



VCU ASPIRE

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

ASPIRE Annual Report 2015-2016



TURN AWARENESS INTO ACTION



Director's Message



Erin Burke Brown, Ph.D.
Director, VCU ASPIRE

About ASPIRE

VCU ASPIRE is a unique living-learning program with more than 150 undergraduate students each year. VCU ASPIRE students promote community engagement through academic coursework and co-curricular experiences.

Mission

VCU ASPIRE enriches and deepens students' understanding of their capacity to create positive change in communities and addresses critical societal needs through long-term sustainable partnerships.

Impact Areas

- Affordable Housing
- Community Building
- Education and Workforce Development
- Environmental Sustainability
- Health and Wellness

Living

All VCU ASPIRE students reside in the West Grace South Residence Hall for two years, complete nine credits of academic coursework, and contribute a minimum of 100 co-curricular hours.

Learn More

For more information or to apply, visit aspire.vcu.edu.

Bridging the Gap between the Community and Campus through Service

What a difference a year makes! It has been a wonderful experience serving as the VCU ASPIRE director this year with such a dynamic group of students, staff and community members. I have been inspired daily by the dedication and commitment that our students have to serving the community. As a native Richmonder, I am familiar with many of the needs of the city and can personally attest to the importance of having the presence of sustained volunteers to help move the needle on critical issues.

In its fourth year of operation, VCU ASPIRE continues to provide students with opportunities to integrate meaningful service with course curriculum. During their two years in the program, students have an opportunity to mix and match service experiences that connect with their majors, interests and future careers as they complete 100 co-curricular hours. This unique living-learning experience helps to prepare students for life after VCU.

This May, 81 students completed the program with a certificate of

completion in community engagement, becoming our largest cohort yet.

Collaboration has been a key component of the program's success this year. We gained eight new community partners, including Art for the Journey, UNOS and Change the World RVA. We enhanced and deepened partnerships with the Mary and Frances Youth Center and Peter Paul Development Center, developing sustained service activities facilitated by student leaders. We also worked closely with on-campus partners like RamPantry to provide students with additional resources to support their needs, a strategy that resulted in VCU ASPIRE being awarded the 2016 Campus Partner Award through the Division of Student Affairs.

I am looking forward to keeping these and other collaborative efforts going in 2016-2017 and beyond.

Erin Burke Brown, Ph.D.
Director, VCU ASPIRE

179
STUDENTS

were enrolled at the start of Fall 2015

81
STUDENTS
COMPLETED

the two-year program in Spring 2016

36
MAJORS

represented in ASPIRE

COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Community Partner Focus Groups Demonstrate Strong Ties



At VCU ASPIRE, we recognize that our partnerships with the community are how we make it real for our students. It is only through these community-based collaborations that we are able to enrich the learning experience for our students, teach civic responsibility, and help communities to address identified needs. In December 2015, two focus groups were conducted off-campus by staff not affiliated with VCU ASPIRE to assess the quality of VCU ASPIRE's community partnerships from the perspective of the partners.

Partners were pleased with the quality of students and staff in the program reporting that students display cultural humility, passion, and leadership. While partners appreciate having committed volunteers to assist with their program goals, they believe that the added benefit of creating a space

to break down barriers between people of different backgrounds was equally important.

When asked about challenges, partners described the difficulty with offering students longer term volunteer projects and getting a sense of the students' perspective on the changes being made in the community. The partners concluded that they valued - and felt valued by - their VCU ASPIRE partnerships. Moving forward, VCU ASPIRE will continue to assess its partnerships to assure that its partners continue to have a meaningful voice in the program as means to continuously improve it.

To read the full partner report, visit scholarscompass.vcu.edu/community_resources/.

"All community-based organizations need additional support to bring about the levels of community change and development they are working toward. The VCU ASPIRE students serve as role models for younger kids in our programs and inspire them to think about going to college themselves. This inspiration has the power to change the life trajectory of many for generations to come. VCU ASPIRE's ongoing attention to a fully collaborative process, including using partner focus groups for program feedback, helps create a dynamic support system that helps to strengthen some of Richmond's most vulnerable communities."

—Ralph Stuckey, Community Partner
Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS

Moving Toward Excellence Across the Board



VCU ASPIRE students have proven themselves to be leaders among their peers across campus. This year several have been awarded scholarships and opportunities to enhance their learning.

President's Volunteer Service Award

Gold: Caitlin Lange, ASPIRE '15
Bronze: Sanaz Ghodsi, ASPIRE '15
Bronze: Nequa Griffin, ASPIRE '14
Bronze: Frances Marquez, ASPIRE '14

Benjamin Gilman Award

with participation in the Costa Rican Medical Spanish Program
Daniella Pizarro, ASPIRE '14

Emerging Leader Award

Division of Student Affairs
Angelique Scott, ASPIRE '14
Jessica Chavis, ASPIRE '14

Dr. Henry G. Rhone Excellence in Student Affairs Award

Division of Student Affairs
Angelique Scott, ASPIRE '14

Federal Policy Fellow

Elaine Williams, ASPIRE '14

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Scholarship for Leadership in the Community
Brittney Maddox, ASPIRE '14

NAACP Award

Pascaline Ezouah, ASPIRE '14

Board of Visitors Award

Marvin Chau, ASPIRE '14

11,200 HOURS

completed in co-curricular activities

700 EVENTS

offered through co-curricular programming

108 PARTNERS

in the community and on campus

FACULTY FELLOWS SPOTLIGHT

Faculty Fellows Make it Real for VCU ASPIRE Students



This year, VCU ASPIRE benefitted from the expertise of five faculty fellows from across the university.

The fellows spent the fall semester exposing students to key concepts and ideas related to community engagement in their discipline, resulting in 15 workshops with 259 attendees.

In the spring, 32 students committed to engaging in a range of semester-long activities, serving more than 200 hours in the community.

Fellows/Projects:

- Dr. Candace Johnson (School of Nursing) taught students about social determinants of health to prepare them to implement a health intervention in Hillside Court.
- Dr. Kristin Reed (University College) taught students about the impact of mass incarceration in the United States in preparation for a series of book clubs held at the Richmond City Justice Center and a community panel discussion on incarceration.

- Dr. James Keck (Wilder School) taught students about disaster emergency preparedness and led VCU ASPIRE students in teaching elementary students about the topic.
- Professor Lisa Anderson (Division of Epidemiology) taught students about issues related to public health and prepared them to participate in Public Health Awareness Week.
- Dr. Sallie Mayer (Pharmacy) taught students about diabetes and preventative measures they could take to decrease its spread.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Annual VCU ASPIRE Halloween Event Takes Scarieness out of College



This year marked the 4th annual VCU ASPIRE Halloween Extravaganza. The event started in the program's first year after the director of the local Boys and Girls Club asked if there were opportunities for children to trick-or-treat on-campus.

Many children in Richmond live in communities where it is unsafe to go door-to-door, and the VCU ASPIRE event provides a safe alternative for them to participate in the holiday festivities.

What began with a single

community partner and about 20 children expanded to multiple partners with more than 100 children in attendance this year.

The Halloween event serves multiple purposes for the youth that attend. It provides them with an opportunity to come to VCU and experience a college atmosphere, interact with college students and learn about their experience and, of course, get candy!

This year the event was made more successful by making it a collaborative effort across several

units. The National Pan-Hellenic Council, Department of Athletics, Honors College, LEAD and GLOBE all participated in the event, sponsoring engaging activities for the children. Several members of the men's basketball team stopped by to take pictures with the children at the photo booth and provide some words of wisdom on succeeding in college.

Exposing children as young as five years old to a university setting in such a fun way is one small step in taking the scariness out of college.



3.2 GPA

average for VCU ASPIRE students

