

# CT *The* Commonwealth Times

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## BACK TO SCHOOL BOOSTERS



Illustration by Rena Bridge

### VCU requires students get booster shots for spring semester

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Contributing Writer

**V**CU IS REQUIRING ALL STUDENTS eligible to receive a COVID-19 booster shot to report having one by Feb. 1 for the upcoming spring semester, according to the VCU Together website.

This requirement applies to all VCU students “except those with religious or health exemptions, and students enrolled in VCU’s entirely online programs,” according to the website.

Anju Mathew, a senior studying biomedical engineering, said the required booster shots were an appropriate measure if VCU plans to keep classes in-person.

“I’m okay with it because it seems like classes are still in-person, or there’s in-person activities, so they’re not shutting down campus,” Mathew said. “I understand why they’re doing it.”

University spokesperson Mary Kate Brogan stated in an email this decision

was made following recommendations and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Virginia Department of Health and VCU’s own medical experts.

“The decision to require boosters was based on data that pointed to the level of protection vaccines and booster shots provide,” Brogan stated.

The combination of two doses of the vaccine as well as the booster shot is considered “fully vaccinated,” according to an email from ONE VCU: Better Together Master Plan.

Detected in December, the Omicron variant has been found to spread quicker than the “original SARS-Cov-2 virus,” according to the CDC website. The decision to require an additional booster shot for students was announced amidst the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

VCU decided to proceed with in-person classes for the spring semester after weighing the severity of COVID-19 and the “benefits of in-person classes and activities,” Brogan stated.

“VCU’s high student and employee vaccination rates, coupled with our successful mitigating health and safety protocols, led to the decision to continue in-person classes and activities as planned,” Brogan stated.

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**Anju Mathew, senior biomedical engineering student**

ting, students who test positive for COVID-19 are now required to quarantine for five days starting from their most recent exposure, according to the VCU Together website.

Senior biomedical engineering student Anju Mathew said she disagreed with CDC’s change in guidelines, because of the risk of spreading COVID-19 to others.

“At the end of five days, if you still have COVID-19, you have the chance of spreading it to other people,” Mathew said. “If they [the CDC] said 10 days before was, like, the good standard, I was just confused on why they [the CDC] switched to five days.”

Cat Long, the public information officer in the Richmond and Henrico health districts, said the reduction in the quarantine period was because symptoms presented more quickly with the Omicron variant.

“With some of the other variants, it might take more time between when you’re exposed to when you become positive and develop symptoms, but with the Omicron variant, it’s shorter,” Long said. “We tend to know sooner than previously whether or not we have COVID-19, so we’re able to reduce the quarantine guidelines.”

Along with booster shots, eligible students are required to document vaccination and complete the Responsible Together Course before arriving on campus and cannot participate in activities on campus otherwise, according to the VCU Together website. The requirement for students to be masked indoors has also been maintained by the university, according to the website.

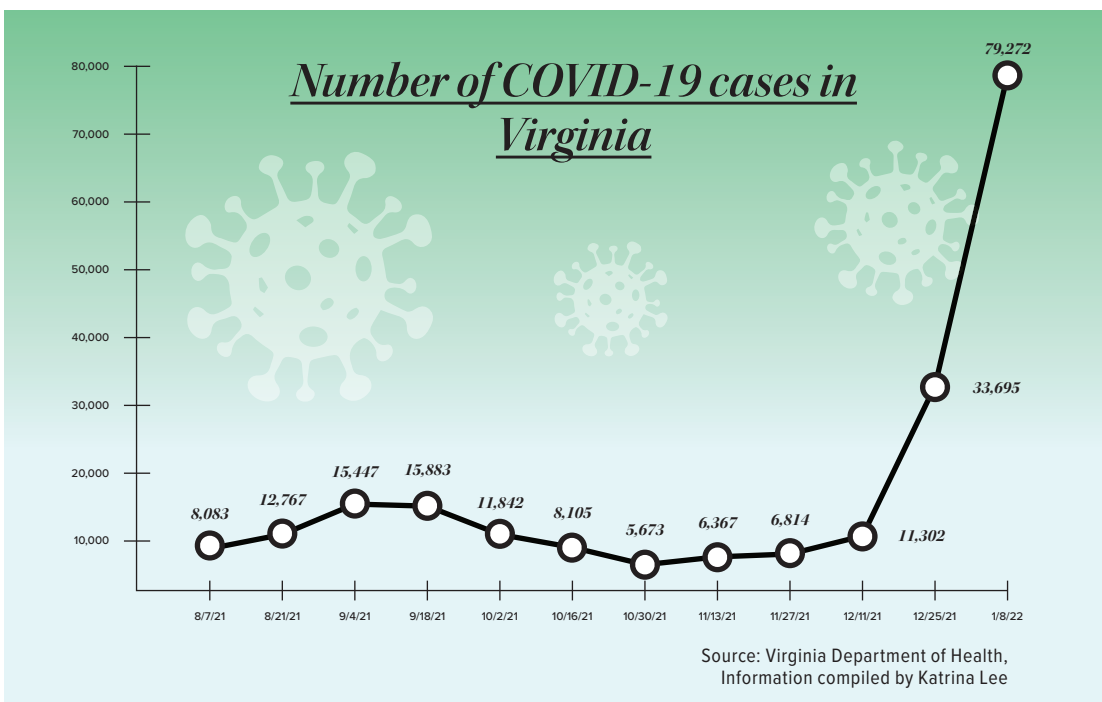
Long said it is permissible for institutions to stay open as long as they monitor the number of outbreaks and ask infected students to stay home.

“For K-12 or colleges, I would not say it’s irresponsible for them to be open,” Long said. “But we just need to make sure that we stay very diligent about all the prevention methods that we have in our toolbox.”

To mitigate the extreme number of hospitalizations and shortage of tests at VCU Hospital, VCU Health is postponing “non-urgent surgeries and procedures” and encouraging community members to vaccinate,” Brogan stated.

“Many of our hospitalized COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated. This means that vaccination is protecting people from severe illness,” Brogan stated. “We are urging everyone eligible in the community to please get vaccinated or schedule a booster shot.”

In adherence to the CDC’s updated recommendations on quaran-



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**H**ARVARD LAW AND HISTORY PROFESSOR Annette Gordon-Reed visited the James Branch Cabell Library on Thursday, Feb. 10 to deliver VCU's 21st annual Black History Month Lecture about her most recent 2021 publication, "On Juneteenth."

Juneteenth, celebrated on June 19, honors the day Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas, in 1865 and announced that the over 250,000 enslaved African Americans had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation had been decreed over six months prior, according to the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

The audience included VCU alumni, students and staff to hear Gordon-Reed's lecture — including VCU alumna Stephanie Holt, who said she has a connection to the VCU library's book club and staff.

"The event was wonderful and very informative. I learned a lot about Texas history, which isn't generally taught in Virginia, as well as the African American viewpoint which is always interesting in understanding between people," Holt said.

The lecture discussed the historian's viewpoint on the journey the United States has taken to reach the prevalence of Juneteenth today, including Texas' origins as a state and discrimination against African Americans with personal accounts and anecdotes from Gordon-Reed.

Juneteenth became a state holiday for Virginia after former Gov. Ralph Northam proposed the executive order in 2020, according to the Governor of Virginia's website.

University spokesperson Sue Robinson stated that the VCU library's office compiled a list of potential speakers before selecting Gordon-Reed. Gordon-Reed offers one of the most authoritative voices on race and history in America, according to Robinson.

As the first African American recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for history, Gordon-Reed is recognized as a nationally significant public intellect and a leading scholar of U.S. history, according to Robinson.

Dean of Libraries and university librarian Irene Herold helped coordinate this event for students and faculty members in the community, according to Robinson. Herold supervises the James Branch Cabell Library on VCU's Monroe Park Campus and the Health Sciences Library located on the MCV Campus, according to VCU library's website.

See **JUNETEENTH** on page 8

## "ON JUNETEENTH" author gives Black History Month Lecture in Richmond

The  
Black History Month  
Issue



Illustration by Bailey Wood

## First to get fired, last to get hired: The dilemma of Black coaches in the NFL

“

We need change. That was a number one reason. I know there's a sacrifice there's a risk to that but, at the end of the day, we need change.”

Brian Flores, Former NFL head coach

See **NFL** on page 6



# THE COMMONWEALTH TIMES

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# 'USE MY VOICE'

Women's History Month events highlight inclusion, honor women's accomplishment

*The*  
WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH  
*Issue*



Illustration by Bailey Wood