

**Virginia Commonwealth University
Community Engagement Grant Recipients
2007-2008**

Environmental Festivals: Opportunities for Engaging our Citizens in Watershed Sustainability

Community Partner: Miles J. Jones Elementary School
Primary VCU Partner: Helen Ruth Aspaas, Geography
Other VCU Partner: Biology

Description: To help Richmond citizens who live in the Reedy Creek watershed develop a lifelong commitment to environmental protection and take ownership for the health of the creek, we will design, promote and stage two environmental festivals that will engage Reedy Creek's community in learning about its wetlands and riparian ecosystem. Participation by community members will hopefully blossom into a life-long commitment to good stewardship of the environment. The proposed environmental festivals will be family and community oriented, will provide a safe, supervised learning environment, and will use engaged learning as the tool for helping participants to understand environmental themes in an outdoor, real-world setting that is located close to their homes. Miles J. Jones Elementary School will be our community partner in this effort.

Improving the Access to *FIRST* Programs in the Underserved Community

Community Partner: Richmond Public Schools, Virginia *FIRST*
Primary VCU Partner: Ashok Iyer, Engineering
Other VCU Partner: Education

Description: VCU School of Education and School of Engineering will work with Richmond Public Schools and Virginia *FIRST* to bring a hands-on high-tech educational opportunity to students in underserved schools. The goal is to expose students to the excitement involved in science and technology. The partners will use two *FIRST* programs, (*FIRST* LEGO League and *FIRST* Vex Challenge) to illustrate the process of problem solving and project management while learning life skills and technical expertise.

VCU Lends Helping Hands to Friends

Community Partner: Friends Association for Children
Primary VCU Partner: Donna Dockery, Counselor Education
Other VCU Partners: Social Work
CESNA

Students from Counselor Education and the School of Social Work will collaborate with Friends Association for Children in a unique Community Engagement Partnership. Individual and group counseling and classroom interventions will be offered to foster academic, behavioral and social development for youth and families participating in FRIENDS preschool, school age and adult programs. Working with children and families from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds will provide the university students with opportunities to enhance their multicultural awareness, skills and competence while collaborating across professional disciplines.

ECO-Monitoring: Ecology, Chemistry, Observation, Mentoring

Community Partner: Charles City County Public Schools
Primary VCU Partner: Anne Wright, Life Sciences Outreach
Other VCU Partner: Center for Environmental Studies
Education
Biology
Chemistry
Pathology

Description: This project represents a collaborative effort between VCU's Life Sciences, Chemistry, Biology and Pathology Departments and the Charles City County Public Schools. We hope to enhance science education opportunities, foster scientific inquiry and awareness, and promote environmental stewardship in Charles City County students by developing an environmental monitoring regime that investigates the relationship between the local landscape variation, mercury contamination, and amphibian populations. Through mentorship and field experiences, they will explore how water quality in Charles City County may affect local wildlife and human communities, as well as the impact of local ecosystem health on regional (e.g. air quality in the mid-Atlantic) and global (e.g. amphibian declines) systems.

Cosby High School/VCU Partnership

Community Partners: Cosby High School Health Sciences Specialty Center
Virginia Mentoring Partnership
Primary VCU Partner: Seth Leibowitz, University College
Other VCU Partner: Medicine
Center for Health Disparities

Description: For our project we will be teaching a health careers exploration course in the Cosby High School Health Sciences Specialty Center in spring 2008. We plan to create two service learning courses, one allowing the high school students to explore health careers through a range of presentations, service activities, and lab experiences on our MCV campus. The other course will give upper-level pre-health students at VCU an opportunity to serve as mentors to the high school students while they go through the career exploration process.

Chandler Middle School Arts Center Project

Community Partner: Chandler Middle School
Primary VCU Partner: Sarah Branigan, Art Education
Other VCU Partner: Interior Design

Description: During the Spring of 2007, the VCU Department of Art Education and Chandler Middle School began a partnership that paired inservice art education students with reading classes in order to support reading skills through art lessons. Through the support of the grant, this partnership will continue to grow as students and faculty in the VCU Department of Interior Design work with Chandler Middle School to develop and build a permanent exhibition space in the school cafeteria for display of the art works created by Chandler students. The goal of these partnerships is to improve the learning environment for students and faculty at Chandler Middle School while providing real life experiences to our students within the Department of Art Education and the Department of Interior Design.

VCU Community Workforce Investment Project

Community Partner: Richmond Career Advancement Center
Primary VCU Partner: Anthony Mallon, Social Work
Other VCU Partners: Workforce Development
Human Resources

Description: The Community Workforce Investment Project (CWIP), a collaboration the School of Social Work and the VCU Health System in partnership with the Richmond Career Advancement Center, will involve the provision of pre-employment counseling and remedial skills development, on-the-job training, mentoring, and other supportive services to facilitate community residents in obtaining entry-level jobs with the Health System, maintaining their employment, and advancing to higher-paying positions. The project will address two related needs in Richmond: (1) high rates of joblessness and poverty among low-skilled City residents, and (2) the existing and growing shortage of workers prepared to obtain employment in the health care industry.

Science Connection: A VCU—St. Andrew’s School Partnership

Community Partner: St. Andrew’s School
Primary VCU Partner: Jacqueline McDonnough, Teaching and Learning
Other VCU Partner: Physics
Life Sciences

Description: Science Connection: A VCU/St. Andrew’s School Partnership” will be a year-long after-school and professional development science program for students and faculty at St. Andrew’s School. The goal of the program is to increase elementary students’ interest and positive attitudes towards science through exposure to engaging instructional experiences and interactions with teachers who have higher pedagogical content knowledge. Faculty in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Physics and VCU Life Sciences will train teams of pre-service elementary teachers and science content majors to deliver 12 hands-on science lessons. These faculty members will also conduct three professional development workshops for all teachers at the school. A secondary goal relative to the VCU students who will be delivering the lessons is to increase the pre-service elementary teachers’ interaction with diverse students and science content.

VCU Online GED

Community Partner: Adult Career Development Center
Primary VCU Partner: Joan Rhodes, Education
Other VCU Partners: Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center
Honors College

Description: VCU Online GED seeks to develop a comprehensive educational program that will match struggling high school students with successful VCU college student role models, increase GED certifications for at-risk 16- to 19-year-old students, and introduce innovative web-based instruction methods to improve retention at Richmond’s alternative high school. This proposed collaboration between the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) at VCU’s School of Education, the Honors College at VCU, and Richmond Public Schools’ Adult Career Development Center (ACDC), will provide consistent support and one-on-one mentoring for at-risk alternative education students in order to create an alternative solution to traditional instructional methods. Through VCU Online GED, a pilot group of 16- to 19-year-old students from Richmond Public Schools’ ACDC alternative high school will receive peer counseling from VCU Honors College students; facilitated computer-mediated learning through the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center’s web-based eLearnVA initiative; and ongoing classroom support and assessments from ACDC.