

# STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY 2025



Dear Friends,

The 2025 State of the University is presented in a new format this year—reflecting the fact that we are no longer the University we once were. Over the past decade, Virginia Wesleyan has experienced a profound and purposeful transformation—one that touches nearly every aspect of our institution.

Yet amid that change, our core values remain unwavering: innovation, growth, achievement, community and environmental stewardship.

In the pages that follow, you'll find a snapshot of a remarkable year—one shaped by the hard work and dedication of our trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and partners. You'll also catch a glimpse of what excites us most as we chart the bold, new course ahead.



Thank you for supporting our University as we strive to provide a practical, well-rounded, thought-provoking, and exceptionally empowering educational experience for every student we serve.

Sincerely,

Scott D. Miller, Ph.D.  
President

# WHO WE ARE

While we have many reasons to be proud of our enrollment, our endowment, and our academic outlook, those numbers only tell one part of our story.

Anyone who has ever learned, lectured, or even visited Virginia Wesleyan University knows what really makes our story special are the amazing people who form our VWU community.

## 2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

### Sentara College of Health Sciences Joins VWU

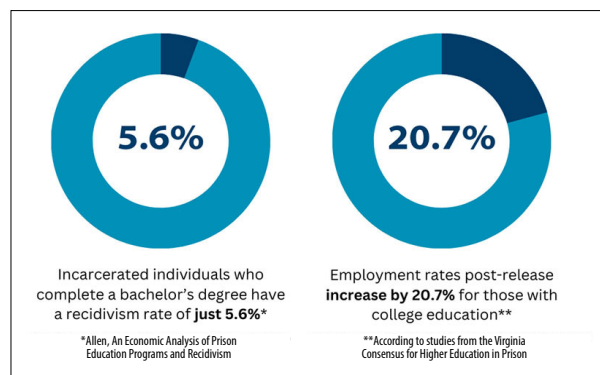
VWU announced Sentara College of Health Sciences of Virginia Wesleyan University. This integration builds upon a strong history of collaboration between Sentara College of Health Sciences and VWU on health-related academic programs, student wellness services and joint Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree offerings.

This bold step reflects our shared commitment to addressing critical healthcare workforce needs while advancing access to high-quality education. By uniting Sentara's rich legacy of healthcare excellence with Virginia Wesleyan's academic infrastructure and student-centered mission, we are creating a powerful model for the future of health sciences education in Coastal Virginia and beyond.



### Trailblazing Education Program for Incarcerated Virginians

In January, VWU became the first and only four-year institution in Virginia to create a degree-earning program for people living behind prison walls. Launched in partnership with the Urban League of Hampton Roads and the Virginia Department of Corrections, and supported by federal funding spearheaded by U.S. Representative Bobby Scott, this initiative seeks to reduce recidivism in Virginia by providing incarcerated people with educational opportunities that can help prepare them to earn jobs and become valued employees upon release. Investing in these learners whom society often overlooks can have life-changing benefits: research finds expanding general postsecondary education in correctional facilities reduces recidivism rates by over 60%.



## 2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

### Virginia MOCA at VWU Nears Completion

In August 2024, VWU broke ground on the new state-of-the-art Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (Virginia MOCA) at VWU, which will be housed on campus and serve as both a public museum and an immersive classroom experience for VWU students.

One year later, the project is well on its way to completion, and our entire arts-loving community is excited to witness the progress as we approach the museum's projected opening date of 2026.



### New Carnegie Classification, VWU in a Rare Class

In the newly updated 2025 Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, Virginia Wesleyan was classified as a National Arts and Sciences institution, a distinction awarded to only 6 percent of higher education institutions in the nation. VWU also earned a Higher Access distinction for enrolling more Pell Grant recipients and students from underrepresented populations than would be expected based on the demographics of the region we serve.



*"Education opens doors, not just to knowledge but to a better life. We take great pride in serving students who may be the first in their families to attend college and in giving them the tools, resources, and mentorship needed to thrive academically and professionally."*

— VWU President Dr. Scott D. Miller

### Raising Awareness of Sacred Spaces on Campus

The Robert Nusbaum Center of VWU is renowned for hosting nonpartisan and deeply reflective investigations of the most pressing issues facing our global society. In October, the Center offered a tour of "sacred spaces" on Virginia Wesleyan's campus that serve as touchstones for reflection, remembrance, and inspiration, including Beech Grove, the Statue of John Wesley, the Domestic Violence Wall, and the Peace Garden. Led by several collaborating VWU faculty, the tour explored many complex questions including the impact of slavery, civil rights, and the AIDS crisis on the history of the University, as well as the surprising controversy that a grove of campus trees can create.



## 2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

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*VWU delegation meeting with Virginia State Senator Angelia Williams-Graves*

### Encouraging Legislators to Increase Academic Access

In February, President Miller led a contingent of Virginia Wesleyan students to the Virginia State Capitol for Student Advocacy Day, an annual event organized by the Council for Independent Colleges in Virginia (CICV). The initiative provides students with an opportunity to meet with lawmakers and express their support for the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG) program, which has helped make college more affordable for over 185,000 Virginians for more than 50 years. President Miller also joined Chris Peace, President of Virginia Private Colleges; Tracy Fitzsimmons, President of Shenandoah University; and Darrell Williams, President of Hampton University to advocate for continued support of VTAG.

### Recognized as a Top College

Virginia Wesleyan University was once again named one of the nation's best institutions for undergraduates to earn their college degree by The Princeton Review, which selected VWU for inclusion in The Best 390 Colleges: 2025 Edition and featured the University in the Mid-Atlantic category of its 2025 Best Colleges: Region by Region. Only about 15 percent of America's four-year colleges are profiled in the book, which is one of The Princeton Review's most popular publications.



# UNIVERSITY UPDATES

New programs, new sports, new scholarships, and even new leadership — with so many big changes happening at VWU, you might need a scorecard to keep track of all the ways our institution is evolving to serve the needs of tomorrow's learners.

## 2024-2025 ACADEMIC AND PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

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### A New Academic Structure Empowers VWU Leadership for the Future

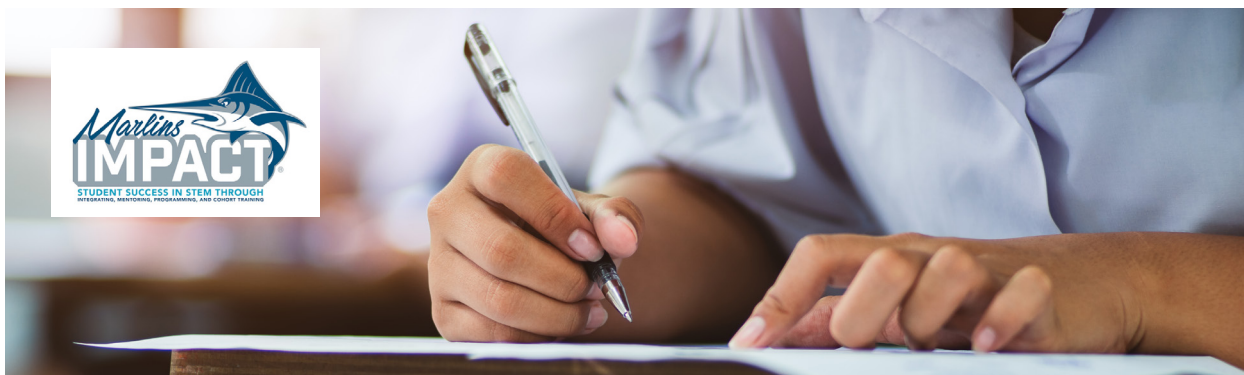
This year, Dr. Deirdre Gonsalves-Jackson transitioned from the role of Vice President for VWU Global Campus to serving in the new role of Provost and Vice President. Under her leadership, the Division of VWU Global Campus has greatly expanded to serve over 3,500 learners. Her dedication to academic excellence and strategic partnerships makes her an ideal leader, and in this new role she will continue to be instrumental in shaping the future of Virginia Wesleyan University.



Proof of her strategic wisdom can be seen in her approved recommendations to fill vacant or revised academic leadership positions in the upcoming academic year, including:

- Dr. Loren Marquez, previously Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, will now serve as Associate Provost.
- Dr. Victor Townsend, Kenneth R. Perry Dean of the Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, will now serve as Assistant Provost.
- Dr. Drian Glyde, Assistant Professor of Management, Business and Economics, will now also serve as Dean of VWU Global Campus.
- Dr. Soraya Bartol, Professor of Marine Biology, will now also serve as the Kenneth R. Perry Dean of the Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences.
- Dr. William J. McConnell, Batten Associate Professor of Education and Director of Education Programs, will now also serve as Dean of the D. Henry Watts School of Professional Studies.
- Dr. Maynard Schaus, Professor of Biology and Environmental Science, will now also serve as Director of Academic Effectiveness and Accreditation.
- Lisa Geiger, Instructional Technologist, will also serve as Director of Continuing Education.





### NSF Grant Helps VWU Students Make a Bigger IMPACT

In November, VWU was awarded nearly \$2 million in grant funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) to fund the Marlins IMPACT Scholarship Program, a new initiative providing substantial financial and academic support to low-income students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The program will provide eligible students with \$11,000 per academic year, for a total of \$44,000 over four years, to help cover tuition and related expenses in addition to any other financial aid they may receive.

*“Receiving this scholarship allowed me to build meaningful connections with peers and professors across various STEM fields. This supportive community provided me the confidence to explore diverse subjects [and] ultimately shaped my career path, which now involves working in water chemistry at the Newport News Shipyard alongside the U.S. Navy.”*

— VWU alumna Alexandra “Allie” Ghazaleh ‘18, who was selected for this program in 2018 when the federal grant was last issued.

### Bridging Psychology and Workplace Behavior: Introducing a New Graduate Degree that Delivers Real-World Impact



Virginia Wesleyan continues to expand its graduate offerings with the introduction of a Master of Arts in Applied Psychology, a fully online, 30-credit-hour degree program that prepares students for impactful careers in human resources, behavior analysis, marketing research and more. With a focus on real-world applications of psychology in the workplace, this program is designed both for aspiring psychologists and working professionals in nonprofit organizations, corporate human resources and government agencies who seek to apply psychological principles in organizational settings.

## 2024-2025 ACADEMIC AND PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

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### **“The Library of the Future” Nears Completion**

The reinvention of VWU’s H.C. Hofheimer II Library as a state-of-the-art learning hub is almost finished. Now transformed into The Athenaeum in Hofheimer Library, the multi-functional space will redefine the role of a university library. By expanding far beyond the classic must-haves like books and study areas to now include interactive and collaborative learning resources, The Athenaeum will be VWU’s pulse of academic enrichment and professional development. Construction started in March 2025 and is expected to be completed before the 2025-2026 academic year begins.



### **Flags Will Fly in Newest Athletic Program**

In 2026, VWU will officially add its 26th athletic program: Women’s Flag Football. The fast-growing sport has exploded in popularity this decade with over 20 million women playing the sport in more than 100 countries worldwide. That includes around 500,000 girls under age 17 in the U.S., which is a 63 percent increase from the number who were playing in 2019.

# GIVING BACK

The tremendous generosity of our VWU community is a powerful tool for change that extends in all directions. Just as our donors continually seek new ways to enhance the VWU experience for our students and staff, our university is always finding new ways to partner with and support residents and visitors in the greater Virginia Beach region.

## 2024-2025 PHILANTHROPY HIGHLIGHTS

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### Remembering D. Henry Watts

In March, Virginia Wesleyan University mourned the loss of one of our most esteemed benefactors, Dr. D. Henry Watts, Trustee Emeritus, who passed away at the age of 94. He and his wife, Eleanor, who passed away in 2024, were familiar faces courtside and in the stands at VWU, always cheering on the Marlins and championing the student-athlete experience. A prominent civic leader, generous donor and unwavering advocate for higher education, Henry Watts served on the VWU Board of Trustees since 1989, becoming one of the most influential leaders in the university's history. Together, the Watts family leaves a profound legacy of generosity and leadership that has shaped VWU's past, present and future.



### Board of Trustees Adds Three New Voices

With a watchful eye on the economic, healthcare, and energy needs that affect all Virginians, VWU's Board of Trustees proudly welcomed three new members who will help guide our future educational and operational decisions. Jeffrey S. Heller brings a wealth of expertise in marketing, sales, and operations to the university. Prior to his retirement from Norfolk Southern Corporation, Heller served as Vice President for Intermodal and Automotive, where he was responsible for more than \$4 billion in revenue. Becky Sawyer is Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer for Sentara Health and currently serves as a board member for the Virginia Business Higher Education Council. Dr. William L. "Bill" Murray is Senior Vice President-Corporate Affairs & Communications at Dominion Energy and previously served as Vice President-Policy at the Virginia Hospital Association. We are grateful for their collective wisdom and leadership.





## 2024-2025 PHILANTHROPY HIGHLIGHTS

### Honors Village Residence Hall Renamed

"Building 3" in the six-building Honors Village located on campus was renamed Anne B. Shumadine Hall in honor of the late Hampton Roads business leader who was instrumental in designing the academic and business model of VWU's prestigious Batten Honors College.



Anne B. Shumadine



Jane Batten and David Kaufman, long-time friends of VWU and Bobby Levin, hold a Levin original at the kickoff celebration for the Bobby Levin Art Exhibition and Scholarship at DeFord Manor

### New Art Therapy Scholarship Established

The Bobby Levin Art Exhibition and Scholarship will support qualifying VWU juniors and seniors pursuing combined coursework in studio art and psychology required for admission to accredited master's programs in Art Therapy. Levin was a longtime Hampton Roads "friend to many," as well as a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist who found the healing power of art therapy during his own battle with cancer. Levin Scholars

will curate exhibitions featuring works created by individuals who are using art therapy to navigate pain, trauma, and other challenges. Thanks to VWU's extensive community partnerships with EVMS, Sentara Healthcare, Naval Station Norfolk, and Westminster-Canterbury on the Bay, Levin Scholars will be well-equipped to make a meaningful difference.

### Ceramics Studio Gets a Classic Upgrade

In October, VWU alum and pottery enthusiast Jim "Zulu" Zullinger '70, who co-founded "Quiet Times Pottery" post-retirement, donated a state-of-the-art salt kiln during Homecoming and Family Weekend. Zullinger is proud to make the kiln's unique and gorgeous glass-like finishing technique, which originated in 14th-century Germany, available to VWU's emerging artists.



Jim Zullinger (center) with President Scott D. Miller (left) and Professor of Art Philip Guilfoyle (right) during the kiln dedication ceremony on October 5.

# SAFEGUARDING OUR ENVIRONMENT

At Virginia Wesleyan University, we believe we owe it to our community to conserve and protect all aspects of our shared environment.

By providing our students with the knowledge and tools they need to combat the most detrimental effects of global climate change, our goal is to ensure the responsible cultivation of a healthy and sustainable environment for future generations.

## 2024-2025 ENVIRONMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

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### Helping Young Learners Understand Environmental Impacts

In January, VWU was awarded nearly \$200,000 as part of the Chesapeake Bay-Watershed Education and Training program, a grant funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This funding will enable VWU to make environmental education more inclusive and impactful for elementary and middle school students with learning differences and those who are neurodivergent. The program will provide third- through fifth-grade teachers across the Chesapeake Bay watershed with training, hands-on materials, and ready-to-use lessons that can be seamlessly integrated into classrooms and are sustainable long-term resources.



*"We'll be working with teachers who know their kids and how they learn. By accommodating the learning styles of this student population, we want to create experiences for these students that really resonate with them, instilling within them the importance of environmental stewardship."*

— Dr. Mindy Gumpert, Education Faculty, D. Henry Watts School of Professional Studies

## 2024-2025 ENVIRONMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

### Presenting Heat Mapping Findings and Solutions

In March, VWU, in collaboration with the Center for Sustainable Communities and other key partners, convened at New Bethel Baptist Church in Portsmouth to present findings from last summer's heat mapping campaign and engage the community in developing strategies for heat mitigation. The findings showed neighborhoods with dense asphalt and concrete recorded temperatures among the hottest in the entire Commonwealth of Virginia, posing a significant public-health risk for elderly residents, low-income residents lacking heat protection, and those with preexisting health conditions. What can fix it? Recommendations included aggressive tree planting efforts, removing unnecessary concrete surfaces, and promoting green infrastructure.



*Dr. Malcolm presents heat mapping results*

*"The data collected will help us create targeted interventions that directly benefit the most vulnerable communities."*

— Dr. Elizabeth Malcolm, Professor of Ocean & Atmospheric Sciences and Director of Sustainability,  
Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences

### Earth Day Celebrations

VWU marked Earth Week 2025 with a powerful blend of education, engagement, and environmental action that brought our [\*Environmental Guiding Principles\*](#) to life. Fun and educational events included a campus clean-up, community garden workday, partnering with the Norfolk Public Library to teach students about ecopsychology and ecotherapy, and crowning our year-long Compost Champions. BONUS: New trees! The week also included an Arbor Day tree planting ceremony dedicated to outstanding Environmental Studies majors Kimberly Carosi, EB Smeltzer, and Evelyn Weaver; and Sustainability Management major Jessica Wilson.



## 2024-2025 ENVIRONMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

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### Preparing Physicians for Tomorrow's Eco-Challenges

In April, NYU Assistant Professor Dr. Aaron Hultgren — son of Dr. Larry Hultgren, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy — spoke at an event hosted by VWU's Robert Nusbaum Center. He outlined the growing health impacts of climate change, such as significant annual increases in preventable deaths from pollution-related causes and heat-related illnesses. With the effects of climate change worsening each year, Dr. Hultgren says the global community must change the mindset of the next generation of physicians by preparing them not only to respond to the current crisis but also to lead in shaping a healthier and more resilient future. The good news? To increase his eco-conscious impact, Dr. Hultgren is incorporating climate-related health training into the education of his NYU medical students and residents, as well as staging Climate Medicine Bootcamps.

### 2024-2025 VWU Environmental Awards and Recognitions

The Princeton Review's Guide to Green Colleges ranks Virginia Wesleyan as "among the nation's most environmentally-committed schools," with a Green Rating of 89 out of a possible 99.

VWU is one of just 58 colleges and universities nationwide that are members of the Intentional Endowments Network, the leading network for endowment fiduciaries investing for an equitable, low-carbon, and regenerative economy.

VWU has been recognized as a Tree Campus by the Arbor Day Foundation, and the Professional Grounds Management Society has repeatedly recognized Virginia Wesleyan for exceptional maintenance of the University's 300-acre campus in its University and College Grounds category.



*Tree planting on Arbor Day: (From left) Senior Jessica Wilson, President Scott D. Miller, Professor Elizabeth Malcolm, Heather Gargano (Virginia Department of Forestry), and Senior EB Smeltzer*



# FACULTY / STAFF ACCOLADES

From fresh faces to familiar favorites, so many of our VWU faculty earned spectacular recognition this year for their inspiring work in the classroom, on the sports field, and out in the community. Here are some of their most notable achievements.

## 2024-2025 FACULTY / STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

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### VWU Faculty Member Recognized with Statewide Teaching Honor

In November, Dr. Elizabeth Malcolm, Batten Professor of Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences and Director of Sustainability, was honored with the prestigious 2024 Libby & Hiter Harris Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award by the Virginia Foundation of Independent Colleges. The award is presented to a faculty member who demonstrates unwavering commitment to undergraduate education within the liberal arts and sciences. Dr. Malcolm's contributions to VWU have included the creation of a campus forestry plan supported by the Virginia Department of Forestry, community heat-mapping projects funded by multiple grants, the development of an Environmental Studies master's degree program, environmentally and socially responsible endowment investments, and much more. She was honored at the Harris Family Faculty Awards and Luncheon at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture in Richmond.



*President Miller, Elizabeth Malcolm, H. Hiter Harris, and Malcolm's husband Jim Saunders at the presentation of the Libby and Hiter Harris Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award from the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges.*

## 2024-2025 FACULTY / STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

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Brandon Elliott, pictured with his family, has developed a nationally prominent softball program, amassing an impressive record during his 16 years at VWU

### Two Coaches Enshrined in Hampton Roads Hall of Fame

In October, Brandon Elliott '03, Head Softball Coach, was inducted into the Hampton Roads Sports Hall of Fame, Class of 2024.

Elliott was named VWU softball coach in 2007 and has gone on to win three national championships (2017, 2018, 2021). He is a 10-time ODAC Champion, coached 19 All-Americans, received nine ODAC Coach of the Year honors and five VaSID All-State Coach of the Year awards, coached 12 ODAC Pitchers of the Year, and set the NCAA national record for wins in a season with 55 in 2018.

The late Darryl Cummings, who coached Men's Tennis at a number of area colleges including VWU, was also included in the 2024 class.

*"I haven't accomplished anything in my life alone, and this honor is no different. Coaches don't win games or championships, players do, and God has blessed our program with some amazing women who have allowed our staff to lead them all these years."*

— Brandon Elliott, VWU Head Softball Coach

## 2024-2025 FACULTY / STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

### Exemplary VWU Faculty Earn Top Awards

During 2025 Commencement Weekend, VWU was proud to honor the achievements of some standout faculty members:

- James Moskowitz, Batten Lecturer in Political Science, Birdsong School of Social Science, received the prestigious Jane and Frank Batten Distinguished Scholar Award
- Dr. Lydia Kennedy, Associate Professor of Mathematics, Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, received the Samuel Nelson Gray Distinguished Teaching Award
- Dr. Craig Wansink, Batten Professor of Religious Studies and Leadership, Susan S. Goode School of Arts and Humanities, and the Joan P. and Macon F. Brock, Jr. Director of the Robert Nusbaum Center, received the Birdsong Community Engagement Award
- Dr. Ben Dobrin, Professor of Social Work, D. Henry Watts School of Professional Studies, received the United Methodist Church General Board of Higher Education and Ministry Exemplary Teacher of the Year Award



*James Moskowitz pictured with Deirdre Gonsalves-Jackson (Provost and Vice President), President Scott D. Miller, and Travis Malone (Anne B. Shumadine Dean of the Batten Honors College)*

Congratulations to these incredible educators for going above and beyond in service of our students and setting such an amazing example for our entire faculty.

### Retiring Faculty Honored in Tree Planting Ceremony

In May, the VWU community gathered to celebrate the distinguished careers of three retiring faculty members during the University's annual tree planting ceremony. This time-honored tradition began with a celebration in the Greer Environmental Sciences Center's Atrium and concluded in the Wilson Arboretum, where trees were planted in tribute to each retiree.

This year's honorees, whose combined service to VWU totaled 116 years, were Kathy Ames, Lecturer in Mathematics, Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences; Dr. Linda Ferguson, Professor of Management, Business and Economics, D. Henry Watts School of Professional Studies; and Dr. Doug Kennedy, Professor of Sport and Recreation Professions, D. Henry Watts School of Professional Studies.



*Professor of Management, Business and Economics Linda Ferguson chose a Swamp White Oak to plant in the Wilson Arboretum to commemorate her 38 years at VWU.*

# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Some of our proudest moments of the year come from celebrating the accomplishments of our incredibly talented students. Seeing how they strategize, communicate, and collaborate to tackle complex problems gives us so much hope for the future, and we can't wait to see what kinds of innovative solutions they develop for the challenges of tomorrow. Here are just a few of their recent achievements, which we hope you find as exciting and inspiring as we do!

## 2024-2025 STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

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### Commencement 2025

Spring's annual commencement to celebrate the graduation of the Class of 2025 also marked VWU's participation in From Campus to Community, a national campaign launched by more than 60 college and university presidents to champion civil discourse and democratic engagement during graduation ceremonies.

As a member of the College Presidents for Civic Preparedness, a nonpartisan coalition convened by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, President Miller used the occasion to remind graduates of the importance of civic responsibility, free inquiry, and empathy in today's divided world.



*Pomp and Circumstance: Abigail Marie Villacrusis marches into TowneBank Arena with fellow members of the Class of 2025 during the processional to begin the Commencement Ceremony on May 17. Villacrusis, from Rockingham, Virginia, graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication and French Studies.*

*"Make no mistake: we live in challenging times. You're graduating into a divided world, but you're exactly what it needs. You've already done the hard work on our campus, learning to listen, to debate, to compromise, and ultimately, to work together. Carry these skills with you."*

— Dr. Scott D. Miller, President



## 2024-2025 STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

### Her Service Sets a Shining Example

In January, Monika Brandon '25 received the 2025 Mavis McKenley Award. The award is named for VWU Board of Trustees member and alumna Mavis McKenley '11 and recognizes students who exemplify courage and conviction in valuing differences, as well as for their commitment to seeing beyond borders by building inclusion, compassion for humanity and commitment to social change.



Bethany Smeeton with Monika Brandon '25

*"As a work-study student with Wesleyan Engaged, Monika is the first to sign up for volunteer opportunities and her actions inspire others to make a difference in their community. From campus clean-ups to creating wildflower seed bombs for Hoffer Creek and volunteering to help clean the living quarters of the USS Wisconsin, Monika consistently steps out of her comfort zone. Her actions are a testament to her strength, leadership and commitment to creating positive change in the lives of others."*

— Bethany Smeeton, Director of Civic Engagement and Service Learning



Students honored at inaugural Student Worker ALL-STAR awards

### Honoring Our Indispensable Student Workers

In April, VWU celebrated the exceptional contributions of our student employees during the inaugural Student Worker ALL-STAR Awards. Hosted by the Truist Lighthouse Center for Exploration and Discovery, the event recognized exceptional students participating in VWU's Work and Learn Program (WLP) to offset the cost of their education. With a wide variety of responsibilities that range from helping in the chemistry lab to training staff in the Boyd Dining Center, these outstanding student workers embody the values and mission of Virginia Wesleyan by exemplifying dedication, professionalism, and leadership.

## 2024-2025 STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

### From VWU to Montenegro by Way of NYC

In April, VWU's 18-member delegation represented Montenegro at the National Model United Nations Conference. The event brought together more than 1,500 students from over 140 institutions across more than 50 countries, fostering crucial collaboration to address top global challenges. Topics of focus included preventing the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors, protecting human rights during peaceful protest, and addressing the global impacts of climate change. Students also met with Dr. Jovan Mirkovic, Ambassador of Montenegro to the United States, who shared insights into Montenegro's distinction as the world's first constitutional "ecological state" committed to environmental and social justice.



*VWU Delegation in New York City*

### VWU Student's Investigation of Religious Inclusivity Wins 1st Place

Congratulations to Batten Honors College scholar Andrew Steiner '25, whose paper "A Theological Battleground: LGBTQ Rights, the Enlightenment, and Questions of Authority in American Presbyterianism" secured first place in the U.S. History category at the Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference in April.



*Head Librarian and Faculty Advisor to Phi Alpha Theta (history honor society) Stephen Leist with VWU students Deb Buckalew, Lucas Gordon and Andrew Steiner at the 2025 Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference*



*From left: Board of Trustees Chair Jon Pruden, Louis Ryan, Breanne Bessette, Jane Batten, Dean of the Batten Honors College Travis Malone and President Scott D. Miller*

### Reaching New Heights in Research Excellence

At the third annual Louis and Prudence Ryan Environmental Research Symposium on May 1, Batten Honors College student Breanne Bessette '26 was awarded the Ryan Environmental Prize for Excellence in Research. Her presentation, "More than Sex Ed: Empowering Women Through Comprehensive Sexual Health," focused on innovative approaches to addressing

complex interrelated issues of the environment, sustainability, and individual health freedom. Bessette, a junior from Salt Lake City, Utah, is double majoring in Hispanic studies and political science. She plans to apply to law school and pursue a legal career with a focus on international law.

## 2024-2025 STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

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### VWU Softball Racks Up Honors

Marlins Softball made a return to the National Championship Series for the first time since 2021, concluding an extraordinary 2025 season as national runner-up in the NCAA Division III National Championship Series. In addition, the team won both NCAA Regional and Super Regional titles while fielding eight All-ODAC selections, five All-Region players, and two All-Americans, including ODAC Player and Rookie of the Year Morgan Tucker, whose 76 RBI also set new ODAC and VWU records. In recognition of their stellar achievements, the Marlins coaching staff were named 2025 ATEC/NFCA Division III Regional Coaching Staff of the Year.



*ODAC Player and Rookie of the Year Morgan Tucker.  
Photo by James Hill.*



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