



January, 2026

News & Updates

New MPH concentration in Health Communication launches this Spring

The 5th MPH concentration available in our school, the Health Communication concentration teaching students the fundamentals of translating complex health information for diverse audiences.

A big thank you to our department faculty who helped develop this concentration!

[Read more](#)

Hiring a new faculty member

Interviews are currently underway for a full-time, open rank, tenure track position in the department. In-person visits will be slated soon!

Massey Summer 2026 Internships

Massey's 2026 Summer Cancer Research Internship applications are open. Pathway programs are available for high school, undergraduate, medical and pre/postdoctoral trainees interested in areas of cancer research, scientific writing and clinical trial operations. Applications close in less than one month, on Friday, Feb. 6 at 11:59 p.m.

For more information, contact Caroline Blair at blaircp@vcu.edu or visit <https://www.masseycancercenter.org/education-and-training/>.

Awards & Honors

- Affiliate faculty member Dr. Monica Baskin was selected to serve on the Association of American Medical Colleges' board of directors in 2026.
- Dr. Katherine Y. Tossas was selected for the New Voices in Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine leadership program at the National Academies.

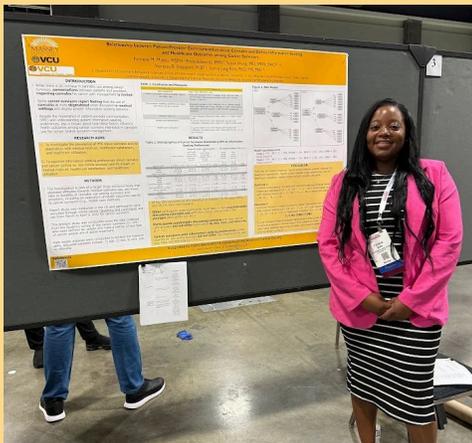
Student Spotlight



Three graduate students successfully defended their dissertation proposals in the fall term and are now PhD candidates! Congratulations to Tolu Kolawole, Paula Rivera, and Farnese Motto!



In November, Anu Owolabi, MHA presented on her work with the University of Maryland Baltimore's Opioid Restitution Fund. Anu has been attending Advisory Board meetings for the Restitution Fund as part of her community-based participatory research experiential learning, and shared information about Baltimore's efforts to address opioid use disorder and overdose.



Farnese Motto, MSPH and Samuel Sijuade, MPH presented at the APHA annual meeting in November.

Research Spotlight



In November, postdoctoral fellow Karly Casanave-Phillips, PhD, MA presented at the Commonwealth of Virginia Cancer Research Conference, hosted by Massey.



Postdoctoral fellow Chloé Jones, PhD, MS received a VCU IRACDA (Institutional Research and Academic Career Development Award). She will be working with Virginia State University for the teaching portion of this training program, starting this spring. Congratulations, Dr. Jones!

[Read more](#)

Around the Globe



Richard Brown, PhD spoke at the International Association for Communication in Healthcare (EACH)/ Academy of Communication in Healthcare (ACH) annual meeting in October in Ottawa, Canada. Dr. Brown is currently serving as president of EACH.



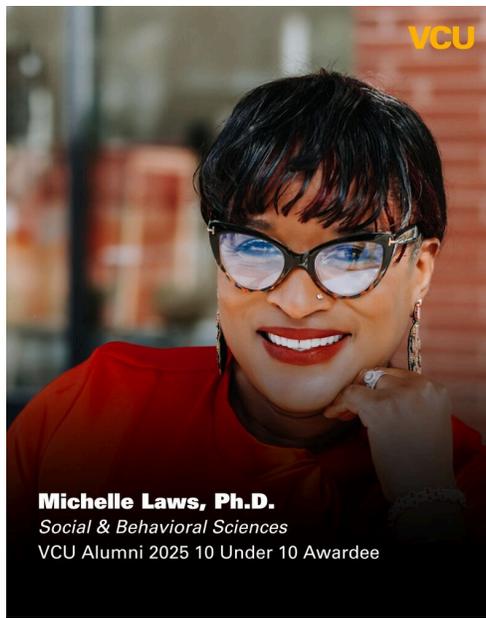
In November, Alexander Lucas, PhD traveled to Cape Town, South Africa to attend the 2025 Global Cardio-Oncology Summit. Next year's event will be held here in Virginia, hosted by VCU.



In October, Katherine Y. Tossas, PhD, MS, spoke at the 37th annual International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) meeting in Bangkok, Thailand.

Alumni Spotlight

Michelle Laws, Ph.D. VCU Alumni 10 Under 10



VCU Alumni's 10 Under 10 awards recognizes the noteworthy and distinctive achievements made by alumni who earned their first VCU degree (undergraduate, graduate or professional) within the past 10 years.

Michelle Laws, a native of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is a dynamic teacher, scholar and public speaker who is best known for her advocacy for social justice and human rights.

Dr. Laws completed her Ph.D. in Social and Behavioral Sciences in 2016.

[Read more](#)

SBS Events



Halloween Party

In October we celebrated Halloween with a department get together complete with costume contest, won by the Jedi council (a.k.a. Dr. Maria Thomson, Sadia Shah, Malik Phillips, and Emmy Oyenyin)!



Fall Potluck

In November we embraced fall with a potluck and hand turkey crafting session!





Winter Social

In December we welcomed the winter celebration spirit with a festive gathering! We crafted snowflakes and enjoyed some relaxed social time. The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the snowman-making competition.

Recent Publications

Dr. Sunny Jung Kim:

Kim, S. J., Boyle, J., Fugate-Laas, K., Barsell, J., Do. E. K., Hayes, R. B., & Fuemmeler, B. F. (2025). mHealth App-Based Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) to Ascertain Tobacco Retail Outlet Exposure, Tobacco Marketing, Tobacco Use, and Susceptibility among Rural Youth. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaf081>

Stephenson, D., Korenok, O., Kim, S.J. et al. Heterogeneous Vulnerability and Vaccination Behavior: Evidence from Experimental Games. *Dyn Games Appl* (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13235-025-00697-5>

Drs. Jeanine Guidry (SBS '17) and Kellie Carlyle :

Guidry, J. P. D., Laestadius, L. I., Miller, C. A., Stevens, M. P., Burton, C. W., Carlyle, K. E., & Perrin, P. B. (2025). Building Vaccine Readiness for Future Pandemics: Insights from COVID-19 Vaccine Intent and Uptake. *Vaccines*, 13(12), 1201. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines13121201>

Dr. Katherine Y. Tossas:

Cheng, H. G., Hong, S., Oxana Palesh, Winn, R. A., Martins, R., & Tossas, K. Y. (2025). Multiple Primary Cancer Incidence by County-Level Smoking Prevalence among U.S. Cancer Survivors. *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, 35(1), 165–172. <https://doi.org/10.1158/1055-9965.epi-25-1197>

Kauer T, Franco CL, Munroe DD, Doescher M, Paskett ED, Swenson WT, Tossas KY, Cerhan JR, Krieger J. Redefining Rurality: Adopting an Identity-Based and Community-Engaged Approach to Defining Rural Cancer Disparities. *J Natl Cancer Inst*. 2025 Nov 10. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djaf329>

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, February 11th 1pm

Creating a Research Impact Statement
VCU Wright Center Research Impact Seminar Series
Register [here](#)

Thursday, February 12th 12-1pm

Funding for Community Engagement
Division of Community Engagement
Register [here](#)

April 6th - 12th
National Public Health Week

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Social and Behavioral Sciences

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