025 Applied Ethics Bowl University of Richmond Champion Team

Save the Date

2026 Applied Ethics Bowl
University of Richmond
Friday, February 13, 2026

Faculty coordinator Brannon McDaniel, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy, led the team.

The championship round of the bowl took place at the reception on Friday evening. As part of this closing event, the VFIC celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Applied Ethics Bowl and honored past board chairs who served since the inception of the event. Among those honored were Nancy Howell Agee, George Y. Birdsong, James L. Cherry, G.S. "Sandy" Fitzhugh, Barry J. Fitzpatrick, Gary R. Tompson,

Thomas R. Goode, H. Hiter Harris III, C.T. Hill, Senator Mark R. Warner, Thurston R. Moore, Esq., Jeremiah J. Sheehan, William R. Van Buren III, Esq., and Robert W. Woltz, Jr.

In addition to the competitive portion of the Applied Ethics Bowl, the VFIC held a networking luncheon and reception. During this time, corporate leaders from various industries and sectors hosted tables to engage students in conversation about careers and networking.

"The Applied Ethics Bowl truly captures the unique strength of the liberal arts education," says Ogens. "As a result of their education and the experiential opportunities it provides, our students graduate not only prepared to excel in their careers but also to serve as principled leaders in their communities across the Commonwealth."

THE VFIC EXTENDS SPECIAL THANKS TO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY APPLIED ETHICS BOWL EVENT SPONSORS

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Mission

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

Vision

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



VFIC Annual Fund

The VFIC seeks to ensure that the personalized educational experience of independent colleges in Virginia remains an affordable choice for tomorrow's citizen leaders. Without VFIC funds, the available pool of financial aid would shrink, and many of our more than 34,000 students would not be able to attend the VFIC college of their choice.

If you have already given to the 2024–2025 Annual Fund, thank you. If not, please consider joining the Honor Roll of Donors by fiscal year-end, June 30. Your support provides the resources students need to achieve their goals and lead lives of service and distinction.

The Honor Roll of Donors recognizes commitments at the following levels:

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Make your gift to the VFIC today!

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