



At 75, VCU Health Administration is just getting started

With an event designed to celebrate 75 years of educating health care leaders, the VCU College of Health Professions Health Administration Celebration Dinner delivered a clear message: the program's enduring success is driven by its people.

SPOTLIGHT

On the web, read the full recap and watch videos from a September night to remember.



VCU College of Health Professions



FROM THE CHAIR

New faces, celebrations and continued excellence in health administration

A NOTE FROM PAULA H. SONG, Ph.D.

RICHARD M. BRACKEN CHAIR AND PROFESSOR

In my fifth year with VCU Health Administration, perhaps no semester has gotten off to a more exciting start than this one as we celebrated the department's 75th anniversary.

As our team stood on the closed street in front of the Altria Theater on September 14, it was impossible not to be awestruck at the number of national health care leaders and VCU alumni gathered in one place. There were alums whose faces we see in the national spotlight. There were leaders who have not only made an impact on health care, but on their communities. Attendees spanned eight decades, and the 75th Anniversary Celebration Dinner was a testament to the impact VCU has made on health care delivery nationwide across that time.

New College of Health Professions Dean Amy Darragh said it best: "If you ask me what gets me out of bed in the morning, it is because I truly believe I am part of the engine that is developing the next generation of health care providers who will impact patient care for years to come."

And to that end, I want to extend another welcome to Dean Darragh, who joined us at the start of the semester from The Ohio State University, where she served as director and vice dean in the institution's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. I returned to Health Administration as chair and want to acknowledge the outstanding work of our Dr. Saleema Karim, who served as the department's interim chair as we conducted the search for a new dean.

Saleema seamlessly led the department, including through our successful program re-accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) and integration of the College's bachelor of science in health services into the department. Saleema was also recently honored with the Bon Secours Professorship, which you can read about more in our newsletter.

She joins a number of endowed professors here — along with some brand new faces that you'll read about on these pages and online: associate

lower birth rates during 2008's Great Recession. A trending decrease in college-age students affects enrollment across the nation, and ours is no exception.

In anticipation of those challenges, we innovated our educational offerings to meet the shifting needs of students. We added a fourth certificate program: Sustainability, Health and Health Care, providing foundational knowledge on the interplay of climate change, human health and the health care industry. In our mission to prepare the next generation of health administrators,

"As we navigate the year ahead, we remain focused on nurturing the next generation of leaders, expanding our research capabilities, and strengthening our educational programs...together, we will build on our legacy of excellence."

professor John McHugh, Ph.D.; assistant professor Kristin MacDonald, Ph.D.; assistant professor Matt Krauchunas, Ph.D.; and Lauren Mortenson, the new assistant program director of the bachelor's degree in health sciences.

These faculty will be there to guide students into an always-evolving health care sector driven by factors such as payment reform, the integration of artificial intelligence, louder calls for sustainability, continued emphasis on care quality, cost and access as well as the increasing involvement of private equity investments.

The fall semester also marks the first that we experience the long-awaited "demographic cliff," a result of

finding ways to address these issues are opportunities for growth — both within our department itself and across the broader leadership landscape. These forces further emphasize the critical need for skilled and diverse health care leaders, and after 75 years, our department's shared focus remains on preparing our students to navigate and lead in this dynamic field.

As we look to the year ahead, we remain focused on nurturing the next generation of leaders, expanding our research capabilities and strengthening our educational programs. Moving into the next quarter-century of VCU Health Administration, together we will build on our legacy of excellence in our discipline and patient care.

New Ph.D. Scholarship named after former Health Administration chair and founder of doctoral program will keep admissions competitive



Thomas T.H. Wan, Ph.D., left VCU 21 years ago, but he's never forgotten his roots.

This summer, Wan and his wife pledged \$100,000 to create the Thomas and Sylvia Wan Ph.D. Student Scholarship for students applying to the Ph.D. in Health Services Organization and Research (HSOR) program.

The HSOR doctoral program emphasizes a transdisciplinary approach to health organization research, preparing students to tackle complex health care challenges. Unlike the administration program, which focuses on management, HSOR aims to develop leaders who can shape health systems. Program graduates hold prestigious roles in academia and health care, including positions as public health school deans and organization leaders.

Laura E. McClelland, Ph.D., associate professor and director of the HSOR program, called the Wan's gift "a testament to Dr. and Mrs. Wan's commitment to doctoral education and the future of health services organization research."

"To continue to pursue excellence in training and research, we need to continue to build a foundation that is current with the trends to attract the best students in the world," says Wan, who served on the faculty from 1981 to 2003, chaired from 1990 to 1999 and was pivotal in launching the HSOR doctoral program in 1982. Under his guidance, the program grew from a class of three to a globally recognized initiative. "Supporting and recruiting students is expensive, so with this support, we can maintain our quality of education by attracting the top students worldwide."

This scholarship supports VCU's goal to remain competitive on a national level; VCU Health Administration is ranked No. 3 in health care management programs by *U.S. News & World Report*.

"The scholarship reflects Tom's desire to help and his lasting impact at VCU," said Paula H. Song, Ph.D., the Richard M. Bracken chair and professor of VCU Health Administration. "Ph.D. funding is crucial for attracting students who give up full-time work to pursue their academic goals. This support allows them to focus on research and progress toward completing their doctoral degree."

Empowering future health care leaders

HCA EXEC, VCU ALUM, FUNDS CLARK-MORAN SCHOLARSHIP

It can be more financially challenging for out-of-state students to attend VCU.

Brent Clark, MHA '00, knows as much. A Kentucky native, he applied to and attended VCU Health Administration despite the funding gap between in- and out-of-state tuition.

And so Clark, now vice president of capital planning and analytics at HCA Healthcare in Nashville, decided to do something to help those like him. He established the Clark-Moran Scholarship to support those who aren't from Virginia but want to pursue a degree at VCU, one of the nation's top-ranked health care management programs. Inspired by his own educational journey and the guidance of mentor and health care administrator Pam Moran, Clark transitioned from his initial medical aspirations at the University of Richmond to VCU, where he embraced a path in health care leadership.

The scholarship helps cover the approximate \$12,000 annual tuition gap that can be faced by out-of-state students. Clark wants to raise \$300,000 to ensure that deserving students can access quality education without the financial strain.

His decision to create the scholarship stemmed from his own experience navigating significant tuition differences and the mentorship that shaped his career. Clark worked for three years over summers for Moran, then head of strategy, planning and development for a community hospital in Kentucky.

"Naming this crucial scholarship in part to honor Pam Moran, who guided Brent in his decision to go to graduate school, is really a testament to the power of mentorship, which is a core value of VCU's Health Administration program," said Paula H. Song, the department's chair.

Clark highlights the value of VCU's MHA program: "Beyond the essential knowledge and understanding of the complex health care landscape, what truly sets this program apart is the invaluable network it provides," he says. "The connections made through VCU's program are significant, especially in the health care industry, which is surprisingly small. Having experienced this firsthand at HCA, I can attest to how these relationships open doors and create opportunities that extend well beyond graduation."



New faculty with diverse backgrounds bolster department expertise



Lauren Mortensen is assistant director of the B.S. in Health Sciences program. She brings a unique perspective to her role, having been a non-traditional student herself. After pausing her undergraduate studies to pursue a career in human resources, she returned to complete her degree while working full-time. Now pursuing a Ph.D. in Education, she's dedicated to supporting

adult learners balancing multiple responsibilities. She helps lead a fully online, hybrid and on-campus program aimed at students pursuing health care professions beyond clinical roles.



Kristin M. MacDonald, Ph.D. is an assistant professor. Her research focuses on the role of compassion in long-term care, particularly among certified nursing assistants (CNAs). Having worked as a dietician and administrator in skilled nursing facilities, MacDonald observed how compassion impacts residents and caregivers. Her research shows that compassionate environments

lead to greater job satisfaction and retention among CNAs, addressing critical staffing shortages. A 2023 Tillman Scholar, MacDonald is also exploring how organizational practices and cultural factors influence the experience of compassion.



Matt Krauchunas, Ph.D. is an assistant professor. A retired Air Force colonel, he brings over 32 years of military leadership and health care administration experience to his teaching. With a Ph.D. in health services organization and research from VCU, Krauchunas combines operational expertise from roles in military logistics,

aeromedical evacuations and hospital management with civilian experience at UnitedHealth Group's WellMed.



John McHugh, Ph.D. is an associate professor. His research focuses on patient access and the transition between hospitals and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). His work highlights how patients with Alzheimer's and related dementias are less likely to go to preferred SNFs after hospital stays. He also explores the

complexities of organizational decision-making, especially how hospitals and SNFs, operating under different regulations, impact patient outcomes. Previously at Columbia University, McHugh's expertise deepens the Department of Health Administration's research profile and curriculum.

Read full profiles of our new faculty in the Featured News section at ha.chp.vcu.edu.

Beth Williamson Ayers receives Honorary Alumni Award

When accepting the Honorary Alumni Award from VCU Health Administration at the 75th Anniversary Celebration, Beth Williamson Ayers let the alumni in the audience know how important their work is.

"You are making a difference every day," Ayers said at the Sept. 14 ceremony in Richmond.

Yet that is also a sentiment others often use to describe Ayers, the director of outreach and professional affairs who is retiring from VCU on Jan. 1. Known as a face of not only the department but the College itself, she organizes alumni events, tackles fundraising efforts and performs numerous other roles — relationship building chief among them.

"This honorary award reiterates the relationships we have built together and the work that we accomplished to help shape a student, connect an alumnus to a classmate and create meaningful networking and engagement," she said. "Our alumni have



Ayers with her son, Owen.

been and continue to be a large part of the success of the department, and I have thoroughly enjoyed working alongside them to create opportunities that have enriched our students."

Paula Song, Ph.D., the Richard M. Bracken chair and professor of Health Administration, added that Ayers' long-standing faculty and alumni relationships have been a key asset in the department's outreach.

"It is hard to put into words the impact that Beth has. We've had these conversations about transition and coverage of her duties, and it's difficult because so much of what she has done has been around developing these really kind of lifelong relationships with alumni and faculty over the decades," Song said. "She's been a steady state."

Read full story in the Featured News section at ha.chp.vcu.edu.

Servant Leader and a Careerist Mom: Meet VCU Health Administration's new Executives-in-Residence

VCU Health Administration's Executive-in-Residence (EIR) program gives students and faculty a direct link to health care leaders who can complement their MHA and MSHA education. The leaders mentor students virtually and are on-site at VCU at least once a year. This year, VCU partnered with former hospital CEO Bill Downey and independent health care strategist Carlene Callis.

DOWNEY: HEALTH CARE IS A PEOPLE BUSINESS FIRST

In a hospital or other care setting, "everybody is important."

"If you work in health care, you work with great people who haven't finished high school up to people who have 10 years or more of post-college education," explains Bill Downey, the former chief executive of Riverside Health System. "The surgeon can do a masterful job, but if the room isn't clean and the patient gets an infection, their work is minimized."

Great health administrators know every team member plays a critical role in patient care and quality. It's a lesson that Downey, who retires from Riverside at the end of the year, hopes to instill in MHA and MSHA students.

For anyone starting in health care, "you've got to love change," he says. "It is a dynamic industry, with pretty seismic events every couple of years."

One of the biggest challenges ahead is an aging workforce — along with the patients they serve. And there aren't enough people joining the health care workforce to replace outgoing providers and staff.

"While health care is a people business, we can augment a lot of it with technology," he says. "That's the challenge before new leaders: How do you take all of this technology, all of this artificial intelligence and machine learning and drive that in the



best way to give nurses and other staff the ability to offer more of a human touch and those personal connections that are needed in health care, which technology cannot provide?"

In his work with VCU, he hopes to bring in outside experts from across his four decades of making connections, to teach concepts that don't often come from textbooks — like raising capital funding for projects using bonds and equity, or negotiating with insurers.

"It's about being available to the students — even just to answer questions," he says. "If they have a question coming out of a class, or if they read or see something, I want to be there to explain how it really works in health care versus in the textbook."

CALLIS: FOR CAREER AND LIFE SUCCESS, PUT FAMILY FIRST

It was not too long after graduating from VCU with a master's degree in health administration that Carlene Callis realized where her passion in health care lay.

She was afforded an opportunity during her residency and fellowship program to design strategy, oversee construction, integrate operations and operationalize a new outpatient facility in Michigan.



Once established, she was asked to run it. Following a few years in managing the facility, she realized how much she missed being at the table to design and build new programs and offerings that create organizational growth.

The early career lesson kept her focus on things she enjoys doing, as well as understanding that a career isn't always linear. "You have to zigzag such that you find your passion and your wheelhouse," she says.

Over her 30-year career, Callis has served in a variety of roles that allowed her to achieve a unique blend of expertise in optimizing operations and growth. Today she is an independent consultant.

One tenet she preaches: Managing work and life — kind of. "Work-life balance is pretty much not a real thing. You do have to make choices, but in my opinion, you'll have fewer regrets if you err on the family side versus the professional side," says Callis.

She never fully left the health care field, but sidelined herself for the better part of a decade to raise a family of three girls and care for her terminally ill sister. While she mentors all types of students and early careerists, she's particularly interested in coaching women, current or would-be moms and those who are primary caregivers.

"I was at the top of my career, but in the end, it didn't hurt me to step away for a bit of time or make a sacrifice for my personal life," she says. "I believe it actually helped me be a better leader and manager, and that's a message that needs to be instilled in early-career women today."

Welcome to our newest cohorts

MHA STUDENTS

Lauren Aleksa
James Madison University,
Health Services Administration

Julia Cook
Virginia Commonwealth University,
Health, Physical Education and
Exercise Science

Alexandra Driscoll
University of South Carolina,
Biological Sciences

Julia Gagulska
University of Virginia,
Sociology

Grace Hutson
Virginia Commonwealth University,
Chemistry

Mikaela Jefferson
Old Dominion University,
Health Services Administration

Brandon Llave
Virginia Tech,
Psychology

Tooba Malik
University of Maryland
at College Park,
Biology

Joshua Na
Virginia Tech,
Human Nutrition, Foods
and Exercise

Jacob Park
Brigham Young University-Idaho,
Health Administration

Anna Reiner
Miami University - Oxford,
Public Health

Payal Shah
University of Virginia,
Psychology

Diane Stewart
Southern New Hampshire
University,
Health Administration

Delaney Stratton
Virginia Commonwealth University,
Health, Physical Education and
Exercise Science

Abigail Sullivan
Virginia Tech,
Public Health

Harlie Talman
James Madison University,
Health Services Administration

Nyvia Taylor
American University,
Public Health

Rondajai Washington
Vanderbilt University,
Medicine, Health and Society

Joelle Younes
University of Virginia,
Kinesiology

MSHA STUDENTS

Alona Anisimova
VCU Health

Treena Bonner
VCU Health

Vikram Brar
VCU Health

Krissy Bryant
UVA Health Medical
Center

Hannah Cho
Inova

Deja Christopher
Reliance Medical
Transport

Jennifer Coakley
Stafford Hospital

Nicole Cook
VCU Health

Dan Elkes
VCU Health

Rupanjeet Gill
VCU Health

Meagan Hale
Enhabit Hospice

Farehaa Hussain
UVA Health

Mary Hutson
VCU Health

Nicole Ingram
VCU Health

Aya Musa
Bon Secours Mercy Health

Benjamin Sizemore
VCU Health

Tushar Thakre
VCU Health

Meghan Thoms
VCU Health

Andre Tolleris
VHHA

MHA CLASS OF 2027



Front row (from left): Brandon Llave, Lauren Aleksa, Harlie Talman, Payal Shah, Joshua Na, Tooba Malik, Alexandra Driscoll. Second row (from left): Mikaela Jefferson, Julia Cook, Julia Gagulska, Abigail Sullivan, Diane Stewart, Anna Reiner, Nyvia Taylor, Delaney Stratton, Joelle Younes. Back row: Grace Hutson, Rondajai Washington, Jacob Park.

Associate Chair Karim named to Bon Secours Professorship

While all regional health systems compete, when it comes to supporting health care leaders and the next generation of administrators, partnership takes precedence.

VCU Health Administration associate chair Saleema Karim, Ph.D., has been appointed the Bon Secours Professor of Health Administration. Established in 2006, the professorship aims to attract distinguished scholars in health administration with expertise in not-for-profit hospital systems.

"Many Bon Secours leaders have come through VCU Health Administration — including me," says Chris Accashian, FACHE, MHA '01 and chief operating officer for Bon Secours Richmond Health System. "This program creates well-rounded leaders for health care. The Bon Secours Professorship is an investment in future health care leadership, supporting the health and well-being of our communities. We appreciate what VCU Health Administration has done not only for Bon Secours, but for the health care community at large."

Karim is a respected researcher in hospital financial sustainability and addressing geographical disparities in health access. She has contributed to 48 peer-reviewed publications, presented her work internationally and received continuous grant funding since 2015. She holds a doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and both an MHA and MBA from Dalhousie University in Canada.

"Achieving this milestone has been a rewarding journey, driven by my commitment to teaching and research," Karim said. "This professorship allows me to further advance meaningful research and impactful teaching under the Bon Secours name."

Paula Song, Ph.D., the Richard M. Bracken chair and professor of Health Administration, said endowed professorships help VCU attract and retain top faculty, insulating the program from state budget uncertainties. "Saleema is particularly worthy of this professorship. Her research, rapport with



"Saleema is particularly worthy of this professorship. Her research, rapport with students and faculty and dedication to our department make her an invaluable asset."

PAULA H. SONG, Ph.D., RICHARD M. BRACKEN CHAIR AND
PROFESSOR OF HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

students and faculty and dedication to our department make her an invaluable asset," Song said.

The non-profit Bon Secours Mercy Health (BSMH) is one of the U.S.'s largest health systems, operating 49 hospitals and employing over 60,000 associates. Serving the greater Richmond community, Bon Secours is committed to advancing health care through partnerships and academic support.



**Read the
full story in
Featured News.**

Congratulations 2024 Graduates!

Ph.D. HSOR

Kristin MacDonald

MHA

Austin Andersen
Saagar Bhikha
Kelly Black
Karis Cha
Tanner Couch
Emma Creech

Jared Dawson
Ryan Denzler
Juan Garza
Rafid Kabir
Braden Keller
Skyler Kent
William Keyt
Samantha Krejdovsky
Fiona Maxwell
Miyanla McConner

Victor Melo
Lance Mendoza
Zoe Moyer
Noah Peton
Kriti Pradhan
Brennan Rasmussen
Drashti Makasana
Alexandra Ritchie
Deepika Sarma
Deidre Skerritt
Justin Truitt

Woon Chow
Chelsea Christiano
David Dent
Teri Dulong-Rae
Lauren Ennis
Kimberly Ferguson
Alyssa Grigg
Juliette Highland
Kalyann Kauv
Sarah Marquez
Katherine Martin
Danielle Noreika
John Parker
Ashton Pas
Margaret Quartermann
Benjamin Rickard
Seth Seaborne
Ashleigh Shear

Sarah Snead
Jaisri Thoppay
Cara Watts

CERTIFICATE GRADUATES

Health Care Financial Management

Emma Creech
Braden Keller
Fiona Maxwell
Zoe Moyer
Noah Peton
Alexandria Ritchie
Miyanla McConner

Health Equity

Danielle Noreika



Kristin MacDonald (left) graduated from Ph.D. Program in Health Services Organization and Research in May and was selected as recipient of the James W. Begun Award for Excellence in Doctoral Studies. The award, established in 1999 to honor the second HSOR director, recognizes excellence in dissertation originality, use of theory and overall advancement of scientific knowledge. MacDonald now serves as an assistant professor in the doctoral program and is pictured with program director Laura McClelland, Ph.D.

MHA 2024 Graduates

Front row: Miyanla McConner, Fiona Maxwell, Emma Creech, Justin Truitt, Alex Ritchie, Karis Cha, Kelly Black

Back row: Will Keyt, Sammy Krejdovsky, Noah Peton



MSHA 2024 Graduates

Front row: Terri Dulong-Rae, Juliette Highland, Danielle Noreika, Dr. Paige Powell, Chelsea Peck, Woon Chow, Ipsita Batra

Back row: Dave Bessom, Ben Rickard, Sarah Marquez, Seth Seaborne, Alyssa Grigg



VCU College of Health Professions

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