



## New VCU Students Attend Discussion Groups

During Welcome Week, more than 2,000 first-year students attended 90 Summer Reading Program discussion groups, centered on "Nickel and Dimed - On (Not) Getting by in America."

The discussion groups, led by faculty, staff and students and attended by members of the Board of Visitors, gave incoming students the opportunity to gather and



discuss the book in an academic setting. The author of "Nickel and Dimed," Barbara Ehrenreich, examines the lives of Americans

living on minimum wage by attempting to live that way herself. Ehrenreich records her experiences working as a waitress, hotel maid and a Wal-mart employee.

Students shared their feelings about the book and provided their insight about a variety of questions, including "How did the writer's frame of reference influence how the information in the book was portrayed?" "How would you characterize the American Dream?" "Do you believe the method of participatory observation was effective for this topic?"

Incoming student Chris Davis thought the author's experience wasn't completely authentic, stating "when it came down to it, she could always run home and check her e-mail."

Bryce Aquino, a first-year student, thought the tone was more geared toward people like the author,



Nedra Lowery shares her thoughts on "Nickel and Dimed"

educated and well-off. But she did think the author's account helped readers to see the human side of life as a minimum-wage worker.

## Convocation Welcomes New Students

VCU Convocation, held Aug. 21, officially welcomed the incoming class of 2007 to the university. Jon Steingass, dean of the University College, kicked-off the program by providing an overview of the students who make up this year's incoming class and reaffirming the resources and support services available to lead students toward success in college.

Laura Moriarty, vice provost for academic and faculty affairs, emphasized the academic and community expectations that are

part of being a student at VCU, including getting your game on and acquiring necessary skills. Henry Rhone, vice provost for student affairs and enrollment services,



spoke about the VCU expectations of getting connected to your university and treating college like a full-time job. Jessica Lee, Student Government Association

president, spoke to her fellow students about building traditions. VCU Men's Basketball Coach Anthony Grant gave a motivational speech about the students' role at VCU. Students were also treated to a performance of the National Anthem by fellow student and music-performance major, Elise Steenburgh, along with a spirit performance by the VCU cheerleaders and dance team. All students in attendance received a VCU t-shirt and commemorative tassel.

## Preparing Focused Inquiry Instructors

New faculty members, who will teach approximately 170 sections of the year-long Focused Inquiry (FI) courses, attended a week-long FI Institute in the beginning of August. The institute oriented faculty to the program structure and curriculum and to learner-centered pedagogical practices.

According to Joseph Marolla, VCU Vice Provost for Instruction, the FI program is designed to help students improve specific skill areas, including communication, critical thinking, information literacy, collaborative work and ethical reasoning.

"The major goal of the Focused Inquiry Program is to give incoming students a common, shared experience," said Daphne Rankin, director of Student Engagement. "Forty-one full-time faculty and seven part-time faculty have come from all over the country, and the training program ensures



a consistent experience for our students."

Michael Abelson, a new FI faculty member from Wisconsin began work at VCU early to be able to attend the institute.

"I feel that this position was written for me – it's the perfect merger of my interests," said Abelson, who is completing his dissertation on the changing civic purposes of universities in Europe. "The FI program will allow me to work with students on the front-end of

their university education to help them learn skills that will be useful as they become citizens of the university, and later as well, in their personal, professional and public lives."

Faculty and staff from the Core Education Program, the Center for Teaching Excellence and the University College collaborated to offer the institute.

For more information on the Focused Inquiry program, contact Rankin at 7-8204 or e-mail [dlrankin@vcu.edu](mailto:dlrankin@vcu.edu).



## FIA Program Involves Students in the Learning Experience

Twenty-four students gathered Aug. 22 for the Focused Inquiry Associates (FIA) training session. These second-year students are the first group of associates who will lead learning support workshops for freshmen in the Focused Inquiry (FI) program.

The FIA program links classroom learning with student life. Encouraging and modeling an active learning community and positive learning attitude are the chief missions of the program. FIA workshops will be student-designed and facilitated, which is perhaps the most important feature of the program.

"We want to provide opportunities for students to connect with each other, involving them more explicitly in teaching and



learning outside the boundaries of the classroom," said Patty Strong, director of the program. "We hope our program will help freshmen plug into the academic culture, absorbing and developing the habits of successful college students."

The FIA workshops, thematic in design, will complement the curriculum of the FI sequence. Historically, first-year students have not had many "community

learning" opportunities outside the classroom. The FIA program will help to fill this gap and motivate new students toward better learning attitudes and behaviors.

In addition to a comprehensive schedule of workshops and planning meetings, FIA teams will visit FI classrooms to stay connected to the curriculum, to promote the program and to positively model academic expectations. Each year, outstanding FI students will be given the opportunity to participate in the program, offering opportunities for rising sophomores to connect with incoming students, to maintain relationships with faculty and establish themselves as leaders in the university community.

# Scenes from Welcome Week



The University College helped to welcome new students to campus during Welcome Week through sponsorship of or participation in many events, including: Summer Reading Program Discussion groups, RAMpage to Academic Success sessions, Writing Center information sessions, classroom tours, Off-Campus Student Social, New Student Convocation, Block Party, Wal-Mart Shopping Trip, Science Day and the Wednesday Wanderings Concert.

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