

SURF

SPRING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FORUM
VIRGINIA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY



Friday, May 1st 2026

8:15am to 9:00am | Welcome Reception

International Coffee in the Athenaeum

Location: The Athenaeum, Hofheimer Library

Please join us for international coffee provided by Brooke Novkovic, Director of Global Engagement; Alice Jones Director of Career Development; and John Rudel, Director of Undergraduate Research and Creativity.

9:00am — 10:15am | Kick Off Event

The Premier Speakers Session

Location: The Athenaeum, Hofheimer Library

Session Leader: Prof. John Rudel

Students may be designated as premier speakers only upon the endorsement of their faculty mentor, recognizing their exemplary contributions to academic excellence. These individuals represent the pinnacle of high—impact learning experiences at Virginia Wesleyan University.

Alen Curovic - Computer Science

Seasonal Spatio-Temporal Modeling of Wildfire Occurrence Probability in California using Gradient Boosted Trees

Mentor: Dr. John Wang

Kaylee Grimstead - Political Science

Lifestyle Differences Between the U.S. & Switzerland

Mentor: Director of Global Engagement, Brooke Novkovic

Harrison Merrill - History and Social Science

Voices For a World Built on Peace: A History of Engaged Buddhism

Mentor: Dr. Tyler A. Lehrer

Joaquin Garza - Instrumental Music

Reflections on Composing "Nostalgia and Remorse" for Classical Guitar and a Live Performance

Mentor: Dr. Jason Squinobal

10:30am — 11:45am | 3 Simultaneous Concurrent Sessions

[Joan P. Brock School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences Research Presentations](#)

Location: Blocker Auditorium

Session Leader: Dr. Caitlin Williams

Speaker: Elliot Fylstra

Topic: "Impact of Invasive Plants on Bird Communities in a Suburban Woodland"

Speaker: Liese Hazelwood

Topic: "Where's Waldo? (But Make It Molecular)"

Speaker: Vanessa Davidson

Topic: "Tree Planting for Environmental Justice: Reducing Urban Heat in Portsmouth's Vulnerable Communities"

[The First-Gen Experience: A Conversation with Tia Durand](#)

Location: Lighthouse Common Area

Session Host: Kaza Dayton

Speaker: Tia Durand

Followed by Q&A with Kaza Dayton

Description: Join us for an inspiring conversation with Tia Durand, a First-Generation student scholar, as she shares her journey of navigating higher education and building academic

confidence. Hosted by Kaza Dayton, this session marks the first-ever SURF event intentionally created for First-Gen students at Virginia Wesleyan University. Attendees will hear Tia's story and participate in a live Q&A designed to uplift and empower the First-Gen community. All First-Gen students are warmly invited to be part of this milestone moment at the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum.

Democracy as Facade

Location: Athenaeum in the Hofheimer Library

Session Host: Dr. Modupe Oshikoya

Student Presenters:

Breanne Bessette, Melanie Goya, Samantha Smith, Jennifer Mejia, Abigail Carlson, Tavion Speight

12:00pm — 1:15pm | 5 Simultaneous Concurrent Sessions

Education Students Report from the Field

Location: Blocker Auditorium

Session Host: Dr. Clair Berube

Student Presenters:

Elementary:

Anita Gaddis

Charlotte Gantt

Miles Sporn

MAED:

Kara Young

Michael Gilbert

Mikayla Dayton

Sydnee Washington

Iyonna Valentine

Samantha Scelta

Caroline Tovar

Body Biographies

Location: Room 2 in Roop Hall

Session Host: Dr. Taryn Myers

Student Presenters:

Madalynn Antoskow, Madison Dragas, Zantia Durand, Carmen Everett, Jaleyah Jones, MJ Manini, Eythan Moreira, Charity Nelson, Camryn Owens, Nyah Rivera, Mary Ruffin, Milo Schuehle, Kylee Simon, Anika Valentine, Malika Varn

Resistance, Violence, Representation, and Memory in the Global Conflicts of the 20th Century

Location: Brock Commons in the Jane Batten Student Center

Session Host: Dr. Tyler A. Lehrer

Speaker: Abigail Wigginton

Topic: "To Be Seen as Impure is to Be Invisible: Women's Struggle with Psychological Warfare through Sexual Violence"

Speaker: Andrew Steiner

Topic: "Homelands not Heroes: Reframing Filipino Guerrilla Resistance in World War II"

Speaker: Lucas Gordon

Topic: "Thoughts from The Woods - The Armed Partisan Resistance Movement (1944-1952) and its Reflections on International Relations"

Speaker: Logan Schohn

Topic: "Heroes Just for One Day"

World War 3: Potential and Possibilities

Location: Athenaeum in the Hofheimer Library

Session Host: Dr. Modupe Oshikoya

Student Presenters:

Kaylee Grimstead, Connor Bryant, Grace Harrimon, Joy Ramsey, Galilea Robledo, Andrew Steiner

Senior Music Capstone Presentations

Location: Parsons Ensemble Room in Beverly Hall

Session Hosts: Dr. Jason Squinobal and Dr. Bryson Mortensen

Student Presenters:

Tyler Barnett

Aidan Foly

Ja'Marri Henderson

Aviana Medina

Isaac Samuel

Jacob Underwood

1:15pm — 1:45pm | Special Reception

Reception and Awards for Student Response Projects to Nina Chanel Abney “The Pursuit of Happiness”

Location: Henry and Eleanor Watts Lobby in the Goode Fine and Performing Arts Center

Session Host: Prof. John Rudel

Description: Join us for a reception celebrating student projects responding to the inaugural exhibition at Virginia MOCA on the campus of Virginia Wesleyan University. Improv performances, and an awards ceremony will take place in the Henry and Eleanor Watts Lobby of the Susan S. Goode Fine and Performing Arts Center.

2:00pm — 2:45pm | Signature Event

Honors Convocation

Location: Joan and Macon Brock Theatre, Susan S. Goode Center for Fine and Performing Arts

Description: The Honors Convocation at Virginia Wesleyan University is a prestigious annual tradition dedicated to the formal recognition of exceptional student achievement. During this esteemed event, academic departments have the opportunity to acknowledge and award outstanding students for their exemplary performance and contributions to their respective disciplines.

3:00pm — 4:30pm | Signature Event

Academic Fair Poster Session

Location: CMAC, Jane Batten Student Center

Description: Virginia Wesleyan University students present 140+ posters on research, scholarly, creative, internship, career development, and global engagement experiences. Refreshments will be provided.

Featuring Student Presenters:

Eddie Adkins
Ana Adams
Emma Adams
Gavin Ashe

Brianna Foster
Ariana Frazier
Lillian Glenn
Lucas Gordon

Ryan McAdams
Emily Moore
Theresa Dill
Bradley Painter

Kianna Bair	Isabella Grosswiler	Maria Parr
Gabrielle Barnett	Anna Greenleaf	Joshua Pepper
Erin Beaudry	Kaylee Grimstead	Danielle Poulsen
Breanne Bessette	Becca Hallingstad	Sarah Reich
Jackson Blevins	Victoria Haneline	Lily Reslink
Sammy Blythe	Kristin Hansen	Hannah Rose
Aidan Bolling	Grace Harriman	Kyla Robberecht
Ella Clingenpeel	Margaret Haynes	Chloe Scott
Stephanie Clark	Haley Haydon	Aaron Scheible
Juliette Coffey	Terrah Henrich	Milo Schuele
Aiden Croghan	Garrett Hoffman-Cockerille	Megan Setlak
Lynsey Cox	Dhamisaa Holsclaw	Matthew Smith
Alen Curovic	Jake Hofstetter	Emani Smith
Haley Davis	Gianna Holt	Mackenzie Swanson
Shyenne Diaz	Jaleyah Jones	William Sexton
Mia Diehl	Laila Jones	Nicholas Valentin
Mallory Dillon	Salena Jones	Victoria Verspoor
Jaylin Diggs	Elena Lichtenwalner	Tyler Waddell
Meadow Dyke	Steven Medinets	Jerry Watson
Vasylyna Fedun	Samantha Medrano	Taylor Wootten-Chapman
Isaac Fick	Guevara	Paige Ziegler
David Feliciano	Mason Medina	Chandler Turner
Elliot Fylstra	Tommi Mero	

4:45pm — 6:00pm | 3 Simultaneous Concurrent Sessions

[Norfolk's Proposed Seawall and Environmental Justice](#)

Location: Room 155, Greer Environmental Sciences Center

Session Leader: Dr. Levi Tenen

Student Presenters:

Erin Beaudry, Jocelyn Kaelin, Logan McConnell, William Pleasants

[Psychology & Media and Communication Internship Presentations](#)

Location: Athenaeum in Hofheimer Library

Session Leader: Dr. Taryn Meyers and Dr. Kathy Merlock Jackson

Student Presenters: Hunter Davenport, Siah Hall, Madalynn Antoskow, Madx Balint, Haley Davis, Charity Egbo, Jette Hafermann, Avery Lewis, Sharice Puryear, Nyah Rivera

Senior Art Majors Exhibition Reception

**This event runs from 5:00 pm - 7:30 pm*

Location: Neil Britton Art Gallery in Hofheimer Library

Session Leader: Prof. Derek Eley

Student Artists: Jeremiah Boateng, Sharice Puryear, Kevin McSwain, Sarah Richards, Abigail Peck, Ava Staunch, Anika Valentine

7:30pm | Concert

Marlins Jazz Ensemble Concert

Location: Joan and Macon Brock Theatre in the Goode Fine and Performing Arts Center

Description: The Marlins Jazz Ensemble, under the direction of Jason Squinobal, takes the stage for its Spring Concert. Showcasing the versatility and energy of jazz, the ensemble will perform favorites spanning a variety of styles—from timeless standards to contemporary grooves.