



VCU

Office of the Provost

CARNEGIE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED UNIVERSITY RECLASSIFICATION SELF-STUDY



2025 Executive Summary

Prepared by

**Division of
Community
Engagement**

912 W Grace St
Richmond, VA
engage@vcu.edu
community.vcu.edu

Overview



The Carnegie Community Engaged University Classification Process is a university-wide self-study that asks VCU to audit, assess, and advance our community engagement policies, practices, and infrastructure and identify opportunities for continued growth. VCU was one of the first universities in the country to receive this prestigious recognition in 2005 when it was launched for the first time. It was reclassified in 2015 and applied for its second reclassification in March 2025.

VCU CHOOSES TO UNDERTAKE THE SELF-STUDY FOR THIS INTERNATIONAL DESIGNATION TO:

- 1.** Celebrate our history and identity, which has community engagement in the very fabric of its DNA ([Wayne Commission, 1967](#))
- 2.** Honor and hold ourselves accountable to our strategic commitments to our community partners and our mission
- 3.** Support our transformative learning and research goals which are advanced, expanded and deepened through community engagement
- 4.** Help us to adapt to a changing world, which requires that we work collaboratively internally and externally.

The 2025 self-study was a significant undertaking that required a year to execute. It has been a tremendous effort across the campus. We want to recognize what we have accomplished, thank everyone who contributed, and share highlights of what we have learned.

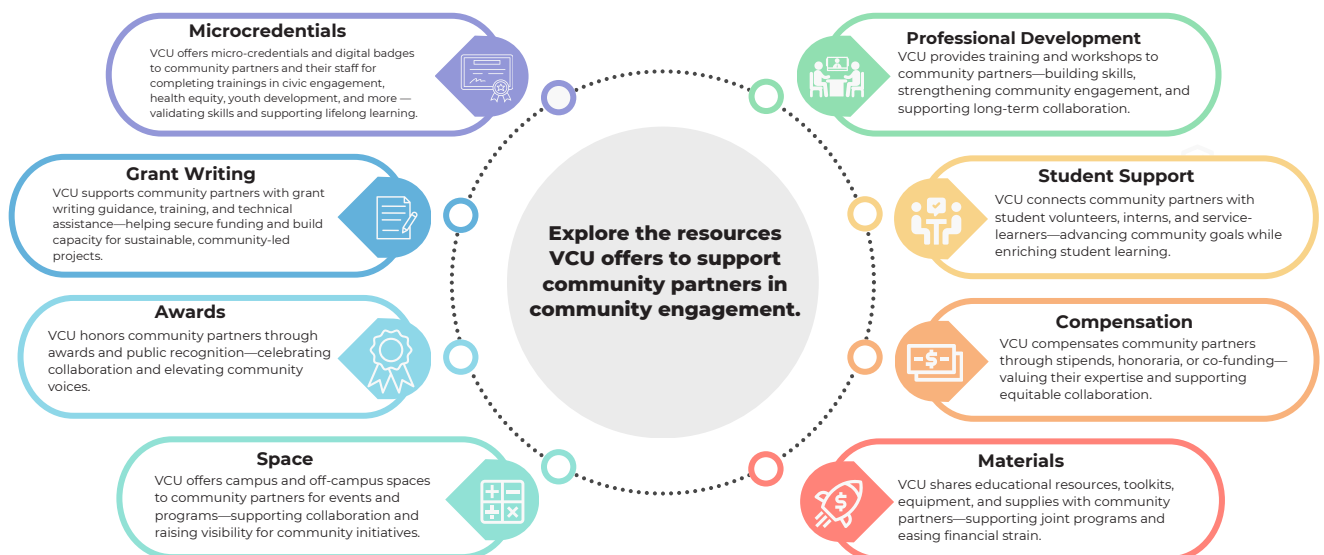
Over the past year, we conducted two unit-level surveys and one survey of our community partners. We met with many campus committees, used questionnaires and interviews to collect and verify case study details, and worked with offices, centers, departments, and individual faculty and staff to gather and confirm quantitative, qualitative, and program data. In addition, we reviewed existing VCU records and requested further data from specific units when needed, particularly for assessment-related questions. We held two town hall meetings to share what we were learning for feedback - one with VCU and one with our community partners.

Key Findings

The self-study demonstrated that community engagement at VCU is pervasive. It is present in all our schools and colleges and embedded into curricular and co-curricular activities, ensuring its integration into various aspects of student learning. Community partnerships are a fundamental part of our research, comprising 40-50 percent of VCU's research projects that submitted IRB applications over the past ten years.

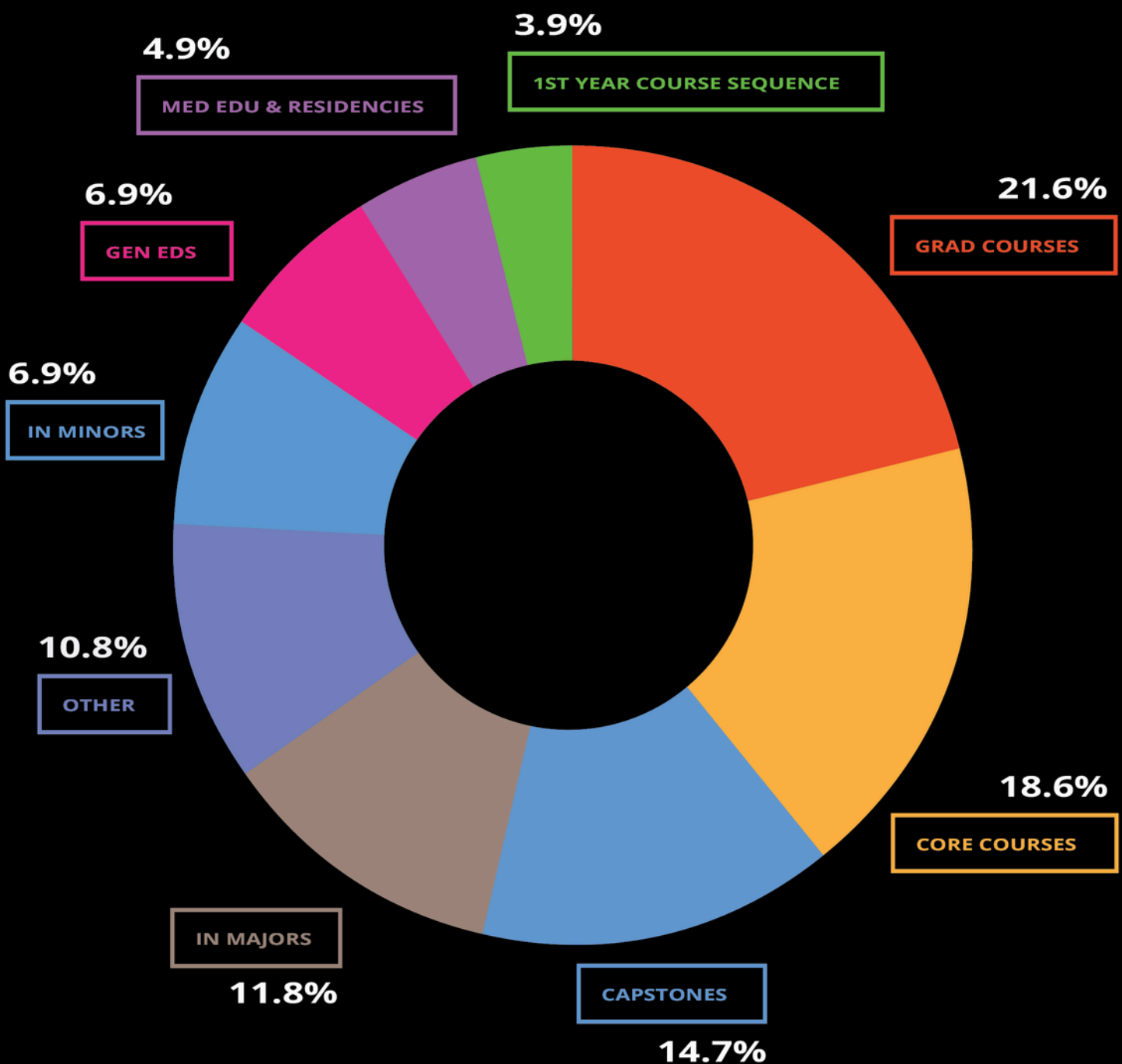
Community engagement is deeply woven into the fabric of Virginia Commonwealth University—it is reflected in our mission, our vision, and all facets of our work. It is an essential component of who we are and what we do. Our location shapes this commitment, which is reflected in the student body we serve and upheld through our research initiatives and the wide range of partnerships established and nurtured across every university unit.

Resources



ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

A survey of VCU schools and colleges revealed that community engagement is integrated throughout academic curriculums



REAL IMPACT

Between 2014 & 2024

Student participation in
community engaged learning.

2024 STATS

971

Undergraduate Classes

349

Graduate Classes

373

Faculty

71

Departments

2014

138

Undergraduate Classes

22

Graduate Classes

75

Faculty

30

Departments

STUDENT VOLUNTEERISM

466

Active Student
Organizations

102

Community & Civic Service
Organizations

8,932

Services Hours Completed

MUTUAL PARTNERSHIP

Students & Communities both benefit from
Community-Engaged Partnerships.



Students

Apply Knowledge
Develop Skills
Gain Real-World Experience



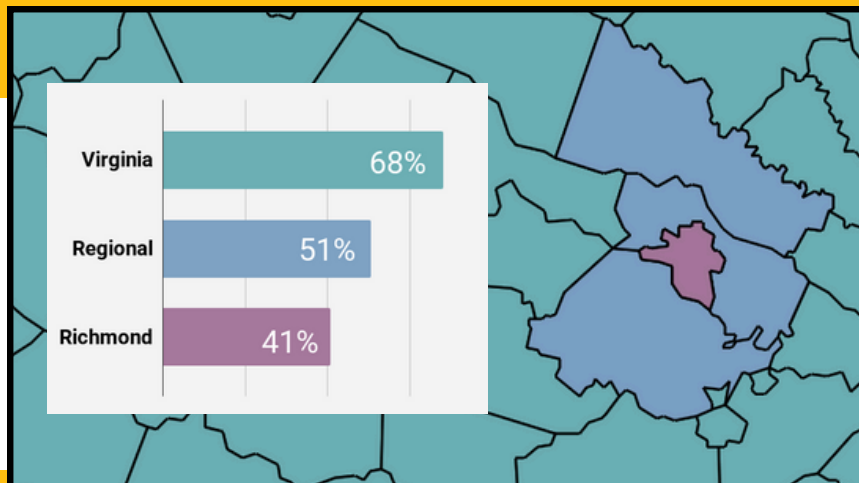
Communities

Receive Support
Increase Community Voice
Build Trust with VCU

VCU RESEARCH **IMPROVES** OUR COMMUNITIES

REACH

Over the past 10 years, 40–50% of VCU’s community-engaged human-subject research applications included local partners. Out of these local partnerships, 60% were specifically located in Richmond.



INTENT

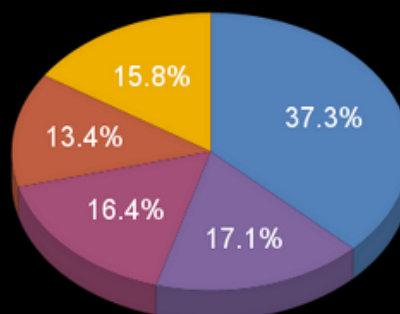
29/38

RESEARCH CENTERS
COMMUNITY ENGAGED



At VCU, 20/38 research centers embed community engagement in their mission statement, and 29/38 conduct community-engaged research.

Health represented the highest proportion of partnerships, followed by K-14 research, which delivers on VCU’s commitment to improving the health and education of our communities.



- Health
- K-14
- Community
- City/State
- Other

PARTNERS

While we have much to celebrate, we also have work to do. We learned that data collection via self-study only captures some of our work, not all. We lack sufficient monitoring and assessment systems to understand who participates, where our partnerships are, and the impact of this work on VCU and our community. We measure inputs and outputs for the most part—how many attend, how many are served—but not the actual impact. We must shift toward a more comprehensive understanding of impact across our community engagement efforts at the university. Now more than ever, higher education institutions must be able to document and articulate the varied types of impact they generate—not only to meet goals related to accountability and strategic direction, but to ensure that our work creates meaningful opportunities and drives lasting change.

Each unit within the university has a role in identifying, capturing, and advancing a wide range of impacts—from educational and health improvements to shifts in policy, economic growth, and broader community well-being. Acknowledging the full spectrum of these outcomes is critical. While long-term impact is a gradual process, we must be deliberate in tracking and celebrating progress along the way. Doing so allows us to refine our approach, strengthen our partnerships, and reinforce our commitment to building a university that substantially contributes to the communities we serve.

Finally, as needs grow, problems become more complex, and resources become scarcer, we will need more partnerships to support our students, faculty, and communities. As trust is critical for this growth, we must build strong partnerships that benefit the campus and the community equally. VCU has a significant opportunity to strengthen its efforts in building strong partnerships, which will enhance our capacity to expand community engagement opportunities for students, faculty, and staff, while more effectively responding to the needs of our community. By advancing our commitment in this space, we position ourselves to build deeper partnerships, enrich learning and research, and create greater collective impact.

Next Steps

The Carnegie Self-Study showed unequivocally that community engagement is a crucial commitment and strategy for achieving a university's mission and goals. The self-study also pointed to the broader need for more intentional collaboration across units—particularly around student engagement, faculty support, and the research enterprise. It also underscored the importance of increasing awareness and use of VCU's established principles and definitions for community engagement and partnership. Strengthening coordination, improving data collection and impact assessment, and expanding professional development opportunities will be key to aligning our efforts and advancing a shared vision for community engagement.

We are taking steps to address each one of these.

Internal Assessment of Partnerships: We have contracted with Collaboratory, a university-developed community engagement database. Given its growing importance to transformational learning, the research enterprise, and the communities we serve, substantial community engagement activity and partnership data collection will be essential infrastructure to move this work forward, especially in tracking and assessing partnership activity and impact. A partnership activity database such as Collaboratory serves a dual purpose, critical to advancing our community engagement goals. Internally, it offers valuable insight into the breadth and scope of our partnerships across the university, helping to break down silos and foster collaboration among units. By making this information accessible, we create stronger connections within VCU that support more cohesive and coordinated engagement efforts.

Externally, Collaboratory is a public-facing tool highlighting where and how VCU is engaged in communities. It showcases our student involvement, civic engagement, and the wide range of collaborative work taking place. It functions as a gateway for community members, partners, and prospective collaborators to understand the depth and diversity of our engagement—and to identify areas for more intentional, strategic partnership.

More importantly, we must be able to communicate the impact of our work in ways that resonate with the communities we serve. Our stakeholders want to know what problems we are solving, how lives are being improved, and how students are growing as a result of these efforts. Demonstrating meaningful outcomes—whether related to health, education, economic well-being, or community vitality—is essential to building trust and sustaining long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

Training: Engaging in the community is not enough. How we engage is just as important—if not more so—than the fact that we engage. It is what builds trust and sustains long-term relationships. We are increasing the number, types, and opportunities for professional development in community engagement to deepen our work and prepare more faculty, staff, and students to do it well. Relationships and reciprocal collaboration define the success of universities.

Coordination across the university: Transformational learning and robust co-curricular opportunities emerged as critical areas of community engagement, making coordination and alignment across campus critical. Increased collaboration can help advance community engagement exponentially, benefiting students, faculty, staff, and our communities by establishing standard foundations for community engagement, advocating for Collaboratory's use, increasing community engagement training and credentials, and coordinating work in priority partner communities.

Future Outlook

As we look to the future, we must continue strengthening VCU's community engagement—expanding its reach, increasing its intensity, and measuring its impact. This is the next horizon for our institution. Coordinated and integrated approaches across the university will be essential to evaluating and elevating the effectiveness of our community-engaged work. Sustaining meaningful relationships will be foundational to maintaining trust and ensuring our efforts remain responsive and relevant in an evolving landscape.



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