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Photo illustration by Gabi Wood

Photos by Megan Lee and Jay Stonefield

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

STUDENTS GATHERED IN MONROE Park as Rodney the Ram rode on the back of a pickup truck with the university's pep band on Monday during New Student Convocation.

Last year's Weeks of Welcome activities were mostly virtual due to COVID-19, however, the university plans to host certain events in person this fall to welcome new students and returning sophomores who lacked a proper welcome last fall. The University's Weeks of Welcome will take place between Aug. 23 and Sept. 23.

Sophomore finance major Alex Barton just transferred to VCU. He said he feels safe attending larger events because of VCU's COVID-19 vaccine requirement. All students, faculty and staff are required to get a COVID-19 vaccination unless they have a religious or health or exemption.

"I don't think I'd ever be excited to be in a classroom," Barton said.

The university reinstated its indoor mask mandate on Aug. 9, which affects indoor activities hosted at the University Student Commons, such as movie nights. University spokesperson Matt Lovisa stated masks should be worn in outdoor situations where six feet of distance cannot be maintained and at events with over 50 people.

VCU hosted New Student Convocation from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. complete with food trucks, a bouncy house, a concert by Echsmith and speeches by both President

Michael Rao and men's basketball coach Mike Rhoades. Many students attended the event, and most were unmasked.

Students of all ages gathered in Monroe Park to walk to The Commons to complete a university tradition of touching the ram horns while making a wish. Fraternities, sororities and community members lined the streets and cheered the students on as they walked around campus.

“

I missed a lot last year, so I wanted to see what VCU usually does for freshmen.”

Elianna Karo, sophomore communication arts major

Sophomore communication arts major Elianna Karo attended the event, despite not being a freshman. She lived on campus last year and is living in West Grace South as a sophomore this year.

"I missed a lot last year, so I wanted to see what VCU usually does for freshmen," Karo said.

She said she's looking forward to pushing herself out of her comfort zone while being on campus. The sophomore said she has already met more people in the past few days than she did her entire first year.

"I'm pushing myself by being more social," Karo said. "A lot of freshmen are kinda in the same boat."

Events the university is boasting include The Commons Take-Over and the Student Organization Fair. The Student Organization Fair is one of the largest events VCU hosts, according to the university website. It's held biannually at the beginning of each semester.

The fair will be held virtually between Aug. 23 and 26 and an in-person Student Organization Fair will be held on Aug. 27 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. in Monroe Park. The virtual fair will be held via RamsConnect where students can search for clubs and contact student leaders.

The university is also offering grab-and-go activities, where students can pick up materials needed at The Commons and participate in activities on their own time. Students must register in advance on RamsConnect for grab-and-go events as spots are limited.

Those events include paint night, movie night with provided snacks and game night with provided card games. All events are free to students. The Commons is also hosting virtual game nights for students who don't wish to gather in groups.

A full list of Weeks of Welcome activities are available on RamsConnect.

A full list of Weeks of Welcome activities are available on RamsConnect.

Mask mandate returns, some students skeptical

EMMA CARLSON
Contributing Writer

Students across campus are feeling the full effects of a reinstated mask mandate with the fall semester beginning.

Psychology graduate student Patricia Basta expressed disappointment with the return of the mask mandate.

"It's a little frustrating because you started getting used to having to not wear masks, and now they're bringing it back, but I'm just happy to be in the classroom again," Basta said.

VCU announced on Aug. 9 that, effective immediately, indoor masking would be reinstated throughout the university and continued in all health systems facilities for all individuals, regardless of vaccination status.

VCU's updated mask guidelines come from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance and evolving COVID-19 data, which shows cases in Virginia on the rise. Cases in August have averaged almost 2,000 per day, compared to 100 in early June.

August 2020 had a seven-day moving average of around 1,000 cases per day, with rates peaking in January at around 6,100 per day, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

Basta has three in-person classes this semester with one online. She said she is excited to get to experience grad school in person compared to online last year.

The delta variant is the primary COVID-19 strain that is causing new cases, according to the VDH. The week of July 18 through 24 saw at least 382 new cases in Virginia. Of those cases, 375 were caused by the delta variant. The number of cases caused by the variant heightened the following week to 403 out of the 404 new cases. The VDH notes that July 11 and onward contains evolving data, meaning not all cases have been reported yet.

See **MASK MANDATE** on page 3



Students move into Gladding Residence Center on Aug. 18.
Photo by Kaitlyn Fulmore



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11 INDICTED IN CONNECTION TO FRESHMAN ADAM OAKES' DEATH



Clockwise from left: Benjamin Corado, Robert Fritz, Quinn Kuby, Riley McDaniel, Jason Mulgrew, Christian Rohrbach, Colin Tran, Alessandro Medina-Villanueva and Andrew White. The photos of Alexander Bradley and Enayat Sheikhzad are unavailable. Eleven individuals have been charged with "unlawful hazing of a student," six were charged with "purchase, giving alcohol to a minor." Photos courtesy of the Richmond Police Department

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

ELEVEN PEOPLE WERE indicted on Friday in connection to the death of VCU freshman Adam Oakes, as a result of a seven-month-long investigation led by the Richmond Police Department, according to RPD spokesperson Tracy Walker.

Out of the eight people arrested, seven were taken into custody by VCU Police and one by Virginia State Police. The other three individuals turned themselves in on Monday, according to Walker. After a Sept. 27 hearing, seven more were released on bond, according to an article by CBS 6 Richmond.

The Oakes family released an emailed statement on Friday with a list of seven things that can be learned from Adam's death and the recent arrests. The list includes stopping hazing, "being brave" by standing up for others, calling emergency services and "hug your loved ones and let them know you care."

"Time is precious," the Oakes family stated. "We would give anything to hug Adam one more time, see the smile on face, or hear his laugh, but we can't because of the actions these young men took that evening in February."

Benjamin Corado, Quinn Kuby, Riley McDaniel, Alessandro Medina-

Villanueva, Jason Mulgrew, Christian Rohrbach, Colin Tran, Enayat Sheikhzad, Andrew White, Alexander Bradley and Robert Fritz have been charged with "unlawful hazing of a student." Corado, Kuby, Tran, White, Bradley and Fritz were additionally charged with "purchase, giving alcohol to a minor."

Nine out of the 11 people indicted are currently enrolled in the Fall 2021 semester, according to university spokesman Michael Porter. Sheikhzad is a graduate of the university and White is not enrolled in the Fall 2021 semester. Andrew White has no relation to Courtney White, cousin of Oakes.



Adam Oakes.

Photo courtesy of the Oakes family

University public relations could not indicate the disciplinary status of the nine students as of Sept. 28, however, CBS 6 Richmond reported seven have been suspended.

The Oakes family also stated they are grateful for the "relentless effort, diligence, and perseverance" of Major Crimes Detective Michael Gouldman and Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Alison Martin. Gouldman led the investigation of Oakes' death, according to RPD.

"Our entire family has faith in the judicial system and we appreciate the driving efforts for justice," the Oakes family stated. "To the young men charged, we hope you learn from your criminal acts and never, ever forget what you and Delta Chi did to our sweet boy, Adam Oakes."

A majority of the individuals: Kuby, McDaniel, Medina-Villanueva, Mulgrew, Rohrbach, Tran, White, Bradley and Fritz will have a court session at 9 a.m. on Oct. 4 in the Richmond City Circuit Court at the John Marshall Courts Building.

Oakes was pronounced dead by Richmond Police on Feb. 27 after he was found dead at a West Clay Street residence the morning after attending a Delta Chi event, the fraternity Oakes pledged. Oakes' family says a hazing event led to his death.

VCU's chapter of Delta Chi was suspended the morning after his death and officially expelled from campus on June 3, according to a university statement.

The cause of death was ruled accidental due to ethanol toxicity, a type of alcohol poisoning, according to a May 25 report from the Richmond Medical Examiner.

The seven-month-long investigation was conducted by the RPD in collaboration with VCU Police and the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, according to Walker.

Hazing is considered a class one misdemeanor in Virginia, which is punishable by up to 12 months in jail, a \$2,500 fine or both.

The international headquarters of Delta Chi released a statement condemning the actions of the former members of the VCU chapter following the arrests that were made on Friday, Sept. 24.

"No family should ever have to experience what the Oakes family has experienced," Delta Chi stated. "Delta Chi remains committed to continued cooperation with all law enforcement agencies and efforts."



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Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin won the gubernatorial election early Wednesday morning. He will be the first Republican governor since Bob McDonnell won in 2009. Photos by Megan Lee and courtesy of Glenn Youngkin

YOUNGKIN WINS GOVERNOR SEAT, FLIPS VIRGINIA RED

KATHARINE DEROSA
News Editor

REPUBLICAN GLENN YOUNGKIN IS projected to win the Virginia gubernatorial election, after a close race against former governor and Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe.

Youngkin took the stage at his election night party in Chantilly, Virginia around 1:04 a.m. The Associated Press called the race in his favor at 12:37 a.m.

“Alrighty Virginia,” Youngkin said. “We won this thing.”

Youngkin garnered 50.97% of the votes, while McAuliffe secured 48.34% of the votes, according to the Virginia Public Access Project, as of 1:59 a.m. on Wednesday morning. His other opponent, Liberation Party candidate Princess Blanding, received 0.69% of the votes. McAuliffe previously served as Virginia governor from 2014 to 2018. Blanding is the sister of VCU alumnus Marcus-David Peters, who was shot and killed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis on Interstate 95 in 2018.

Youngkin is endorsed by former President Donald Trump and has never held public office before, according to Ballotpedia. During his victory speech, he said his win is a “defining moment” in Virginia.

“Together we will change the trajectory of this commonwealth,” Youngkin said in his victory speech early Wednesday morning.

Youngkin’s “day one” plan as highlighted on his website includes cutting taxes, expanding funding for the police, banning critical race theory in public schools and investing in transportation infrastructure.

“There is no time to waste,” Youngkin said. “We work in real people time, not government time.”

Critical race theory is not currently being taught in Loudoun County Public Schools, located in Northern Virginia, according to reporting from The Loudoun Times-Mirror.

Critical race theory is the idea that racism is “inherent” in United States social,

economic and political institutions, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. These systems maintain current unequal social hierarchies between white people and people of color, according to Britannica.

During his victory speech, Youngkin said he plans to “restore excellence in schools” by creating charter schools and allowing parents to select which public schools their children attend.

“

So it’s hard to imagine what exactly he would do — he’s never actually run for office before. That might be part of the appeal.”

Alex Keena, VCU political science professor

Youngkin raised more than \$57 million for his campaign, as of Oct. 21, according to the Virginia Public Access Project. Youngkin himself is the top donor to his campaign, having contributed \$20 million. The Republican Governors Association and the Republican Party of Virginia fall behind Youngkin with donations, contributing \$10.7 million and \$1.6 million, respectively.

Youngkin outraised McAuliffe by over \$360,000. Blanding has raised \$34,771 as of Oct. 21, according to VPAP.

VCU political science professor Alex Keena referred to a win by Youngkin as a “complete shift.” He said Republican voters may see Youngkin as “untainted” by politics.

“There’s been some promises and a lot of focus on anger about teaching kids racism in schools,” Keena said. “Critical race

theory isn’t even taught in public education in Virginia. It’s sort of just an imaginary thing that are getting people on the right really motivated.”

Virginia’s political landscape will change under Youngkin, Keena said, even if Democrats maintain control of other local offices.

Youngkin previously worked at The Carlyle Group, which is a private equity firm, according to his website. He also holds a MBA from Harvard University.

Youngkin’s plans for cutting taxes include eliminating Virginia’s grocery tax, which is currently at 2.5%, according to the Virginia tax website.

After he was declared the projected winner of the governor’s race, Youngkin said he would declare the “largest tax refund in Virginia history.”

Youngkin said he plans to double the standard deduction from taxes for “everyone” in Virginia.

Trump also claimed fraud ahead of the election in his statement, similarly to how he claimed the presence of voter fraud during the 2020 presidential election. Trump lost to a record-breaking turnout for President Joe Biden, who garnered over 81 million votes, according to The Associated Press.

Youngkin’s website has a section where his supporters can sign up to become poll watchers and join the “election integrity task force.”

“As governor, Glenn will ensure every legal vote is counted quickly and accurately,” according to his website.

Toward the end of his victory speech, Youngkin referenced the founding fathers while saying his campaign reflected “the spirit of Virginia.”

“My fellow Virginians, this is a moment,” Youngkin said. “Together we can build a new day.

50.97%

48.34%

0.69%

Gubernatorial Results



GLENN YOUNGKIN (R)



TERRY MCAULIFFE (D)



PRINCESS BLANDING (I)