

Keeping Pace

The latest news from The Pace Center, VCU's Methodist Campus Ministry



Director's Letter

Dear Pace Supporters,

This spring, the Pace Center wrapped up its first full year of our Fellowship Program – a holistic, semester-long program designed to foster servant leaders as they pursue personal and professional growth. This program, which began with 15 students, has become essential to Pace's expansion on VCU's campus. Pace staff has focused on training these student leaders in the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (also known as Servant Leadership). Our Fellows then apply these principles on VCU's campus by helping to lead Pace programs that are based on the gifts of the VCU community. With 22 students signed up for our fall semester, Fellows will continue to expose other students to what an asset-based community looks like as they develop and lead programs where all of God's gifts are valued.

Pace Fellows hosted an average of 20 weekly student-led events during the spring semester. But they didn't do it alone. This school year at Pace has been one of partnership. And as the number of our student leaders has grown, so has the number of our partners. Through our two new staff members, Rev. Russ Kerr and Rev. Kelley Connelly, Pace has formed a deep connection to the Presbyterian (USA) community in Richmond (pg 5). Pace found new partners at VCU thanks to initiatives such as Little Ram Pantry, VCU's service-learning classes, and cultural meals (pg 4). Thanks to the help of dedicated community members, the Pace Center has been able to offer more comprehensive pastoral care to students through our Student Circles program (pg 7). Finally, as Pace students continue to build community at VCU, they seek partnerships with other student organizations to host events such as Cha Social, Queer and Trans Social Work Open Mic Night, and the celebration of an Iftar (pg 2).

Thanks to all of these beautiful partnerships within our community, the Pace Center has been able to expand our capacity. We continue to offer a multitude of ways for VCU students to experience community while also giving our student leaders a very deep and personal experience through our servant leadership training. Besides all of our new partners, I would like to thank you for making this happen. Without the physical, financial, and spiritual support of our friends, donors, and volunteers, none of this would be possible. So, thank you!

Katie B. Gooch
 Rev. Katie B. Gooch
 Director



Students celebrate Iftar, the evening meal during Ramadan with VCU Globe leader, Audrey Short (back, center).

Cultural Partners: Student Orgs

Many students come to VCU to engage in its diverse student body. Pace students have developed some creative ways for students to experience diversity on many levels. This spring, Community Café hosted a special Iftar - the evening meal which signifies the end of the day's fast during Ramadan. Pace students partnered with VCU Globe - a Living-Learning Community which prepares students to navigate global communities - to arrange the meal. Pace and VCU Globe invited students of all faiths and backgrounds to participate in a cultural experience that is celebrated by millions of people around the world.

"I've never celebrated Ramadan before," Pace Fellow Samantha reflected. "For me, I was able to see what this tradition really meant to people. Being able to provide a space for people to celebrate their culture was really valuable. A lot of people made a lot of connections." Lea, a regular Pace volunteer, noted, "There were people there who had never been to Pace before. They all got a chance to experience breaking the fast together. The environment that was created by that was pretty special.

The energy was so welcoming and felt like home - I didn't want to go back to my dorm room at the end of the night."

Selma, a Pace Fellow and a volunteer during the event, had a unique take on hosting the Iftar celebration at Pace. She said, "part of the Islamic faith is having a relationship with your community and making every person feel like they have a place somewhere. I think most faiths give people that opportunity. A lot of times there is tension around it because people see it as a divide. I think sometimes people just need a reason to come together."

Fellows spearheaded several other cultural exchange events throughout the semester. Pace's Cha Social event was hosted in collaboration with several Asian cultural student orgs. During this event, students taught other students about traditional East Asian tea ceremonies and culture. At each Common Grounds event, students chose aspects of their personal cultures to share, celebrate, and discuss. Pace students also partnered with VCU's Queer and Trans Social Work (QTSW) club to host a special QTSW Open Mic Night to celebrate the voices of VCU's queer and trans community.

A freshman recently reported, "I came to VCU for its diversity. Pace is where I actually get to engage with all the diversity around me." Thanks to Pace Fellows, student org partners, and all our event participants who helped make these programs possible.

"I came to VCU for its diversity. Pace is where I actually get to engage with all the diversity around me."

- VCU freshman

Pace in a Week

Monday:

- Red Cross Blood Drive
- Book Club
- Fellowship Meeting
- Student Circles

Tuesday:

- Student Planning Meetings
- Artz and Music Workshop
- Student Circles

Wednesday:

- Walk-A-Dog
- Mindfulness
- Stories and Lunch
- Scripture and Conversation
- Common Grounds
- Student Circles
- Study Hall

Thursday

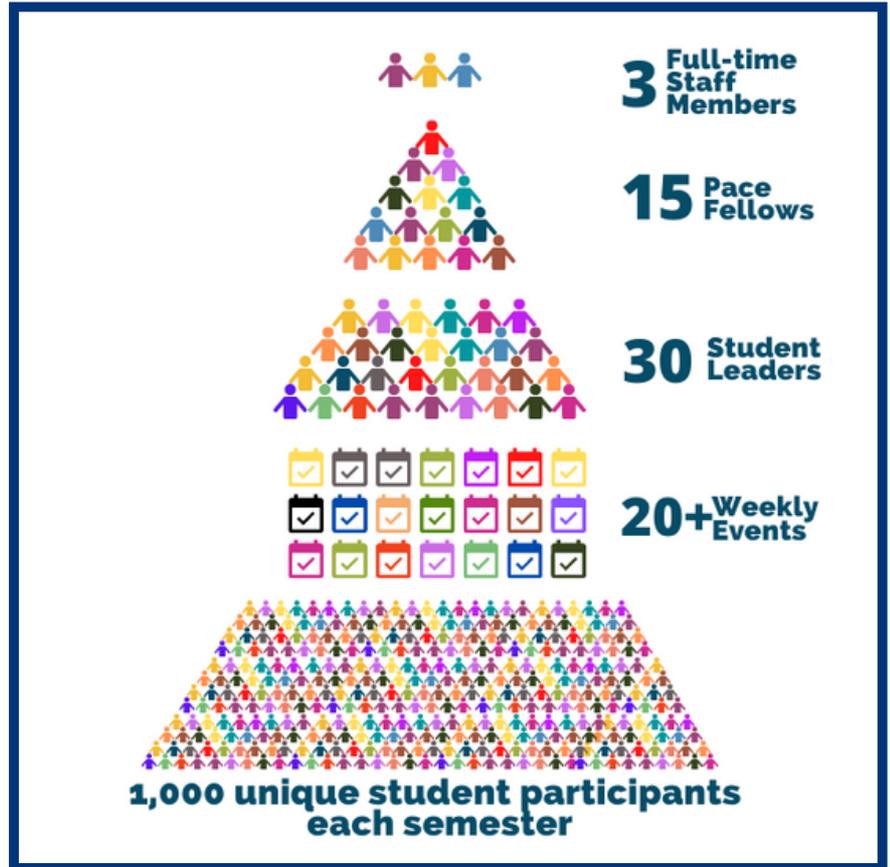
- Food Pantry Volunteering
- Walk-A-Dog
- Community Cafe
- Mindful Creativity
- Student Circles

Friday

- Food Pantry Volunteering
- Walk-A-Dog
- Mindfulness
- Open-Mic Night

Saturday and Sunday

- Weekend Brunch
- Student Planning Meetings



What is Fellowship?

Pace's Fellowship program is a holistic semester-long program designed to foster student leaders as they pursue personal and professional growth. Pace Fellows work with 30+ other student leaders at Pace to create and host all of Pace's student-led programs. In spring of 2022, Pace hosted an average of 20+ events per week (see *Pace in a Week* at left). Fellows get hands-on servant leadership training and learn the principles of Asset-Based Community Development. They also learn techniques to balance their work, school, and personal lives and build supportive relationships with their cohort of Fellows. Fellows develop soft skills that help prepare them for their VCU course tracks and future careers. The program also introduces students to community engagement and community service.

"VCU can be hectic.

Being at Pace, for me, was like a breath of fresh air"

-Lennox, VCU freshman, undeclared



Students serve food during Community Café

Food Partner: VCU

This spring, Pace partnered with Dr. John Jones, Assistant Professor of Urban Food Systems on several projects, including adding a Little Ram Pantry to Pace’s café space, cooking for Community Café with his class, and hosting an etiquette class with Dr. Carlton H. Goode, lead faculty for Men of Color Freshmen Retention Teaching Initiative at VCU.

Jones worked with students, as well as VCU’s Ram Pantry to launch a pilot program for Little Ram Pantries, an initiative to place small food pantries, which are stocked and utilized by students, at various locations around VCU’s campus, including Pace. The goal of the pantries is to help destigmatize food insecurity. By placing the pantries in high-traffic areas, more students can easily access them, either to make a deposit or a withdrawal. “[We] hope that the presence of Little Ram Pantries around campus will help normalize emergency food assistance on campus and encourage the idea that food is a human right.” Jones said in a recent interview with the Commonwealth Times, VCU’s student paper. Lisa Mathews-Ailsworth, another Pace partner and director of VCU’s Ram Pantry, said she believes that use of the Little Ram

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Food at Pace

Many of Pace’s programs feature free or reduced-cost food, which satisfies a variety of goals:

1. **Food is a connector:** Sharing a meal is an easy way to meet new people and begin to build community.
2. **Access for students:** Food access is a huge issue on a campus where over 1/3 of the student population experiences food insecurity at some point during their school career.
3. **Cultural Sharing:** The foods people cook and the way they are shared and eaten can be a gateway for students to begin to experience cultures that are different from their own.



Students find the cultural origin of their meal on a map.

“The thing I like best about the Pace Center is people interacting with one another. I think many people would think about the events themselves. But the events are not what Pace is. It’s the students.”

- Kiet, VCU senior, pre-med

“It was scary at first, but the people I spoke to were very comfortable calling me by my name and pronouns. It's a very open and welcoming space .”

- Oliver, VCU freshman, fine arts

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Pantries will encourage students to visit VCU's larger student food bank which provides perishables, veggies, and toiletries in addition to pantry staples.

Through Jones's class, Healthy Food and Behaviors, students paired with Pace's Community Café to prepare meals as part of an assignment that explores food and culture. “Food has a lot to do with how you grow up,” said VCU student Shay as she stirred a pot of kale soup. “You might think that what you eat is pretty standard, but then you realize someone else's experience might be different.” Another student, Megan, chimed in, “Yeah, it shapes who you are.”

Students are encouraged to think of food from a cultural perspective in Jone's class. Students were given an assignment to conduct interviews with older relatives about dishes that are important to their family. Students learned about the culinary history of those dishes and came together as a class to prepare the recipes for Pace's Community Café.

As the students prepared the ingredients for their dishes - pineapple casserole, jollof rice, and kale soup - one student remarked, “This is the first time that we all worked together to make a meal.” Pace's Community Café event was designed to do this exact thing: bring students together to enjoy a meal and explore the many cultures of the VCU student community. “Cooking is one of the main mechanisms for community to be forged,” said Jones.

Keeping Pace

Spiritual Partner: Presbyterian Church (USA)

Levi Bannerman is a second-year Master of Divinity student at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond. Through an internship with Second Presbyterian Church, Levi helped to organize Pace's weekly Scripture and Conversation event. This program is the result of students' interest in reading scripture and sharing personal stories. “Scripture and Conversation is a space where that can happen,” Bannerman said. “Students and staff can share life experience about how scripture resonates and how it can be applicable to our experiences.”

At the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester, Pace began a partnership with the Presbyterian (USA) campus ministry and newly-ordained minister Kelley Connelly. With the help of Kelley and Levi, Scripture and Conversation has thrived. Bannerman reflected, “College students are asking hard questions and are

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Scripture and Conversation with Rev. Katie Gooch, Rev. Kelley Connelly, and Master of Divinity Student, Levi Bannerman.

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bringing different perspectives and experiences into the conversation. I have watched opinions *change*, and that is pretty rare in greater society. Especially in conversations about things that are religious or political, people usually hold onto their beliefs. But there is a malleability in these students. They are listening and engaging and questioning. The general environment at Pace lays the foundation for students to feel comfortable and vulnerable enough to question their convictions.”

The gifts and stories of students take center stage during these sessions and the conversation could go anywhere. As Bannerman recalls, “Allowing them to lead the conversation and to tell staff what’s important is a way to foster growth and engage students in something they aren’t necessarily engaging with in the classroom. College students are on a particularly wonderful and questioning journey. To be able to walk along side them while they’re



Bannerman (far right), enjoys Stories and Lunch with VCU students and faculty before Scripture and Conversation.

experiencing that and be someone who can help to encourage this blossoming to occur is something I really enjoy.”

Bannerman often stays for an entire day at Pace. He enjoys participating in multiple events, speaking with students and getting to know them. “On Wednesdays, I come first for Stories and Lunch. Meals are sacred, to me - especially when we are engaging in conversation around them. Then to go from that experience, and to dive in a little deeper into questions surrounding faith and spirituality - that is church to me. Engaging together in a meal and conversation.”

“In some instances, this is the primary church experience for these students during this portion of their lives, they might not be going to a weekly worship service,” said Levi. “Students may not see this as church or necessarily classify it as church. But we see a community forming. It’s welcoming, it’s radically hospitable, it’s come as you are. At Pace, we describe this as ‘church’.”



Levi Bannerman, Master of Divinity Student at Union Presbyterian Seminary

"We see a community forming. It’s welcoming, it’s radically hospitable, it’s come as you are. At Pace, we describe this as ‘church’."

-Levi Bannerman, MDiv student at Union Seminary

Community Partners: Student Circle Leaders

One of our most connectional and impactful programs of the semester has been Student Circles. Last year, Pace's two staff members provided academic advising, spiritual counseling, life coaching, and general guidance to dozens of Pace student leaders. As Pace has grown, so has our number of student leaders and their need for support.

Rev. Katie Gooch knew it was vital for Pace to maintain intentional spaces as it grew. The answer was Pace's Student Circles program - small groups, led by several skilled volunteers. This program enabled Pace to connect with more students on a deeper level and provide a space for them to support one another. Student Circles provides an intentional space for holistic care and an opportunity

"Students said they didn't realize how valuable this kind of exercise could be."

- Bryan, Student Circles Leader



Students are encouraged to share a gift to build relationships during Circles.

for students to develop a relationship with a non-student adult whom they can rely upon for guidance and support as they navigate college life. Student Circles leaders are qualified volunteers from local churches, who have prior training in working with students and diverse populations. Throughout the semester, Student Circle leaders met for an hour each week with a small group of Pace students. By introducing students to a caring adult and a supportive peer group, Pace helped create an intentional community that students could rely on.

Student Circle leader, Bryan Tims, noted, "Some of it was just modeling ways to reflect and share. Students said they didn't realize how valuable this kind of exercise could be. They realized they really don't discuss this kind of information with anyone on this level."

Though some students were reluctant to join Student Circles, once they let their guards down, they began to see merit in the program. One student said, "I'm so glad I did this. I didn't realize I needed it." Student Circles will return in Fall of 2022.



Rev. Kelley Connelly (second from left) leads her Student Circle in a group discussion, while Daisy throws peace signs.

Meet Russ Kerr

In April, Russ Kerr (he/him) began as Pace's new Student Development and Engagement Coordinator. He is an ordained Presbyterian Minister and has served congregations in North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. He is a graduate of Emory & Henry College and Union Presbyterian Seminary. His first degree (and love) was theater. He is passionate about community building, storytelling, and unlocking creativity. On the weekends you can find him somewhere outdoors and/or with a good book in his hand.

- 1. What have you enjoyed most about working with Pace students?** I have so enjoyed getting to meet with students and hear their unique stories. I am thankful for the welcome that our students greeted me with when I began work in April. I love celebrations so getting to celebrate with students as they graduate or simply finish out their semester has brought me such joy.
- 2. What are you looking forward to for the fall semester?** I am looking forward to meeting with both current and new Pace Fellows. We have a great group of students who are excited about leading the Pace community in both weekly events and gatherings around food. Our fellowship represents a diverse group of VCU students. I am looking forward to learning about the gifts that they will bring to Pace and to the events they plan.
- 3. One thing you've learned in your time at Pace so far?** A deep dive into ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) has been educational for me. It is very exciting to see what communities can do when they



Russ Kerr (he/him), Student Development and Engagement Coordinator.

come together around a common purpose or goal identifying and using the gifts of each team member. I look forward to continuing to learn and grow in this organizing methodology as well as teaching and co-teaching our ABCD curriculum to fellows in the fall. I love seeing how ABCD applies both to life at Pace and ways it shows up in my own life as well.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?



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by online form



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