



VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR INDEPENDENT COLLEGES · SPRING 2026 · VOL 24 ISSUE 1

## VFIC Launches Presidential Scholars Program to Support Virginia's Next Generation of Leaders

This fall, the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges (VFIC) will mark an exciting new chapter in its mission to expand opportunity and strengthen the Commonwealth's future. With the generous support of former VFIC trustee Wick Moorman and his wife, Bonnie, the Foundation will launch the inaugural cohort of VFIC Presidential Scholars—a transformative initiative designed to recognize, support, and develop Virginia's most promising student leaders.

The Presidential Scholars program represents a bold investment in students who exemplify both academic excellence and leadership potential, yet face financial barriers that could limit their ability to fully realize their ambitions. While all VFIC scholarships are life-changing, this new program is intentionally designed for students poised not only to succeed, but to lead with impact in Virginia and beyond.

Beginning this spring, each VFIC member institution will identify one Presidential Scholar from among its rising students, forming a statewide cohort of exceptional individuals. These scholars will be chosen based on demonstrated financial need, strong academic performance, and clear evidence of leadership ability. Each recipient will receive a \$10,000 annual scholarship, renewable for up to three years, helping to close critical financial gaps that too often determine whether students persist and graduate on time.

But the Presidential Scholars Program is about far more than financial support. At its core, the initiative is a comprehensive leadership development experience—one that reflects the VFIC's deep commitment to preparing students not only for careers, but for meaningful lives of service and influence.

Scholars will engage in a high-touch, cohort-based experience that connects them with peers from across the Commonwealth. Through shared learning and ongoing collaboration, students will form meaningful relationships, exchange ideas, and grow alongside one another. Research consistently shows that cohort-based learning environments improve outcomes by fostering peer accountability, deeper engagement, and strong social networks, which are linked to higher achievement during programs and greater long-term success in careers and leadership roles. In addition, each Presidential Scholar will benefit from personalized mentorship, including engagement with their institution's president as well as guidance from VFIC trustees and leaders in business, government, and the nonprofit sector. These relationships will provide invaluable insight, encouragement, and professional direction at a formative stage in each student's journey.

The program also emphasizes experiential learning—an essential component of leadership development. Scholars

**Cover story, cont.**

will have access to fully supported opportunities such as internships, research projects, study abroad experiences, or other applied learning initiatives. These experiences will allow students to translate their academic knowledge into real-world impact while building skills that are critical for future success.

The Presidential Scholars program is designed with access at its foundation. VFIC institutions already enroll a significant number of Pell-eligible, first-generation, and underrepresented students—the majority of whom remain in Virginia after graduation and contribute to the state’s workforce and civic life. By supporting high-achieving students with financial need, the program ensures that leadership opportunities are not limited by circumstance, but are available to those with the talent and drive to make a difference.

The anticipated impact of the program extends well beyond individual students. By investing in a cohort of leaders each year, the VFIC is strengthening a pipeline of talent that will benefit communities, industries, and institutions across Virginia. Scholars are expected to graduate not only with strong academic credentials, but with the confidence, experience, and ethical grounding needed to lead in complex and rapidly changing environments.

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, the VFIC will track key outcomes including retention and graduation rates, participation in leadership and experiential learning opportunities, and post-graduation success. These metrics will help demonstrate the program’s effectiveness and guide its growth in the years ahead.

The launch of the Presidential Scholars Program has been made possible through the vision and generosity

of the Moormans, whose commitment to education and leadership development reflects a deep belief in the power of students to shape the future. Their investment not only provides critical resources for the inaugural cohort but also sets the stage for broader philanthropic support that will sustain and expand the program over time.

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Looking ahead, the VFIC envisions a program that grows deliberately and responsibly, adding additional scholars at each institution as funding allows. With continued support from donors, foundations, and corporate partners, the Presidential Scholars program has the potential to become a model for leadership development—both within Virginia and nationally.

As the VFIC prepares to welcome its first class of Presidential Scholars in fall 2026, the excitement is palpable. These students will represent the very best of Virginia’s independent colleges and universities—and, more importantly, the future of the Commonwealth.

Through this program, the VFIC is not only opening doors for talented students, it is cultivating a generation of leaders equipped to walk through those doors and create lasting change.



## ***The VFIC About Town***

*Thank you to VFIC Business Trustees, Teague Avey of Brown Advisory, and John Wick and his wife, Zan, for graciously hosting regional receptions in Charlottesville and Richmond. We were especially pleased to welcome several VFIC scholarship recipients, who shared how VFIC support has positively shaped their academic journeys.*



## Why Invest in the VFIC?



Supporting the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges (VFIC) is more than philanthropy—it's an investment in Virginia's future. Your contributions fund scholarships that create opportunities for talented students at 17 member schools, generating a ripple effect across the Commonwealth.

### Building a Pipeline of Talent

- VFIC schools align programs with market needs—nursing, engineering, cybersecurity—while preserving the strengths of a liberal arts education.
- Graduates are critical thinkers, effective communicators, and adaptable professionals.
- Over 70 percent of VFIC alumni stay in Virginia, strengthening the workforce and economy.

### Impact Made Simple

- One gift reaches 17 schools and more than 35,000 students.
- 100 percent of scholarship donations go directly to student aid.
- Your generosity empowers students to choose the school that best fits their aspirations.

### Transforming Lives

- More than 40 percent of VFIC students are Pell-eligible, ensuring access for underrepresented and first-generation students.
- Scholarships change lives—impacting families and communities for generations.
- Experience the joy of success stories from scholarship and “Home Stretch” recipients.



*Invest in the VFIC today—  
because when students succeed,  
Virginia thrives.*

[www.vfic.org/donate](http://www.vfic.org/donate)

# The Humility of Learning

“When it comes to learning, I like to get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable,” says Isaac Plange, a junior at Bridgewater College majoring in mechanical engineering. “That means challenging myself to do things that might sound hard initially just for the chance to learn from the experience.”

That resolute mindset is what drew Isaac to Bridgewater from his native Ghana. He knew he wanted to attend college in the United States, and he was looking for a school with an optimal faculty-student ratio. Another plus? The school was about to launch an engineering program. Ultimately, his career goal was to become an aerospace engineer, and Bridgewater checked all his boxes.

“The real test of my philosophy on learning,” says Isaac, “came last fall in my class on professional ethics. My professor, Dr. Lamb, mentioned that he was coaching a team to compete in the VFIC’s Applied Ethics Bowl and invited us to join. Well, I thought, here’s my chance to be comfortably uncomfortable.”

***“Preparing for and competing in the ethics bowl gave me a deeper understanding of ethical principles and showed me how I can apply them with humility as I navigate the challenges I face every day.”***

The prepping was thorough. The team met for two hours twice a week, as well as Sunday, discussing cases. Dr. Lamb provided regular readings and ethical insights. And a team of four students—two strategic communications majors, a biology major, and a mechanical engineering major—combined their knowledge and distinct perspectives to tackle various ethical dilemmas. The effort was collaborative.

“All my life, as a result of my parents’ teaching and my engineering major, I have learned that the best way to solve a problem is to be calm,” says Isaac. “And to ask questions. Where do I get information? Who do I ask? Who is the resource?”

And how does humility factor in?

“What I’ve discovered is that while I’m learning, I need to be humble enough to admit that I don’t have all the answers to the situation at the moment, that my insights could be off base,” says Isaac. “Being humble, I’ve discovered, is being able to accept all these different viewpoints as valuable and constructive and often better than my own.”

Through his participation on the ethics bowl team, Isaac also strengthened his ability to work with people and develop relationships with them.

“My experience with my ethics bowl team will definitely shape my approach to work in the years ahead and how I collaborate with people,” says Isaac. “The Applied Ethics Bowl exposed me to an array of very difficult scenarios that play out every day in our world—in business and industry, education, politics, public policy, my personal life. Preparing for and competing in the ethics bowl gave me a deeper understanding of ethical principles and showed me how I can apply them with humility as I navigate the challenges I face every day.”

# Bridgewater College Wins 2026 Applied Ethics Bowl

Bridgewater College captured the championship at the 2026 VFIC Applied Ethics Bowl, held February 13 on the University of Richmond campus. Sixteen student teams representing the VFIC consortium of independent colleges and universities from across the Commonwealth gathered for this signature academic event, engaging in four rounds of rigorous ethical analysis and discussion. The one-day event was made possible through the generous support of the presenting sponsor, TowneBank, whose commitment to education and ethical leadership continues to strengthen programs such as the VFIC Applied Ethics Bowl.

This year's competition focused on ethical dilemmas in business, challenging students to examine complex, real-world scenarios. Teams presented their analyses, positions, and recommendations before panels of judges composed of business leaders, professionals, and community representatives from throughout Virginia.

"The Applied Ethics Bowl reflects the hallmark of a VFIC education," said Locke Ogens, president of the VFIC. "Guided by dedicated faculty in small learning environments, students strengthen their analytical skills, engage in meaningful dialogue, and cultivate the ethical judgment essential for leadership."

In the final round, Bridgewater College secured the championship and the Batten Trophy with a win over Mary Baldwin University. The four-member Bridgewater team included juniors Laine Anthony, Madison Lizarraga, and Isaac Plange, along with senior Ifeatu Udokwu. The team was guided by faculty coordinator Matthew Lamb, Ph.D., instructor of Philosophy.



Beyond the competition itself, the Applied Ethics Bowl also offered students valuable opportunities for professional engagement. The day included a networking luncheon and reception, during which corporate leaders from a wide range of industries hosted tables and engaged students in conversations about careers, workplace challenges, and professional pathways.

## SAVE THE DATE

2027 Applied Ethics Bowl  
Hampton University  
Friday, February 5, 2027

*The VFIC extends thanks to our 2026 Applied Ethics Bowl sponsors:*

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**Brian K. Skinner**  
President, Virginia and  
Northeastern North Carolina



# Building Relationships, Serving our Community

“Why does TowneBank like VFIC schools? Simple—they do a great job educating their students to meet the needs we have in the financial services sector, even in comparison to large, in-state schools.”

Brian Skinner knows this firsthand. As president of Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina markets for TowneBank, he has a seasoned understanding of what his company needs in the way of professional talent to be successful in today’s competitive financial services market.

“While the finance world puts a great deal of emphasis on finding students with majors in economics, finance, and real estate lending,” says Skinner, “we know that we need more than frontline bankers. Our diverse workforce includes specialists in IT and technology knowledge, data science, human resources, accounting. VFIC schools develop students with a well-rounded liberal arts background.”

Skinner is quick to say that there’s more to a strong hire than technical knowledge. Relationship skills are critical, and the smaller class sizes at VFIC schools cultivate interpersonal skills and encourage relationship building. As a result, the company finds the talent it needs and wants on the VFIC’s seventeen campuses.

“TowneBank has a culture of caring for individuals and communities,” says Skinner, “so we look for folks who demonstrate a nurturing, giving type of personality. This type of student can walk into a room, shake your hand, look you in the eye, and have a great conversation, not just an interview.”

One of the ways TowneBank attracts and develops recruits from VFIC schools is through its Leadership Exploration and Development program, or LEAD. Through this

management trainee program for graduates, TowneBank works with VFIC schools through their career offices and career fairs. The company’s goal is to build personal relationships with schools so that it can attract the best students who are interested in a career at TowneBank.

“We’ve really cemented our relationship with the VFIC over the past few years by serving as a sponsoring partner of the Applied Ethics Bowl,” says Skinner. “Our employees love attending this premier program, and they sign up every year. In addition to the program’s educational value, our sponsorship gives us the chance to be active contributors in the communities we serve.”

Community engagement is important to the VFIC, too. Not only do VFIC schools factor prominently in the culture and economy of their communities, but nearly 71 percent of graduates from these schools remain in Virginia to live and work.

“We acquired three banks in the past twelve months,” says Skinner. “So we have strategic plans to grow TowneBank. That means counting on students like those from VFIC schools—talented, relationship-focused graduates who are ready to commit to a career in banking and serve the communities they call home.”

## Welcome New VFIC Trustees



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### ***Mission***

To secure financial support that enables college-bound students to access and graduate from outstanding Virginia independent higher education institutions.

### ***Vision***

Academically qualified college-bound students will access personalized, values-based higher education at VFIC colleges and universities, regardless of their financial situation.



# VFIC Annual Fund

The VFIC seeks to ensure that the personalized educational experience of independent colleges in Virginia remains an affordable choice for tomorrow's citizen leaders. Without VFIC funds, the available pool of financial aid would shrink, and many of our more than 35,000 students would not be able to attend the VFIC college of their choice. If you have already given to the 2025-2026 Annual Fund, thank you. If not, please consider joining the Honor Roll of Donors. Your support provides the resources students need to achieve their goals and lead lives of service and distinction.

*The Honor Roll of Donors recognizes commitments at the following levels:*

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