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BONNER

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CENTER FOR CIVIC  
ENGAGEMENT

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Engaged Humanities

2016



*Top:* View from Libby Hill Park. Photo courtesy of Briget Ganske.  
*Bottom Left:* Section of the James River Mural on Cary Street.  
*Bottom Right:* Dr. Nicole Maurantonio's (Rhetoric and Communication Studies) students study scrapbooks at The Valentine. Photo courtesy of Briget Ganske.



# Richmond as a Humanities Laboratory

The city of Richmond offers the University a laboratory for the study of the humanities and for applying humanities learning to critical questions and issues facing our community. The Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) and UR Downtown support and lead many educational, research, and public engagement initiatives to deepen faculty engagement and student learning, connect meaningfully with the Greater Richmond community, and partner for social change. This report provides an overview of these types of initiatives from 2013 to 2016.



“Each cobblestone and street corner has a powerful history of its own.”

-Chelsey Davidson, '17, a student in Dr. Edward L. Ayers' First-Year Seminar,  
“Touching the Past: The Purposes and Strategies of American History”

American Studies major Caroline Weber, '16, installs the labels for *Greetings from Richmond, Virginia: Visitors Through the Centuries* at UR Downtown.



# Transforming Student Learning

“At the Library of Virginia, I work on an educational database known as Document Bank. We upload images and pose questions, so teachers can use primary sources to make history relevant to students while helping them learn and understand state standards.”

- Mason Little, '18,  
UR Downtown  
Student Coordinator

Humanities learning is critical to a liberal arts education and to preparing students to lead lives of purpose. Richmond offers our University limitless opportunities to expand and enrich learning that begins in the classroom.

**City as Classroom.** UR Downtown is located near many of Richmond’s renowned cultural institutions, making it an ideal launching pad and reflection space for humanities-related, community-based learning. In Spring 2016, Don Belt’s (Journalism) “Out of Eden: Slow Journalism” students met with staff at UR Downtown for an overview of how community partners are addressing some of the city’s most pressing issues before they walked the city streets for their own slow journalism projects. In Spring 2014, students in Dr. Thad Williamson’s (Leadership Studies) “Research Workshop on Richmond Politics” met with Mayor Jones and other city leaders working just blocks away at City Hall. The UR Downtown Shuttle provides easy access for faculty hoping to connect students with learning experiences downtown. Classroom space is available, and UR Downtown staff are eager to support the planning of these visits.

**Civic Fellowships in the Humanities.** The CCE’s Civic Fellowship Program provides funding for students completing otherwise unpaid, academically grounded summer internships in the nonprofit or government sectors in Richmond or elsewhere. It has grown from four fellows in its inaugural year to 18 fellows in Summer 2015, many of whom have focused on engaged humanities throughout the years. In 2015, English major Aaron Brown, '16, spent his summer working at Dogtown Dance Theatre in Richmond, advised by Dr. Cheryl Pallant (Dance).

## Exhibition Highlight: Student Curators - From First-Years to Seniors

Public exhibitions teach students many lessons, including the importance of knowing your audience and careful editing. Students, from first-years to seniors, have been involved in all aspects of Wilton Companies Gallery exhibitions, and here are two recent examples.



### *Missing Richmond*

September 5 - December 23, 2014

Missing Richmond brought together the work of artist Caryl Burtner - thirty miniature boxes documenting Richmond landmarks before, after, and during their demolition - and photographs of sites along the Richmond Slave Trail by students in Dr. Edward L. Ayers' (History) First-Year Seminar, "Touching the Past: The Purposes and Strategies of American History." The exhibition, part of the 2014-15 Tucker-Boatwright Festival of Literature and the Arts, inspired conversations and downtown walking tours centered on critical questions about Richmond's history, changing landscape, and future development.



### *Greetings from Richmond, Virginia: Visitors through the Centuries*

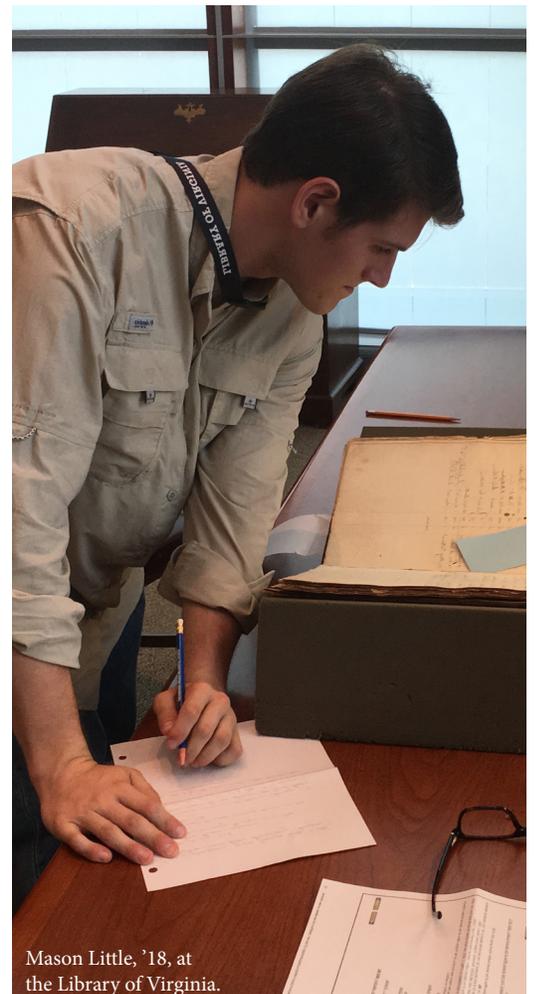
April 1 - August 1, 2016

"Richmond is, and always has been, many things to many people... What is the Richmond that visitors have found through the centuries? And how have those visitors changed the way that Richmonders see their city?" reads the intro panel for *Greetings from Richmond, Virginia: Visitors through the Centuries*. The exhibition was curated by twelve juniors and seniors in the "American Studies Capstone Seminar," under the instruction of Dr. Nicole Sackley (History) and Alexandra Byrum, UR Downtown educational programming coordinator. The students were involved in all aspects of curatorial process and published an exhibition website with critical catalogue essays (<https://blog.richmond.edu/greetingsfromrichmond/>).

Throughout his internship, Brown combined his writing and dance skills to secure grants for the nonprofit theatre and explore his own creative expression. That same year, Molly Rossi, '16, who created her own major in cross-cultural communication, interned at the Smithsonian Institution with support from faculty advisor Dr. Jan French (Anthropology). Rossi learned about museum operations while also thinking critically about the impact of storytelling, cultural narratives, and public spaces on our civic identities.

**UR Downtown Student Coordinators.** Federal Work-Study students and Bonner Scholars interested in public humanities have the unique opportunity to support ongoing exhibition and research projects at UR Downtown, while volunteering at a downtown partner organization. Art history major Paige Schaefer, '15, took her passion for the arts to 1708 Gallery where she supported their development efforts. Schaefer now works in the Development Office at the Brooklyn Museum. History major Mason Little, '18, is currently working on the Library of Virginia's Document Bank to connect K-12 teachers across the Commonwealth with the Library's collection. Downtown Fridays, led by UR Downtown Student Coordinators, empower students to lead educational trips for fellow students and develop critical organizational and communication skills. Recent excursions have included visits to the Poe Museum, the Virginia State Capitol Lawn, and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site.

**Downtown Arts.** Context is critical. UR Downtown hosts dinners in advance of selected downtown performances, allowing students to enter theaters fully prepared for what they are about to experience. University faculty, local performers, and directors provide context about the night's play or musical performance. In the intimate setting of UR Downtown's Wilton Companies Gallery, students can ask questions of and network with local arts professionals. Transportation is provided from campus, and performance tickets are purchased for students in advance.



Mason Little, '18, at the Library of Virginia.

# Deepening Faculty Engagement



Faculty with church historian Benjamin Ross at Sixth Mount Zion. Below: A Summer in the City tour with Alice Lynch of the Virginia Capitol Foundation.



The CCE and UR Downtown support faculty on many levels, as they seek to provide students new avenues to learn, to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, and to grow as individuals.

**Course Support Grants.** The CCE's Course Support Grants enable faculty to bring life to their students' learning by covering the costs of tickets, materials, and much more. For example, in Fall 2015, the CCE awarded grants to Dr. David Routt (History) to take his "The Pious and the Profane: Monks, Nuns, and Medieval Society and Culture" First-Year Seminar to the Our Lady of the Angels monastery, Dr. Anthony Russell (English) to take his "Shakespeare" students to a Quill Theatre performance, and Dr. Patricia Herrera (Theatre) to bring three performing artists into her "Hip Hop Theatre" First-Year Seminar. In Spring 2016, grants were used by Dr. Nicole Sackley (History) to conduct archival research at The Valentine with her "American Studies Capstone Seminar" students, Dr. Elizabeth Baughan (Classical Studies) to take her "Greek Art and Archeology" students to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and CCE director Dr. Sylvia Gale to bind and print books written and illustrated by her "Storytelling and Social Change" students and their peers at the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Facility. These are just a sampling of the many kinds of humanities activities that the CCE proudly supports.

**UR Downtown Faculty-In-Residence Program.** UR Downtown's Faculty-in-Residence Program provides faculty with office and meeting space, parking, and support for public programs. As the 2014-15 UR Downtown Faculty Fellow, Dr. Anthony Russell (English), worked in collaboration with Henley Street Theatre, Richmond Shakespeare, and Virginia Repertory Theatre for their run of *Equivocation* by Bill Cain and with Henley Street Theatre for their Historical Play Reading Series, *Scandals and Tragedies: Theatre in the Headlines of History*. Dr. Russell secured University of Richmond faculty speakers for the talk-back series following the *Equivocation* performances and faculty experts for the Historical Play Reading Series. Dr. Russell was also instrumental in promoting UR Downtown's Downtown Arts program. Faculty connections in the Richmond region are critical to the thriving of our community on campus and throughout the region.

**60** Humanities and humanities-related CBL courses were taught in 2015-16 by **34** faculty in **16** different departments and programs

“These kinds of conversations and these types of events make Richmond think of what it means to be diverse, and also what it means to be inclusive. If you’re thinking about inclusivity, the next level is equity.”

- Dr. Patricia Herrera (Theatre), speaking about her work with Drs. Laura Browder (American Studies) and Lázaro Lima (Latin American, Latino, and Iberian Studies), the Sacred Heart Center, and Richmond Public Libraries to hold community conversations with arts components about being Latino/a/x in Richmond

**TAKE 30.** UR Downtown’s 30-minute discussion series is led by University of Richmond professors and community leaders, opening up the classroom doors to the entire Richmond community. Here are a few past TAKE 30 speakers and their focused questions: Dr. Stephanie Cobb (Religious Studies), “Does Religious Literacy Matter?”; Dr. Elena Calvillo (Art History), “How Can the Italian Renaissance Shed Light on Our Ideas About Love?”; Dr. Eric Yellin (History), “How Has Our Government Limited Black Freedom Since Emancipation?,” and Dr. Monica Siebert (English), “Why Do Virginia Indians Matter to Richmond?”

**Faculty Excurions.** The CCE’s Faculty Excursions are faculty-designed trips that aim to bring faculty from across schools and disciplines together to explore Richmond. Since the program’s inception, these excursions have given humanities faculty opportunities to share and explore Richmond’s many cultural institutions and landmarks with their colleagues from other disciplines. In Fall 2015, Drs. Bert Ashe (English) and Julian Hayter (Leadership Studies) led a tour that began at the Henry “Box” Brown Memorial and Lumpkin’s Jail in Shockoe Bottom before heading northeast to Virginia Union’s Coburn Hall, where Langston Hughes’s gave his first poetry reading in the South. In the Spring, Drs. Nicole Maurantonio (Rhetoric and Communication Studies), Paul Achter (Rhetoric and Communication Studies), and Melissa Ooten (Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) led an excursion called “Visual Disruption Part II: Critical Confederacies,” featuring visits to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, and the Reconciliation Statue.

**Summer in the City.** UR Downtown hosts a Summer in the City series for faculty and staff to highlight significant downtown sites and to inspire future class and department connections. Participants ride the UR Downtown Shuttle from campus and enjoy a lunchtime visit to a nearby destination. Past excursions have included the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia, Dominion Arts Center, John Marshall House, Library of Virginia, Old City Hall, Richmond City Hall, Richmond Slave Trail, Storefront for Community Design, The Valentine, and the Virginia State Capitol.



## Exhibition Highlight

### *Docturum: The Art of Tom Condon and His Students*

February 6 - March 27, 2015

Rarely do we have the opportunity to see the work of student and teacher side-by-side or do students have the opportunity to prepare for a public exhibition with their professor. For this special exhibition, visiting lecturer Tom Condon (Art) presented his work alongside photographs by students in his fall semester courses, “Alternative Photographic Processes” and “Digital Photography.”

Visiting artist Dan Neil talks to students working in UR Downtown's Mobile Studio.



## Partnering for Social Change

The CCE and UR Downtown bring students, faculty, staff, and community partners together to explore educationally meaningful approaches to community-identified needs. Collaborative humanities projects are critical to progress in our city, the capital of Virginia and former capital of the Confederacy.

***RVA Connections.*** RVA Connections dinners bring together faculty, staff, and community leaders around issues of shared interest in the hope of uncovering new opportunities for collaboration. For example, in conjunction with *The Community Voice* (an exhibition illuminating challenges relating to health and healthcare), the CCE and UR Downtown hosted an RVA Connections dinner on healthcare access, featuring an introduction by Danny Avula, deputy director of Richmond City Health District. In attendance were faculty from UR and VCU and staff from CrossOver Health Care Ministry, the Daily Planet, YMCA of Greater Richmond, Capital Area Health Network, and Bon Secours Richmond Health System.

***Cary Street Murals and the Mobile Studio.*** In 2013, organizers of the RVA Street Art Festival approached the CCE and UR Downtown with the invitation to program a 300-foot wall at the GRTC Depot on Cary Street for their upcoming festival and the next three years. This opportunity led to a collaboration with The Valentine to celebrate Richmond as the site of the world's first electric streetcar system. Photographs from The Valentine were reproduced on the wall, and Heide

Trepanier's (Art and Art History) "Mural Painting" students created murals that explored transportation and flow. During the 2014-15 academic year, an interdisciplinary approach led to the creation of the James River Mural. In the fall, Dr. Todd Lookingbill's (Geography and the Environment) "Landscape Ecology" students partnered with Dr. Andy Literal's (Management) "Business Statistics" class to collect and analyze data about the relationship between local development and flooding, while Dr. Emily Boone's (Biology) "Environmental Studies" students researched specific environmental aspects of the James. Students in "Public Art and Social Change in the River City," co-taught by CCE director Dr. Sylvia Gale, UR Downtown educational programming coordinator Alexandra Byrum, and Grace Leonard, '12, used this work to create the mural in the spring. The class learned from and worked with visiting artists Jocelyn Zanzot and Dan Neil, co-directors of Mobile Studio (a traveling studio that promotes learning and civic engagement through place-based interactions). Together, they built a new mobile studio for our community, housed at UR Downtown. This unique resource is intended to bring people together for co-creative activities that engage audiences across lines of difference in a public space.

**Bringing the Humanities to Our Partners.** There are many dynamic ways that our students, faculty, and staff bring the humanities to our partners. Here are a few examples:

- *Sharing humanities learning with partners:* Bonner Scholars Rachel Brown, '14, and Isaiah Bailey, '13, created an after-school dance program at a local Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club and raised funds to build a dance studio there. Additionally, Dr. Kristin Bezio (Leadership Studies) and her "Leadership on Stage and Screen" students consistently teach local youth about Shakespeare, culminating each semester by performing a play.
- *Connecting campus visitors with the community:* The CCE works with the Modlin Center for the Arts to bring renowned artists and performers to our partners. In April 2016, Peruvian puppeteers Teatro Hugo + Ines performed for large audiences at Modlin and also gave students at Peter Paul Development Center a lesson in puppetry.
- *Bringing exhibitions to partners:* UR faculty and staff have co-taught many courses in which students created exhibitions for local organizations. In Fall 2014, Drs. Laura Browder (American Studies) and Patricia Herrera's (Theatre) "Documentary Theatre" course, in partnership with students at Virginia Commonwealth University and Church Hill Academy, photographed and curated an exhibition for The Valentine, *Made in Church Hill*, about residents of the changing neighborhood. Browder and Alexandra Byrum also co-taught a course in Spring 2015 called "Busing in America," which curated a history exhibition for GRTC Transit System's headquarters.

**RVA First Fridays.** UR Downtown, at the entrance of the Arts District, participates in RVA First Fridays during the academic year to build a bridge between UR's arts programs and clubs and the greater community and to expose students to nearly 40 downtown venues. Richmond on Broad Café also opens for the festivities. Through RVA First Fridays and other events, UR Downtown is playing a critical role in downtown revitalization and positive change in our city.

## Exhibition Highlight

### *All Our Sorrows Heal: Restoring Richmond's East End Cemetery*

September 4, 2015 – March 11, 2016

Established in 1897, East End Cemetery sits on sixteen acres of overgrown land in Henrico County and the City of Richmond. *All Our Sorrows Heal* featured the words and photographs of adjunct professors and veteran journalists Brian Palmer and Erin Hollaway Palmer. While the exhibition was on view, UR Downtown hosted a TAKE 30 talk, three Community Dinners, and an RVA Connections dinner and welcomed multiple community and class visits. Those same classes went on to volunteer at East End Cemetery, and the Biology Department collaborated with the Spatial Analysis Lab to develop a data collection app that is mapping undocumented grave stones. The exhibition will travel to the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia and public interest in East End Cemetery has dramatically increased this year. UR Downtown will continue to provide space for ongoing conversations about East End Cemetery and help connect the many classes and community partners who are invested in its future.



Isaiah Bailey, '13, and Rachel Brown, '14, lead a hip hop class.



*Top:* Students gather for the performance of *Equivocation* at the November Theatre.  
*Bottom:* Summer in the City participants approach Richmond's African Burial Ground.





Downtown Ambassador Katie Funk, '16, at Quirk Gallery during a team excursion.

“It was very powerful to see how influential the messages are in creative forms of communication—plays, literature, films—how important they are socially, how they can force us to critique ourselves and our environments, how they influence politics and social justice movements, and how they gave our students a voice and outlet to be their creative selves and be part of something that they had to be really devoted to.”

- Molly Rossi, '16, a student in Dr. Kristin Bezio's "Leadership on Stage and Screen" course



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