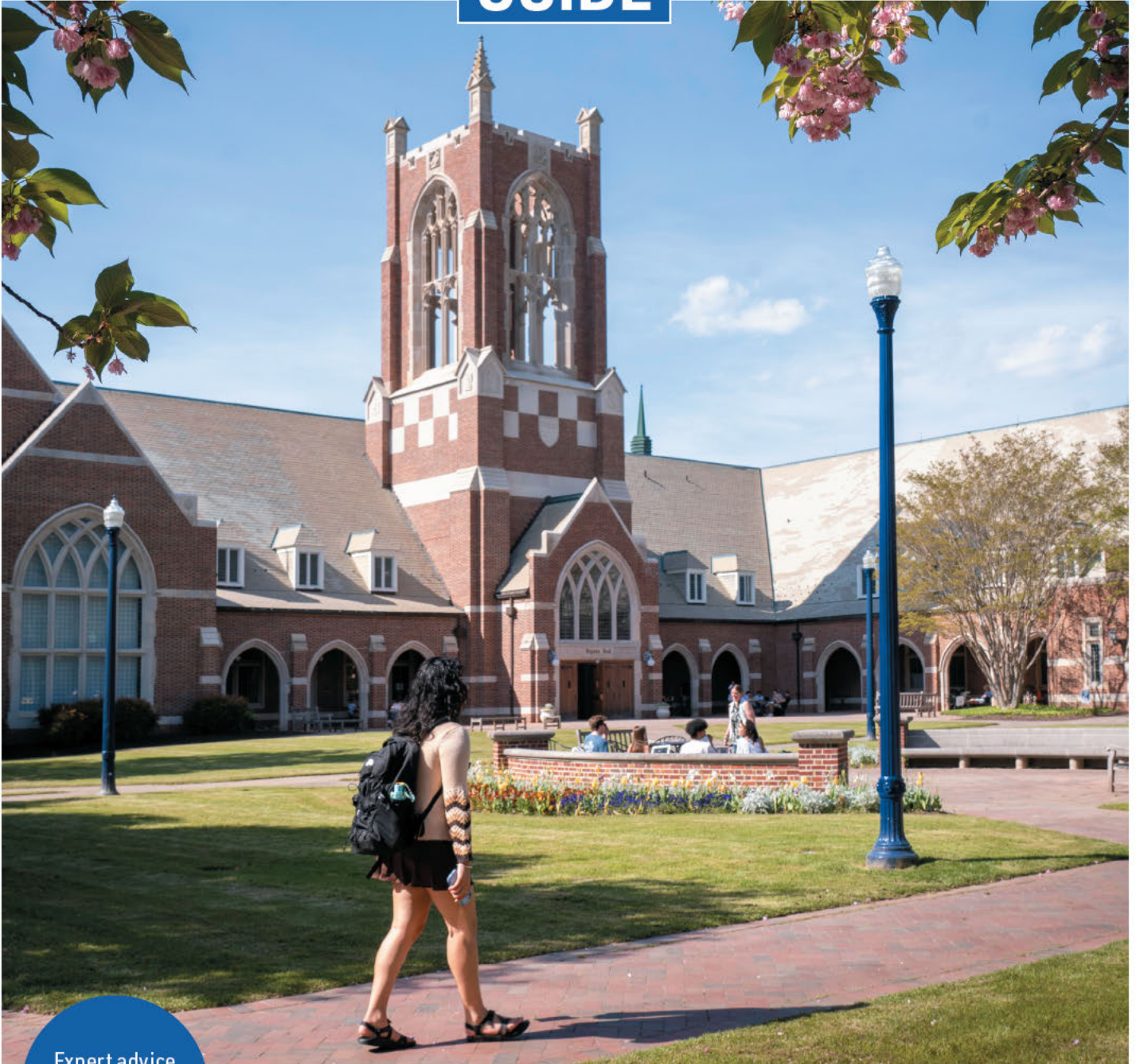


RICHMOND MAGAZINE'S

VIRGINIA COLLEGE

FALL 2024

GUIDE



Expert advice
for starting the
college search

What is FAFSA and other
financial aid facts

Tips for the transition: Moving
in and saying farewell

Updated guide to Virginia universities,
community colleges & adult ed options



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schools for furthering education

COVER: *Courtesy University of Richmond*

VIRGINIA COLLEGE GUIDE

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95

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OF STUDENTS RECEIVE
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#15

BEST CAREER SERVICES
(PRINCETON REVIEW)

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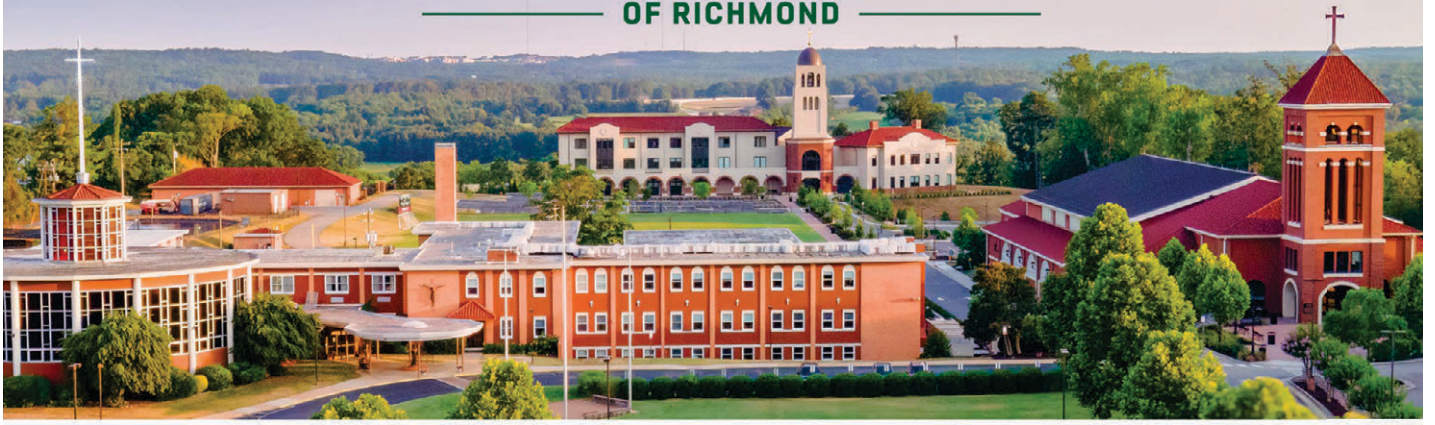
PATHWAY

from what you're learning to
what life will ask of you.

Randolph-Macon College

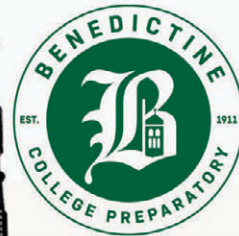
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A **GETTING-STARTED GUIDE** for Families

A child's life is a series of milestones, from first steps and first words to school, driving and one of the biggest: going to college. Planning for the college years can be overwhelming. It's a quintessential kitchen table discussion involving the whole family, and one that comes with an overdose of information and due dates. To ease the process, we gathered tips from local college officials, admissions consultants and other experts to help your student and your family confidently start the search, navigate applications, understand student loans and plan for dorm life.

.....

by **PAULA PETERS CHAMBERS, MINDY KINSEY, LAURA ANDERS LEE, SRIYUTHA MORISHETTY, CALEB OGILVIE, HOLLY RODRIGUEZ, IAN M. STEWART AND ALYSSA TRULL**

Illustrations by RACHEL MAVES

FINDING THE FIT

Tips for choosing a college that feels just right

BY IAN M. STEWART

There are five colleges and universities in Richmond, hundreds more within a day's drive and more than 3,500 in the United States. Helping your student find a school that fits their unique combination of academic, social, extracurricular, career and financial needs can be a long, complicated process. Here are some ideas for getting started.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Melissa Falk, dean of admissions at University of Richmond, says to start with a conversation. "No matter where folks are, whether they're beginning high school or right before their senior year, it really starts with the student," she says. "[Pose] the questions, 'Do you want to go to college? What does that mean to you?'" Falk says asking about a student's academic and extracurricular interests, as well as how far from home they feel comfortable going, may help kickstart the search. "Part of it is asking the questions, but also really providing the space and recognizing if your student is ready to engage in that kind of thinking."

During these early discussions, it's not necessary to discuss potential majors, says Brenda Poggendorf, vice president for enrollment management at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland. "The fact is that the vast majority of students either don't know or are going to change it a

number of times. I always tell students part of the fun of college is to explore." Most colleges will let the student decide a major at the end of their sophomore year, she adds.

CAMPUS EXPLORATION

One of the easiest and most effective ways to continue, says Rob Franek, editor in chief of the Princeton Review, is to visit local colleges. "You can do it at any age," Franek says. "You can start in your freshman year. You can certainly do it in your junior year when the majority of students will be thinking about this stuff."

The Richmond region has a wealth of colleges to visit, including private and

public universities and historically Black colleges. Franek says visiting campuses can put you in touch with faculty and students. He recommends skipping a trip during spring or summer breaks and instead aiming for when school is in session. "To me, that's really the sweet spot, because now you're getting on campus, you're getting a feel for the campus, because there's going to be people, all of whom are there on a daily basis," he says.

In-person campus experiences are also a good way to start building relationships with schools, Franek says. This can be done by signing up for structured campus visits or reaching out to admission departments. He says school admission teams remember these interactions. "The blessing and the curse of living in modern times is that every interaction is tracked," Franek says.

Before booking a trip to tour more distant schools, check their websites; many offer virtual visits. "Take advantage of all the online virtual resources, because they're great," says Connie Livingston, head of counseling at Empowerly College Counseling.

Livingston recommends starting the search early on. "I mean, there's like 3,500 colleges out there, so you don't want to be scrambling and putting all this undue stress on yourself," she says.

OPTIONS OPEN

Early on, it's important to cast a wide net and collect information about schools that interest your student, whether geographically or by size, specialty or extracurricular activities.

"In the initial exploration process, you want a larger funnel at the top to give students more exposure to what is possible and what might be an option," Falk says. That funnel will be pared down as the student learns more about the type of school they're interested in and about themselves, she adds.

Plus, surveying schools is commitment-free, Falk says. "It's not that students and families are committing to all these places. But really try to make sure





Students tour the University of Richmond.

tions, such as the Ivy League schools, don't offer merit scholarships. (For more on college finances, see Page 112.)

PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE

The most important thing throughout the application process is to pay careful attention to application due dates. "Deadlines matter," Vishon Luck, director of undergraduate admissions at Virginia Commonwealth University, writes via email. "Know your timeline and plan accordingly."

Most schools have similar application processes and may even use the same form, called the Common Application, but deadlines vary depending on whether a student is applying early decision, early action or regular decision.

For most schools, the standard application deadline is Jan. 15, while the deadline for early decision and early action applications is Nov. 1, says Princeton Review's Franek. "The value is that you're likely going to know within a month's time if you've been admitted, and that has great solace for a student and their parents," Franek says. However, he notes, the information comes with a caveat: "Early decision is a binding policy; you're obliged to go to that school." Early action, where offered, is not binding.

If a student has a clear first-choice school, it's beneficial to apply early decision if possible. "Schools are competitive, particularly [those] that have a national appeal," Franek says. Applying early decision shows a level of commitment and enthusiasm that carries weight with some admission officials.

Although the application has sections for grades, extracurricular activities and recommendations, the keystone is the personal statement, a 650-word essay written in response to a prompt of the student's choosing.

"Which doesn't sound like that big of a deal," Livingston, the admissions consultant, says. "Guess what? For a 17-year-old, talking about themselves, unveiling their authentic story, that is hard for them." She recommends that students start practicing essay writing the summer before their senior year.

Poggendorf says Randolph-Macon's admissions officers expect essays to be well-written, "but they don't have to be Pulitzer Prize winners." She says the essays are used to assess two things: "We want to get a sense of writing style. Can they write a cohesive document? That's one thing. And believe it

or not, there are a lot of people who can't. And also, what's their thought process like, what are they writing about?"

Most important, says University of Richmond's Falk, relish the time with your college-bound student. Throughout the search and application process, "block out the noise as much as possible," she says. "This is built-in time that you get to hear what they're excited about, hear what they're aspiring to in terms of their future." ■

that they're exposed to as much information and have as much of an opportunity to do that self-reflection."

The funnel analogy is also useful for loosely categorizing schools based on the likelihood of acceptance. Consider a range of so-called safety schools — those you feel confident will accept your student. Include several target schools, or those that pique your student's interest but may be more selective, as well as a few reach schools, which are those that either don't accept many students or are outside your family's budget.

But don't get carried away, Poggendorf says. "I've seen families make these spectacular spreadsheets with all the facts and figures on them," she says. "Put cost, put everything else aside for a minute. [The student should ask] 'Where am I going to flourish the most?'"

COST AND EFFECT

But of course the price tag plays a big part in the final decision, Livingston says. "A lot of it will come down to finances," she says. "You've got to see what schools are offering scholarship wise, because not all schools offer merit aid, which is based on your academic performance."

Livingston says it's important to check for performance-based aid before applying because highly selective institu-



STAYING LOCAL

The savings are appealing, but the experiences are different

BY LAURA ANDERS LEE



Going off to college is a rite of passage. Students leave the nest for the first time seeking independence and adulthood by way of

a new environment. Yet about 1 in 4 full-time undergraduate students are living at home with their parents, according to the Urban Institute think tank.

In most cases, the decision comes down to money. The cost of attending college is higher than ever before, and about half of college students at risk of dropping out cite financial reasons, according to Sallie Mae, the student loan corporation.

At both Virginia Commonwealth University and Randolph-Macon College, room and board will cost more than \$14,000 for the 2024-25 academic year. The University of Richmond estimates \$17,000 for the year. Vishon Luck, director of undergraduate admissions at VCU, says that while living at home can yield significant savings, it might mean missing out on campus experiences, new relationships and access to activities and programs that on-campus living provides.

Ian Richards considered going away to college, but says he ultimately picked VCU because the urban campus has a different vibe than Chesterfield County, where he grew up. A junior studying computer science, Richards chose not to live at home, despite the proximity. "I have my own place in the middle of the

city, so I have that freedom," he says. "My parents are nearby, but they're not monitoring me all the time, and I've learned a lot by doing my own laundry and cooking my own meals."

In addition, Richards says, being close to home makes it easy to keep up with old friends even while he's meeting new people.

At Randolph-Macon College, almost 40% of the incoming class of 540 freshmen are from the Richmond area, including Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover and Henrico counties.

Kim Shank, Randolph-Macon's director of admissions, says staying local has its perks, such as going home for birthday celebrations, popping by for dinner



and having parents cheer you on at school events. She says Randolph-Macon offers students a taste of being far from home while staying in their comfort zone. "Our campus feels like its own world," she says. "Seven trains come through Ashland on a daily basis, and our students can explore other cities. We also have a mini study abroad program in January for students to travel internationally."

Career aspirations are another factor when choosing whether to stay local or leave town for school. Richmond's colleges may not offer the specialty degrees or niche industry networking opportunities that some students seek, but others will find local schools replete with career advantages.

"Our location in Virginia's capital city affords our students convenient access to internships, employment, service learning and an array of other experiential learning offerings," says VCU's Luck.

Shank, however, says that being successful in college has more to do with involvement than geography. "Regardless of the distance from home, it's really about what you do to grow as a person." ■

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LOCAL LENS

Area colleges offer a snapshot of educational options

BY MINDY KINSEY AND ALYSSA TRULL

Richmond's identity as a university town takes on a new meaning when you have a student considering college. Looking beyond sports scores and arts opportunities reveals a range of academic programs and educational experiences, as well as a balanced selection of sizes, settings and social amenities, that draw more than 40,000 students to the region each year. Here's an introduction to the area's five colleges and universities.

RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

A private liberal arts institution in Ashland, Randolph-Macon College primarily offers bachelor's degrees, although it welcomed its first graduate students in physician assistant studies in January 2023. The school was recognized by the Princeton Review for its science labs and career services. While college President Robert R. Lindgren plans to retire in June 2025, he will kickstart major projects before then, including breaking ground on apartment-style residence halls, set to open for the 2025-2026 academic year and accommodate the school's record enrollment. —A.T.

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

Known for its spider mascot and suburban campus straddling the Richmond-

Henrico County border, University of Richmond is a private institution that offers bachelor's and graduate degrees. About half of its students participate in study abroad programs, and a third are involved in Greek organizations. Busi-

[clockwise from top left] Virginia Commonwealth University; Virginia State University; University of Richmond; Virginia Union University; Randolph-Macon College





ness, management and marketing are popular majors among the 100-plus liberal arts and sciences programs available. For the 2024-25 academic year, the School of Arts & Sciences will introduce a cognitive science interdisciplinary program. The Princeton Review recently ranked UR #6 on its list of best private schools for internships; undergrads are eligible for \$5,000 grants to support summer internships or faculty-mentored research projects. —A.T.

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Seamlessly integrated into downtown Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth University offers top-ranked programs in arts, advertising and health care, as well as a range of undergraduate and graduate specialty schools. This fall, VCU is launching interdisciplinary minors in practical artificial intelligence and in mixed and immersive reality studies, which will be open to all students interested in learning how to use AI and metaverse tools. The public university recently began construction on the CoStar Center for Arts and Innovation at the corner of North Belvidere and West Broad streets. Scheduled for completion in late 2027, it will be home to VCU's arts and innovation programs, and comprise classrooms, performance venues and makerspaces. —M.K.

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

One of two historically Black colleges/universities in the region, Virginia State University, just outside Petersburg, is literally a growing force in education. Last year, the public VSU welcomed its largest-ever freshman class, resulting in the highest year-to-year enrollment increase of any college in the commonwealth and one of the highest in the country. In the past year, the university has completed a new building for its College of Agriculture; established a hub for interdisciplinary programs in biotechnology, genomics and bioinformatics; announced a center to support engineering and computer science students; broken ground on an academic commons building; launched a teacher residency program to assist with the teacher shortage in local schools; and brought Wi-Fi 6E to its campus. —M.K.

VIRGINIA UNION UNIVERSITY

One of the 10 oldest historically Black colleges/universities in America, Virginia Union University was founded in 1865 by the American Baptist Home Mission Society and remains a faith-based institution with strong undergraduate and graduate theological programs. VUU increased enrollment by 11% in 2023, creating the largest student body in the private school's history, and has reported that the 2024 incoming freshman class is "record-breaking." The school has steadily grown its academic offerings and now awards 16 advanced degrees, including several in education; VUU also has strong programs in business, health, criminal justice and hospitality management. In May, Wegmans presented the university with a \$300,000 grant to support scholarships. —M.K. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCOTT BROWN/COURTESY VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY; COURTESY VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY; COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND; RACHEL HALSTEAD/ COURTESY RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

HOMEGROWN

Virginia's community colleges fill a niche for recent high school grads

BY RICHMOND MAGAZINE STAFF



Teens who earn a high school diploma generally have two options in their future: Go to college or get a job. Virginia's 23 community colleges offer the chance to do both.

In the Richmond region, Reynolds Community College has four campuses and Brightpoint Community College has two locations. Together, they offer general education, associate's degrees and career training to more than 25,000 full- and part-time students each year.

Many community college students are looking to save money by living at

home. Others aren't ready to make the jump to a four-year residential experience, or perhaps their high school performance wasn't strong enough for direct admissions. Some just want career training and aren't interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Brightpoint, Reynolds and Richard Bland College of William & Mary, a junior college south of Petersburg, all participate in Guaranteed Admissions Agreements with many of Virginia's four-year colleges. The program provides a pathway for community college students to transfer to a university to complete their bachelor's degree.

Community colleges are generally less expensive than other secondary school options, with an average cost of \$4,902 per year for in-state tuition and fees for the 2024-25 academic year, according to the Virginia Community College System.

"Bottom line: Our community colleges offer high quality and affordable pathways to higher education and good paying jobs," says VCCS spokesman Jim Babb. "Starting with community colleges is a smart choice for high school graduates — and adults who want or need to learn new skills to advance their careers." ■

COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN VIRGINIA

Blue Ridge Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Weyers Cave, 540-234-9261 or brcc.edu.

Brightpoint Community College

\$164.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 804-796-4000 or brightpoint.edu.

Central Virginia Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Lynchburg, 434-832-7600 or centralvirginia.edu.

Danville Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Danville, 434-797-2222 or danville.edu.

Eastern Shore Community College

\$158.61 per credit hour. Melfa, 757-789-1789 or es.vccs.edu.

Germanna Community College

\$165.95 per credit hour. Fredericksburg, 540-891-3000 or germanna.edu.

Laurel Ridge Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 800-906-5322 or laurelridge.edu.

Mountain Empire Community College

\$166.90 per credit hour. Big Stone Gap,

276-523-2400 or mecc.edu.

Mountain Gateway Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Clifton Forge, 540-863-2820 or mgcc.edu.

New River Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Dublin, 540-674-3600 or nr.edu.

Northern Virginia Community College

\$190.46 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 703-323-3000 or nvcc.edu.

Patrick & Henry Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Martinsville, 276-638-8777 or patrickhenry.edu.

Paul D. Camp Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 757-569-6700 or pdc.edu.

Piedmont Virginia Community College

\$159.61 per credit hour. Charlottesville, 434-977-3900 or pvcc.edu.

Rappahannock Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 804-333-6730 or rappahannock.edu.

Reynolds Community College

\$167.50 per credit. Multiple locations, 804-371-3000 or reynolds.edu.

Southside Virginia Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 434-949-1000 or southside.edu.

Southwest Virginia Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Richlands, 276-964-2555 or sw.edu.

Tidewater Community College

\$165.40 per credit hour. Multiple locations, 757-822-1111 or tcc.edu.

Virginia Highlands Community College

\$167.40 per credit hour. Abingdon, 276-739-2400 or vhcc.edu.

Virginia Peninsula Community College

\$160.61 per credit hour. Hampton and Williamsburg, 757-825-2800 or tncc.edu.

Virginia Western Community College

\$179.99 per credit hour. Roanoke, 540-857-6076 or virginiawestern.edu.

Wytheville Community College

\$163.40 per credit hour. Wytheville, 276-223-4700 or wcc.vccs.edu. ■

Updated July 2024. In-state tuition only cited. To suggest an update to this listing, please email editor@richmag.com, subject line: school chart update.



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(804) 639-1011

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(804) 375-5773

Primrose School of Swift Creek
(804) 744-0787

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DOLLARS AND SENSE

Familiarizing yourself with financial aid

BY HOLLY RODRIGUEZ



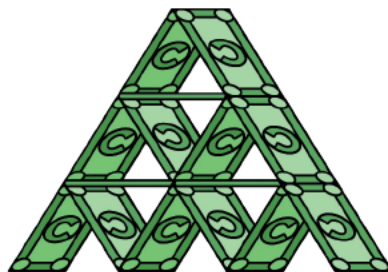
Federal funding has enabled millions of students to pay for college through the Department of Education since 1965. That's when President Lyndon

B. Johnson established the federal government as the main provider of financial aid to students through the Higher Education Act. Students do not have to repay grants, but loans are repaid with interest.

Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, is the first step in receiving either form of aid. The Department of Education uses the application to determine student eligibility and need. The resulting offer of financial aid can be accepted or rejected completely or in part. Students must submit a FAFSA each year they want to receive federal aid. In Virginia, the FAFSA is also used to determine institution- and state-based aid.

"People often think financial aid is only need-based," says Tierney Jackson, senior associate for financial aid at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. "Everyone meeting eligibility criteria will at least be offered a direct loan from the Department of Education."

Direct Subsidized Loans are offered to undergraduate students with financial need. Interest is paid by the Department of Education while the student is enrolled at least half time and for the first six



months after leaving school. After the grace period, students pay principal and interest on the loan. Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available to undergraduate, graduate and professional students but are not based on financial need. Direct PLUS Loans are unsubsidized loans to graduate or professional students and parents of dependent undergrads to cover college expenses. Unsubsidized loans accrue interest even while the student is enrolled in school. All of these

loans have fixed interest rates.

Private funding is also available. Scholarships, like grants, do not need to be repaid. They are awarded by schools, businesses or organizations and have different application processes and deadlines. Private loans may require a credit check and generally have higher interest rates and less-flexible repayment terms than federal loans.

The FAFSA for the 2025-26 school year will be rolled out to limited students and schools on Oct. 1, 2024, and will be fully available on Dec. 1. School submission deadlines vary, so check their websites for information. Accepted students usually receive financial aid packages before college deposit deadlines so that they can use the information to make decisions.

It was widely reported last spring that students and parents experienced technical difficulties with the FAFSA process. "This past year was a roller coaster for all of us," says Erin McGrath, assistant director of college access and PK-12 outreach at SCHEV.

According to a spokesperson, the Department of Education has worked to resolve last year's issues with the FAFSA. "We have brought on new leadership to oversee FAFSA's overall strategy and help manage the development work to ensure millions of students can access the federal financial aid they are entitled to."

For more information on federal student aid, visit studentaid.gov. The Virginia College Advising Corps offers FAFSA assistance at vcac.virginia.edu/fafsa-now. ■



WHAT IS FAFSA?

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, is an online application that determines student eligibility and need for federal (and in Virginia, state and institution) grants, scholarships, work-study funds and loans.





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A STUDENT'S PATH

College living opens the door to self-discovery

BY PAULA PETERS CHAMBERS



For many college freshmen, moving into a dormitory marks the first time they will live away from their childhood home. Along with navigating an unfamiliar academic environment, students must create a new daily existence in a fresh setting populated mainly by people they don't know.

As with other transitions, planning can make the shift easier.

"The greatest thing parents can do [with their child] before college is to list things the child likes and doesn't like pertaining to living in close proximity with others," says Mark James, acting dean of students at Virginia Union University. "Think about relationships [the child has] with siblings, how the child tolerates mess."

Many colleges and universities use a matching program, similar to a dating app, to help students find roommates, which can minimize difficulties. "With any of these online tools, what you put in determines what you get out," says Joe Boehman, associate dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Richmond. "You have to be honest about how neat you are — though 'neat' is a relative term — whether you're a night owl, a partier. Sometimes, those things are hard to answer when parents are standing over your shoulder, so parents should give [students] the space to answer honestly."



Virginia Commonwealth University's Monroe Park campus.

Parents also need to be willing to let go, James says, noting that VCU has a "parting ceremony" following dorm move-in to reassure parents that students will still be cared for, even if they're no longer living at home. "Parents play a major role in transitioning the mindsets of their sons and daughters," he says. "Parents need to prepare students to part from them, so [students] can pursue independence."

COMMUNAL LIVING

Once roomies are together in person, it's time to hammer out specifics. "Have an

immediate conversation," James says. "Say, 'This is what I like; this is what I don't like. Let's talk about it.' Honesty helps solve a lot of problems."

Transparency is key, Boehman notes, because many students have never shared a room prior to college. Sharing a bedroom and bathroom encourages interaction with others, which helps students build social-emotional skill sets, Boehman says. "People will see you at your best and your worst, just as you see them," he says. "[Dorm living] is good for learning how to give grace and being flexible. Be comfortable being uncomfortable. You have to learn how to negotiate some things."

“PARENTS NEED TO PREPARE STUDENTS TO PART FROM THEM, SO [STUDENTS] CAN PURSUE INDEPENDENCE.”

— Joe Boehman,
University of Richmond



GETTING AROUND

Another adjustment for students may be the absence of a readily accessible vehicle, whether their own or a parent's. It's possible for freshmen to have on-campus cars at UR and VUU, but personal transportation is discouraged at both.

"I don't know if I want my son or daughter driving all around that new city rather than focusing on setting that high academic GPA," James says, noting that VUU is on the GRTC city bus line and within walking distance of Broad Street eateries.

UR also has a dedicated bus stop near campus and shuttles that transport students to shopping centers, Carytown, and the train station and airport around spring and semester breaks. "You don't have to rely on having a friend with a car or have a car yourself," Boehman says. "Richmond isn't New York City with a subway system that goes everywhere, but it's a pretty easy city to get around in."

FOOD FRENZY

Campus food is a topic that attracts much discussion, usually on social media, and presents parents with another opportunity for helping prepare students for change. James says, "Nobody's going to make meatloaf like Mom or barbecue like Dad."

Boehman recommends that students take advantage of the variety of food options available on campus. "If you're at a place that offers filet mignon every day, then you're going to get tired of it, even though it's filet mignon," he says. "No matter how good the food is, we all want variety."

The University of
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Plus, college is a good time to explore different types of foods, as dining halls and on-campus cafes have wide-ranging fare. "This is a good time to expand your palate," Boehman says. "You're going to be exposed to really good food you weren't exposed to at home."

MOVING OFF CAMPUS

While students may be eager to move off-campus at the first opportunity, it's best to push that off as long as possible to reduce added costs and additional burdens. "Many students finance [college] through loans," James notes. "When you move into an apartment, you can elongate your debt. When you start with debt early, you can end up with bad credit. That doesn't lend itself to a good start [after graduation]."

Boehman agrees. "Sometimes, adulting — dealing with rent and utility bills — is hard, and you can stay on campus and focus on what matters," he says. "But if you're a junior or senior, and want that little bit of extra freedom, that's a conversation for students and their parents, [evaluating] the pros and cons."

Ultimately, Boehman says, parents will continue to be involved in their children's lives — just in fresh ways. "They're still going to need your support, but that support is going to look different," he says. "It becomes about mentoring and coaching as a parent of a young adult. That's a hard lesson to learn. But once they go off, they're living their own life." ■



MOVING FORWARD



Setting students up for success starts with saying goodbye

BY PAULA PETERS CHAMBERS

Preparing a child to leave home for a residential college is a multilayered, multistep process. It's easy to focus on the packing — clothes, supplies, hobby gear — but the emotional aspect doesn't easily fit in a box.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORIENTATION

Most colleges and universities offer resources and programming to help both students and parents navigate this life transition. Even if the student has visited campus previously, orientation is key to a smooth move.

“One of the most important things about orientation is that a student feels comfortable in their decision,” says Alexis Brooks-Walter, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management at Virginia State University in Petersburg. “This is a road they've never traveled. They have to learn how to ask questions, determine resources and make connections with people on campus. [Through orientation, students] find a cohort.”

Orientation at VSU is also about setting a tone, Brooks-Walter says. “We encourage parents to connect with each other,” she says. “We are a family affair,



[Top] New student orientation at Randolph-Macon College; [right] A Virginia State University homecoming football game

and we try to start the family atmosphere at orientation.”

Grant Azdell, vice president for student affairs and dean of students at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, says orientation is an essential learning experience for everyone. “The basic thing is that [incoming students and parents] don't know what they don't know,” he says. “Every institution runs differently. Even if parents have a college student at another institution, institutions are different. Every year, we tweak [orientation]

to offer what students need. Orientation is not something you want to blow off. We're not here to waste your time; we're here to make the transition easier.”

SETTLING IN

When the time comes for moving into the dormitory, administrators agree that less is more. “We encourage students to realize that most of them are moving into a shared space,” Brooks-Walter says. “Be mindful of what is essential and remember that family weekend is an opportunity to resupply or switch out things when necessary.”

Azdell says that, every year, he sees at least one student arrive with a loaded trailer. “I know more than half that stuff will go home,” he says, adding that students should communicate with their roommates in advance to coordinate room amenities and avoid duplication of large items like refrigerators.

FIRST FAREWELL

For some, the hardest part of move-in is saying goodbye. “It doesn't matter how many students parents have taken to college, the emotions are different, the kids are not the same, the schools are not the same,” Azdell says. “Be careful not to transfer your emotions to your student. That washes off on the student experience and doesn't set [the student] up for success.”

RMC's orchestrated drop-off concludes with a parent send-off in the late afternoon. “It doesn't leave a lot of room for interpretation,” Azdell says. “When students arrive, there's excitement overlaying anxiety. The longer a parent stays, the excitement drops and the anxiety goes up. Every student is going to have some anxiety, but the sooner they engage with other students, the better. I tell parents, give me three weeks, and your [child] will be fine.”

VSU also has a well-organized move-in procedure with help from administrators and upperclass students. “Designated times reduce the flow [of traffic] so students can do what they need to do

and so we can have personnel available at those times,” Brooks-Walter says. Plus, there are snacks, beverages and even music to welcome everyone to campus. “This is a celebration, the beginning of a family reunion,” she adds.

PARENTS' WEEKEND

Parents may plan to visit their student during a fall family weekend. “It’s a wonderful time to reconnect,” Brooks-Walter says. At VSU, activities include open academic houses, a scavenger hunt, social events, a town hall, a football game and nondenominational Sunday service, all designed to help parents become more familiar with their child’s second home. “I think everybody has a sigh of relief when they see that connection [students are forming with the college],” she says, adding that if parents aren’t available to come, students may invite anyone to be their guest — extended family member, academic adviser, etc.

Before booking travel for college visits, Azdell advises parents to confirm details with their student. Some parents may assume if they don’t attend, their student will feel neglected, but that’s not necessarily the case; Azdell says that roughly one-third of freshmen students will have parent participation. “Ask your student; don’t just plan to show up,” he says. “Let the student have their experience.”

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Both Azdell and Brooks-Walter say parents should follow their student’s lead in communicating. “This differs dramatically from student to parent,” Brooks-Walter says. “Some are fine with once a week, some want every day. We recommend talking about GPS [tracking apps], too. It’s important to us that parents and students are on the same page.”

Azdell says parents should remember that if college is going well, they may hear from their child less often. And he recommends parents ditch the tracking apps, recalling one student who purchased a prepaid cellphone so he could leave his “home” phone on a shelf in the library. “The more you make [your child] work around you, the better they will become,” Azdell says. “The parent who intervenes is taking away the experience.”

College is a time when parents need to step back so their children can live their own lives. “Let the experience be the student’s experience, and let them fight their own battles,” Azdell advises. “If they don’t know how [to do that], they’ll learn pretty quick.”

Brooks-Walter adds that parents should try to relax. “Have faith — in your students, in their upbringings, in the university,” she says. “Yes, it’s nerve-wracking, but trust [that students] have the capability to achieve their dreams. We are here for their benefit. We want them to succeed as much as their parents do.” ■



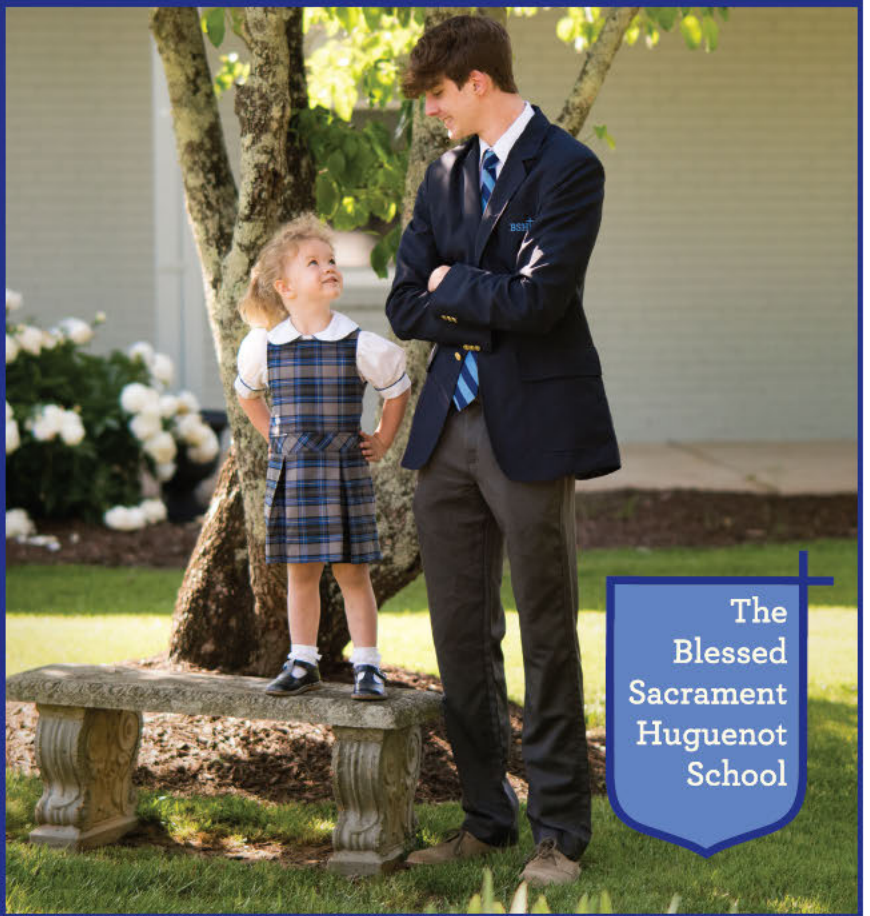
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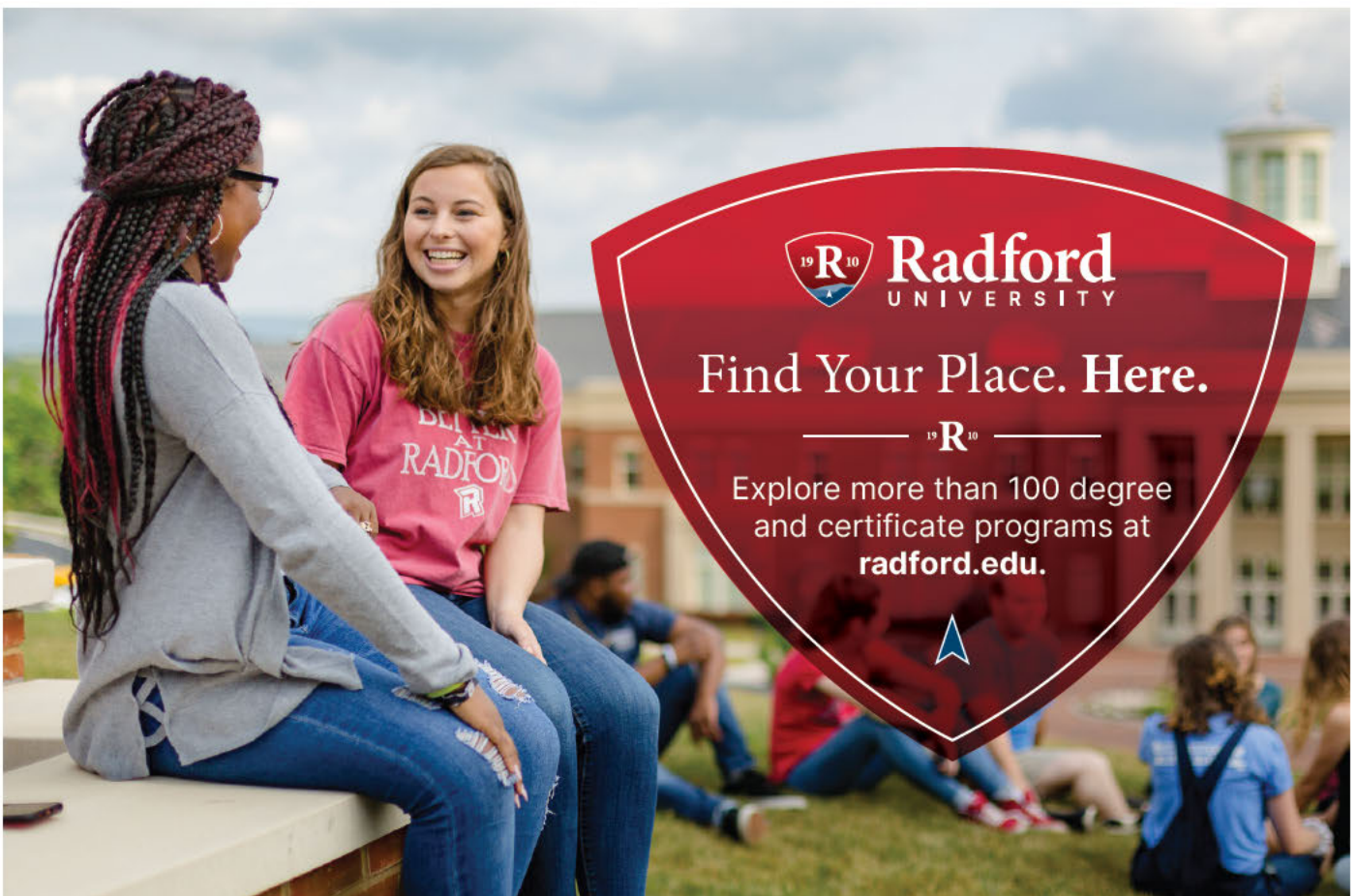
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CAMPUS ADVISING

Tips for troubleshooting common college challenges

BY PAULA PETERS CHAMBERS

Despite cheerful images of bright campuses and happy students on university websites and promotional materials, the reality is that living away from home may lead to situations that don't always make students smile. Issues might include homesickness, academic struggles, difficulty making new friends and conflicts with roommates.

Parents and students can begin to address these challenges even before move-in occurs.

"What will really help [students] is to get them on campus as much as they can before the first day of class," says Aaron Hart, vice president for student affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. Hart recalls that before his freshman year at Southern Illinois University, he spent two days on campus during the summer, exploring the dining hall, bookstore and student union. "That visit helped with my initial fears," he notes.

Many schools now have programs that invite students to campus in the summer for a few days before the start of the fall semester, which fosters settling in. "This is an opportunity to map out the class schedule, maybe meet with professors," Hart says.

Once the semester has begun, when questions or issues arise, there is help. At VCU, Hart says, students should head to the Office of Student Advocacy. "It's a one-stop shop for everything," he says. "There is no concern that this office can't triage."



If your student's school doesn't have a similar clearinghouse location, Hart advises they connect with their resident adviser or hall director. Once that contact is made, the RA will typically refer the student to another person or office.

Parents should resist the urge to jump in to solve problems, Hart says.

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★ "NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO TO SCHOOL, YOU WILL FIND YOUR COMMUNITY."

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— Aaron Hart, ★
Virginia Commonwealth University

"Helicopter parents contribute to homesickness," he notes. "If [parents] don't let their students go, they will still feel like they're at home, which will make them feel more homesick."

Parents also need to be aware of their own reactions to their student's challenges and avoid projecting their feelings. "Students have some fears but don't know what to expect [in college]," Hart says. "Some parents try to live vicariously through their students. That's what our students struggle with."

School-sponsored parent groups offered via Zoom or Facebook are outlets where parents can share information and worries, Hart says. "[Parents] support one another and also give us the opportunity to know what students are feeling, so we can help."

While drug and alcohol abuse are concerns for parents and college administrators, "the new drug is social media," Hart says, noting that many students spend more time on their mobile phones and laptops than they do in company with others. "When they get together in person, they don't talk," he says. "The social skills of our students are in jeopardy."

Although challenges can't be avoided entirely, students can help themselves early on. "If students can acclimate to campus, get involved in an organization — or start their own — find time to interact with their professors, they'll do well," Hart says. "No matter where you go to school, you will find your community, and you can find success." ■

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PUBLIC	Christopher Newport University	Newport News	757-594-7000	cnu.edu	4,047	\$16,828	88%	13-1
	George Mason University	Fairfax	703-993-1000	gmu.edu	28,277	\$14,220	89%	16-1
	James Madison University	Harrisonburg	540-568-6211	jmu.edu	20,847	\$14,242	76%	17-1
	Longwood University	Farmville	434-395-2000	longwood.edu	3,163	\$15,740	85%	13-1
	Norfolk State University	Norfolk	757-823-8600	nsu.edu	5,429	\$10,180	88%	15-1
	Old Dominion University	Norfolk	757-683-3685	odu.edu	17,516	\$12,750	90%	15-1
	Radford University	Radford	540-831-5000	radford.edu	5,704	\$12,548	91%	12-1
	Richard Bland College	Petersburg	804-862-6100	rbc.edu	2,595	\$9,093	79%	20-1
	University of Mary Washington	Fredericksburg	540-654-1000	umw.edu	3,611	\$14,905	85%	13-1
	University of Virginia	Charlottesville	434-924-0311	virginia.edu	17,589	\$19,414	24%	15-1
	University of Virginia's College at Wise	Wise	276-328-0100	uvawise.edu	1,906	\$11,780	99%	13-1
	Virginia Commonwealth University	Richmond	804-828-0100	vcu.edu	21,480	\$16,720	93%	16-1
	Virginia Military Institute (military)	Lexington	540-464-7230	vmi.edu	1,560	\$21,046	82%	10-1
	Virginia State University	Petersburg	804-524-5000	vsu.edu	4,829	\$10,043	89%	13-1
	Virginia Tech	Blacksburg	540-231-6267	vt.edu	30,504	\$15,950	57%	13-1
William & Mary	Williamsburg	757-221-4000	wm.edu	6,963	\$25,734	33%	13-1	
NONPROFIT PRIVATE	Averett University	Danville	800-283-7388	averett.edu	1,165	\$38,400	76%	12-1
	Bluefield University	Bluefield	800-872-0175	bluefield.edu	648	\$27,800	72%	14-1
	Bridgewater College	Bridgewater	540-828-8000	bridgewater.edu	1,400	\$41,350	90%	13-1
	Christendom College	Front Royal	540-636-2900	christendom.edu	550	\$30,420	85%	15-1
	Eastern Mennonite University	Harrisonburg	540-432-4118	emu.edu	863	\$40,990	99%	10-1
	Emory and Henry University	Emory	276-944-4121	emoryhenry.edu	1,100	\$35,155	73%	10-1
	Ferrum College	Ferrum	800-868-9797	ferrum.edu	775	\$38,320	75%	13-1
	Hampden-Sydney College (men only)	Hampden Sydney	434-223-6000	hsc.edu	876	\$51,808	40%	9-1
	Hampton University	Hampton	757-727-5000	hamptonu.edu	3,255	\$29,162	74%	13-1
	Hollins University (women only)	Roanoke	800-456-9595	holins.edu	673	\$42,600	72%	9-1
	Liberty University	Lynchburg	855-731-2512	liberty.edu	15,800	\$23,800	99%	18-1
	Mary Baldwin University	Staunton	540-887-7019	marybaldwin.edu	1,298	\$32,036	90%	12-1
	Marymount University	Arlington	703-522-5600	marymount.edu	2,216	\$37,400	81%	13-1
	Randolph College	Lynchburg	434-947-8000	randolphcollege.edu	541	\$27,930	95%	8-1
	Randolph-Macon College	Ashland	804-752-7200	rmc.edu	1,500	\$46,460	72%	10-1
	Regent University	Virginia Beach	800-373-5504	regent.edu	4,300	\$19,680	32%	21-1
	Roanoke College	Salem	540-375-2500	roanoke.edu	1,826	\$35,350	80%	10-1
	Shenandoah University	Winchester	540-665-4500	su.edu	2,590	\$35,170	78%	10-1
	Southern Virginia University	Buena Vista	540-261-8400	svu.edu	971	\$19,108	98.9%	17-1
	Sweet Briar College (women only)	Sweet Briar	434-381-6100	sbc.edu	460	\$24,740	77%	8-1
	University of Lynchburg	Lynchburg	434-544-8100	lynchburg.edu	1,822	\$34,500	96%	10-1
University of Richmond	Richmond	804-289-8000	richmond.edu	3,164	\$65,230	24%	8-1	
Virginia Union University	Richmond	804-257-5600	vuu.edu	1,318	\$14,530	81%	16-1	
Virginia Wesleyan University	Norfolk, Virginia Beach	757-455-3200	vwu.edu	1,644	\$36,550	81%	14-1	
Washington and Lee University	Lexington	540-458-8400	wlu.edu	1,898	\$63,315	17%	8-1	

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Brightpoint Community College \$164.61 per credit hour in-state. Online associate's degrees in a variety of disciplines. Teacher recertification courses available. 800 Charter Colony Parkway, Midlothian, 804-796-4000; 13101 Route 1, Chester, 804-796-4000 or brightpoint.edu.

Community College Workforce Alliance Workplace training courses in the greater Richmond region as a partnership between Brightpoint and Reynolds community colleges. Multiple training and meeting facilities, 804-523-2292 or ccwatraining.org.

Lifelong Learning Institute Academic and fitness classes for ages 50 and older. \$150 membership per year. 13801 Westfield Road, 804-378-2527 or llichesterfield.org.

Mary Baldwin University Online, MBU Online \$460 per credit hour. Mary Baldwin University offers online undergraduate and graduate degrees, and certificates in 43 majors and programs: business, criminal justice, education, psychology, social work, master of business administration, master of healthcare administration, nursing to registered nurse, and more. online.marybaldwin.edu

Old Dominion University, ODUGlobal \$408 per undergraduate credit hour (with Virginia domicile) \$439 (students living outside Virginia); \$620 (Virginia resident with Virginia domicile) per graduate credit hour. 176 online degrees and certificates in business, education, engineering, health/social sciences, nursing and technology. Transfer agreements with Reynolds and Brightpoint. 800-968-2638 or online.odu.edu.

Reynolds Community College \$176 per credit hour; visit website for details. Parham Road Campus, 1651 E. Parham Road; Downtown Campus, 700 E. Jackson St.; Goochland campus, 1851 Dickinson Road; The Kitchens at Reynolds, 2500 Nine Mile Road; 804-371-3000 or reynolds.edu.



Union Presbyterian Seminary \$500 per semester hour. Graduate programs in biblical and theological studies, ministry and Christian education. 3401 Brook Road, 800-229-2990 or upsem.edu.

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ECPI Degree and diploma programs in technology, business, criminal justice, health science, nursing, culinary arts. Technology, Business & Culinary Arts, 11104 W. Broad St., Glen Allen, 804-934-0100; Nursing & Health Science, 2809 Emerywood Parkway, Suite 400, 804-417-4742 or ecpi.edu.

Lotus Professional College State-certified training in acupuncture, therapeutic massage and esthetics. 8935 Patterson Ave., 804-290-0980 or lotus.edu.

South University Programs in health care, public health, criminal justice, business, psychology and more. 2151 Old Brick Road, Glen Allen, 804-727-6800 or southuniversity.edu. ■

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