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Project spotlight

Graduate assistants gain experience helping CECE study battlefield tourism's economic impact in the Shenandoah Valley



Katie Lee (at left) and Sadhana Manthapuri (second from left), graduate assistants with the Center for Economic and Community Engagement, listen as senior economic development specialist Elli Travis (at right) speaks with visitors to the New Market Battlefield.

[Read more about Shenandoah Battlefields.](#)

March trivia question!

This issue's economic development trivia question is:

What is the largest megasite in Virginia?

- a. Progress Park in Wythe County
- b. Sussex County Megasite
- c. Southern Virginia Megasite at Berry Hill

[Submit your guess here](#). We'll reveal the correct answer in our next newsletter.

November Trivia Question:

What master's degree is the most common among CECE faculty?

- a. business
- b. planning
- c. economics

Answer: Business. Four CECE faculty have business degrees, three have planning degrees, one has an economic degree, and one has an educational leadership degree.

Office update

Welcome to CECE: Samantha Dunn, Student Researcher



Samantha Dunn joined CECE as a graduate assistant in January 2025. She is a first-year student in the [Accelerated Master of Urban and Regional Planning program](#) and is concurrently completing her undergraduate studies studying Smart and Sustainable Cities. Her master's degree is focused on Local Government Management and Economic Development, intersecting with the projects at CECE. She has a strong dedication to tackling urban challenges using analytical processes while prioritizing and addressing environmental, social, and economic factors.

Meet a CECE Advisory Board Member: Justice (ret.) Elizabeth Ann McClanahan



Elizabeth McClanahan serves as the CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation, Inc. and the President of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center. Before joining Virginia Tech, she spent eight years as a Justice on the Supreme Court of Virginia and held the roles of President and Dean at the Appalachian School of Law in Buchanan Co, Virginia. Elizabeth earned her bachelor's degree from William & Mary and her law degree from the University of Dayton School of Law. She grew up in Buchanan County, Virginia.

1. What is your proudest accomplishment over the course of your career?

For me, the greatest source of satisfaction has been seeing the students, law clerks, and interns achieve their dreams. My teaching journey began with Southwest Virginia Community College and later Wake Forest University in the Summer Management Program. More than 100 law students were part of my experience with the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. Today, I teach a Business Law Class for Entrepreneurs at Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business. Supporting and mentoring students is deeply fulfilling because witnessing their journeys through education and experience is satisfying.

2. What do you enjoy most about your roles as Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Tech Foundation and President of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center?

Virginia Tech holds a special place in my heart. My mother was the leader of a Homemaker's Extension Club, sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension. Throughout my childhood, I went to 4-H Camp and I spent summers in Blacksburg participating in 4-H activities. My father took me to Virginia Tech football games. This deep connection to the university has been constant throughout my life, and now I'm thrilled to be a part of it in such a meaningful way. It is incredibly special to serve.

The purpose of our work at Virginia Tech Foundation, Inc. and Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center, Inc., is to advance the impact of Virginia Tech. Virginia Tech faculty are leaders in their fields, and as I like to say, the Foundation is "the wind beneath the wings of the Hokie Bird." Supporting the faculty and administration is strategically important for the Foundation and VTCRC. And as a big Hokie fan, I am enjoying the ability to attend as many athletic events as I can.

3. What projects are you currently working on at Virginia Tech?

At the Foundation, our job is to orchestrate the growth and maximize the impact of Virginia Tech's assets to help the university achieve its aspiration for educational and research goals. Right now, we are working on aligning the work of the Corporate Research Center with Virginia Tech Innovation and Partnerships. It's an exciting project that involves not just collaboration but integrating the missions of both organizations to further their collective impact. We are creating a framework and new model to expand Virginia Tech's impact across innovation, partnerships, and enterprise growth.

[Read more about Elizabeth McClanahan.](#)



Virginia Tech faculty and graduate students: Apply for Vibrant Virginia seed funding!

Do you have an idea for a project focused on bridging divides, reducing disparity, or broadening prosperity in Virginia?

Virginia Tech faculty and graduate students are invited to submit project abstracts for the Vibrant Virginia Community Exploratories Seed Funding development program. 3-4 grants of \$10,000-\$13,000 will be awarded to each team.

Awards will be made on a rolling basis, with a final deadline of **April 15, 2025**.

University sponsors for this fiscal year include Outreach and International Affairs and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

[Learn more and submit your application.](#)

News roundup

[GO Virginia Region 2 report focuses on how industry and education partnerships can forge a path to meet workforce needs](#) (Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement Blog)

[Long-term partnership mobilizes graduate students to map rural workforce challenges](#) (Virginia Tech News)

[Rethinking the impossible](#) (VEDP.org)

[Statewide initiative aims to position Virginia as a leading hub for biotechnology innovation](#) (Virginia Tech News)

[Virginia Tech leads \\$4.9M biotech initiative to accelerate medical breakthroughs](#) (13 News Now)

Support our work

Your investment in the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement means more access to resources for communities across the Commonwealth.

CECE provides expertise, resources, and project support to catalyze action that benefits local communities and economies, specifically in economic, community, and workforce development. CECE's evidence-based research and university connections help to address needs identified at the local level through strategic partnerships and direct services.

Every dollar you donate allows CECE faculty to bring their knowledge and experience to communities from Abingdon to Arlington, Covington to Chincoteague, Damascus to Danville, Melfa to Martinsville, New Market to Newport News, and Radford to Richmond, ensuring that every region in Virginia can thrive. Together, we can build stronger communities and brighter futures across the Commonwealth.

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