One of my favorite Far Side cartoons by Gary Larsen bears the caption “The Four Personality Types.” Each of the four frames shows a person standing in front of a glass of water on a counter. The first person declares, “The glass is half full.” The person in the second frame says, “The glass is half empty.” The third person asks, “What was the question again?” And the fourth person bellows, “Hey, I ordered a cheeseburger!”

As the Center for Civic Engagement enters its second year, it is appropriate for us to evaluate our work from a variety of perspectives. One important question to ask is: How far have we come?

A long way, if we recall that last year—or eighteen months ago, at least—the CCE existed only as an idea on paper. From that perspective, the programs, internships, community service, research projects, and coursework that the CCE has supported make our glass look more than half full.

If we focus instead on the continued dearth of genuine, sustained, and informed conversations, on Richmond’s campus and in the wider Richmond community, about the pressing social issues of our time, it is easy to see a glass that at least half empty. The really interesting frame, however, concerns the questions. What are the right issues to raise? What questions will guide our studies, our service, and our policymaking?

Getting the questions right is the hardest part of both learning and acting. If we didn’t ask any new questions of ourselves, students would remain confined to “the bubble,” faculty members would teach the same courses, social-service providers would be stuck with the resources they have, and policymakers would offer tired, old solutions to new challenges.

I invite you to stop by the Center for Civic Engagement, in person or at http://engage.richmond.edu, as we try to shape the questions we ask on campus and in the community. There is much study, public discussion, and work to do.

From the Director

Asking the Right Questions ... One Year Later

In its first year of operation, the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement established itself as a dynamic and innovative part of the fabric of the University of Richmond, expanding the resources available to students, faculty, and staff and integrating engagement with the wider society into the University’s core educational mission. Following the CCE’s official launch in September 2004, our activities included hosting more than 40 academic-year programs, developing the foundations for long-term strategic partnerships on campus and in the community, and supporting seven summer research and internship fellows.

John Moeser Joins CCE as its First Visiting Fellow

In July, the CCE welcomed Dr. John V. Moeser, professor emeritus of Urban Studies and Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University, who will serve as Visiting Fellow for the coming year. Recently described as Virginia’s “urban studies guru,” Moeser is well-known in Richmond’s communities; he is a student of urban affairs and city and regional politics as well as a tireless supporter of local organizations working to improve the Richmond metropolitan area.

As a scholar and professor for several decades, Moeser has written extensively on post-World War II racial politics in Richmond, demographic trends in Central Virginia, and city-suburban relationships. He frequently serves as an analyst for newspapers, television and radio. In 2003, Gov. Mark Warner appointed him to the Urban Policy Task Force, a group of state and local officials and urban analysts charged to study the challenges facing Virginia’s cities and urban areas and to recommend actions designed to promote urban revitalization. Moeser also serves on the Board of Directors of Hope in the Cities and the Board of Governors of the William Byrd Community House.

Moeser’s passion, experience and expertise make it an honor to have him join the U of R campus community. To learn more about Moeser, please see page 2.

Summer Fellowships Combine Study with Civic Engagement

The eight-week summer fellowship program supporting research and academically grounded internships in the community lie at the heart of the CCE’s mission. Guided by faculty mentors, site supervisors and the CCE staff, our first class of seven student researchers and interns had the chance to rigorously apply their studies toward real-world problems and reflect upon the personal impact of their work. To learn about two of the current fellows’ experiences, please see page 3.

This year, with the additional support of
question & answer with

John Moeser

VCU professor emeritus John Moeser talked to us about his new role as CCE Visiting Fellow and how he’s been inspired to tackle civic and social problems head-on.

What is your role as a visiting fellow?
My role as a visiting fellow is to make myself available to the staff, faculty, and students involved in the CCE to discuss current issues facing metropolitan Richmond. I’ll also assist the CCE as it extends connections between the university and the larger community.

How did you become interested in urban affairs and local politics?
My interest in urban affairs and local politics began in the late 1960s in Washington, D.C., where I completed my Ph.D. in political science. My wife Sharon and I participated in the Poor People’s Campaign led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Just days after King’s assassination and the riots that hit Washington and other cities across the nation, I volunteered to assist a relief agency in the riot-torn areas by distributing food and clothes. The memory of National Guard troops patrolling the streets of Washington carrying rifles with fixed bayonets, with the nation’s capitol only blocks away, will remain forever. The contradiction between the principles espoused by official Washington and the reality of Washington’s inner-city African American neighborhoods could not have been greater. My interest in urban affairs increased when Sharon and I moved to Richmond in 1970 and I began my dissertation on the Richmond City Council.

At VCU, students live and learn in a city environment. How can U of R students, who are more isolated on our campus, become more civically engaged?
Unquestionably, an advantage enjoyed by VCU students relative to civic engagement is that they study and often live in the heart of the city. The proximity to state and local government, non-profit organizations, and the corporate sector provides a host of opportunities. Given the location of the University of Richmond, students are farther removed from these contacts. Proximity, however, should not be the determinant. What the CCE does in exposing students to urban life and social justice issues by fostering service-learning courses, internships, and faculty-student and student-initiated research is invaluable. This exposure often becomes the springboard for students to serve on their own as volunteers with community groups that address human need, to work with and learn from those whose social circumstances are so radically different, and to press for social change to alter the ugly reality that confronts so many Richmonders.

What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the city of Richmond today? What role can young people have in addressing this issue?
The most pressing issue facing Richmond today is the concentration of poverty. Students can address this issue by working with those who are championing mixed-income housing in the Richmond suburbs and in the central city so that low-income people are not segregated from the mainstream. Socially integrated neighborhoods not only lead to lower crime and better schools but also to richer lives as people from different levels of income interact with each other.

What do you enjoy doing when you mind’s not occupied with urban issues?
When I’m not working at the William Byrd Community House or Hope in the Cities or engaged in my work at the CCE, I enjoy reading (both fiction and non-fiction), travel, hiking, and listening to good music.

The most pressing issue facing Richmond today is the concentration of poverty. Students can address this issue ...

- John Moeser

UniverCity Day
is September 10th

first-year students
sign up now
at engage@richmond.edu
or call 484-1800 for more info
FIRST PERSON: Lauren Skiles
2005 CCE Research Fellow

Since moving to Richmond to attend UR, I’ve been interested in historic preservation of Richmond’s older neighborhoods. Historic preservation can contribute significantly to community revitalization and tourism, making it an integral part of local economies. Yet historic preservation has negative side effects as well, such as the displacement of working class residents through gentrification. As a research fellow, I was curious to see if gentrification and displacement had become major issues in Richmond, as they have in other cities that use historic preservation to revitalize neighborhoods.

I used census data from 1950 to 2000 to look at demographic changes over time. I’ve been primarily concerned with variables like income, age, educational attainment, property values, rent costs, and statistics on homeownership. I found that areas of Richmond subject to historic preservation over several decades have gentrified, but slowly. Within the past ten years, the number of historic district designations has nearly doubled, and many of these districts are lower-income areas. They should be watched for gentrification in the next few decades. While these results did not surprise me, I had thought I would find more rapid gentrification in areas like St. John’s Church and the Fan.

I was not able to answer all of my questions about gentrification in Richmond, partly due to census data constraints. I expected to be able to use census data at the block group level, which is more precise than the tract level; however, block group data was not available throughout the time frame of my research. Changes in tract boundaries from census to census also made it difficult to thoroughly analyze important tracts in areas such as Jackson Ward and Oregon Hill.

My classes at U of R definitely helped prepare me for this project. I especially used skills I learned in Social Science Statistics, Intro to Geographic Information Systems, and my Political Science research methods class. This project was much different from work I’ve done in my classes, though. It has been great to study something I’m so interested in, and I think I’ve learned a lot of practical research skills that will help me in future classes and, one day, in my career. Lauren Skiles is a senior majoring in Urban Practice & Policy and Political Science.

FIRST PERSON: Joyce Bennett
2005 David D. Burhans Civic Fellow

“Hispanic Liaison Office, this is Joyce. How may I help you?”

On the other end of the line is a Spanish-speaking man. He is quite upset. He has been living in his apartment for a year now, but the carpet is coming up, the ceiling is falling in, the air conditioning does not work, and the fridge is broke. The gas stove, which has never worked properly, is now getting worse and the paint is peeling off the walls. He lives with his wife and two children, who are 8-months and 2-years-old. He has gone to the rental office several times to file complaints. But no one has ever come to help.

In a tense, slightly raised voice, he asks me how he is supposed to raise his children in this apartment.

What am I supposed to say to that? How am I, a U of R summer intern, supposed to help this man?

When I started working at the Hispanic Liaison Office for the City of Richmond this summer, I promised myself that I would not let my lack of experience get in the way of the people seeking our help.

So when this man called me, I did the only thing I could think of: I called the rental office with this man on the line and interpreted for him to make sure that his complaints had been filed. The rental office said they had received his complaints and that they would now take care of the problems.

On the recommendation of my boss, Tanya Gonzalez, I also gave the man the number of a Spanish-speaking woman at the Fair Housing Authority in Richmond, just in case the rental office did not follow up again. I helped this man, even though I had no idea what to do when I first heard his problem.

Throughout the summer, I proved to myself that I can help Richmond’s Hispanic population even though I am a third-year college student who knows practically nothing about housing issues, worker’s rights, immigration, low-cost or free health care, or what it is like to be in a place where you do not speak the language. I know that there is still much more for me to learn, but I know that if I just put a little effort into it, I can help people.

Joyce Bennett is a junior majoring in American Studies and Music.
events

8/31  “Crash” screening and discussion
     Dr. Archana Bhatt, Rhetoric & Communication Studies and
     Jonathan Zur, National Conference for Community and
     Justice, facilitators
     6:15 - 9:00 p.m.
     Alice Haynes Room

9/8  ‘Full Count: Examining Public Funding for Professional Sports Facilities’
     Dr. Judith Grant Long, Design Critic in Urban Planning,
     Harvard University
     7:00 p.m.
     Brown Alley Room

9/14 Research Fellows Symposium
     6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
     Center for Civic Engagement

9/21 David D. Burhans Civic Fellows Symposium
     6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
     Center for Civic Engagement

All events are free and open to the public

brown bag discussions

9/9  “Major League Cities: The Role of Sports and Tourism Infrastructure in Urban and Community Development”
     Dr. Judith Grant Long, Design Critic in Urban Planning, Harvard University

9/16  “My Time on Capitol Hill with Bradley, Moynihan, and Rangel”
     Daniel Maffei, former Communications Director for Sen. Bill Bradley, Sen.
     Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and the U.S. House Ways & Means (minority staff)

9/23  “Making the City Your Classroom”
     Dr. Doug Hicks, Director, Center for Civic Engagement

9/30  “Considering Sudan”
     Colin Thomas-Jensen, Advocacy and Media Assistant, International Crisis
     Group (Co-sponsored by Americans for Informed Democracy)

10/7  “Affordable Housing in Richmond”
     Greta Harris, Senior Program Director, L.I.S.C. Richmond

10/21 “Race, Space and Place”
     Dr. Andrea Simpson, Political Science; Dr. Kevin Kuswa, Rhetoric &
     Communication Studies; Dr. Paul Achter, Rhetoric & Communication Studies

10/28  “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”
     A discussion of Dr. Beverly Tatum’s book

11/4  “From Campus Activism to the Capitol Floor”
     Jennifer McClellan, Westhampton College Class of 1994

11/11 “Sprawl and Justice”
     Dr. Thad Williamson, Leadership Studies

     Carrie Dorsey, Computer Recycling Initiative

12:30 — 1:25 p.m.
     Center for Civic Engagement
     (THC 201)