

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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OUR FINAL PRINT EDITION!

VIRGINIA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY REALIZES A DECADE OF EXTRAORDINARY GROWTH

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Dr. Scott Miller assumed the presidency of Virginia Wesleyan College in 2015. Despite challenging demographics, stagnated federal and state financial aid and a swath of college closures in recent years, the institution continues to thrive.

While these are challenging times for most colleges and universities, especially small, private colleges, the story at Virginia Wesleyan University can be a model for others. Success is contingent upon bold leadership and requires detailed attention to the recruitment/retention plan, program reconsideration, expanded academic offerings, aggressive fundraising, new partnerships, physical plant improvements and significant investment in the curricular and co-curricular experience for students.

Enrollment Management

The institution first partnered with [THE DYSART GROUP](#) back in 2016 and leadership has collaborated with the firm continuously over the last decade. A new enrollment management plan was introduced after a detailed analysis of outcomes and tactics over the previous five-

year span. Significant changes were implemented:

- The enrollment and financial aid offices were reorganized, and state of the art training was conducted.
- New reporting mechanisms were created to track outcomes and to better inform decision-making.
- Accountability metrics were established to evaluate performance.
- A new communication plan was introduced for students at each stage of the enrollment funnel including inquiries, applicants, accepted applicants and deposited students. Systematic telephone outreach along with text messaging, email, direct mail and personal visits helped guide prospective students and families through the enrollment process.
- The financial aid award policy was changed to more effectively recognize academic talent and meet financial need while maximizing net revenue.
- A new, targeted academic scholarship program was created.

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Alarming Trends

The discount rate for first-time undergraduates rose to 56.3% in 2024, up significantly over the 54.4% reported the previous year.

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- Counselor travel was reduced to focus on destinations more likely to generate real interest.
- The admission process was streamlined for efficiency and quicker admission decisions.
- A call center was created to supplement telephone communication from the admission counselors.
- Campus visits and events were redesigned to enhance the experience for students and families.
- Specific tactics were introduced to better serve the growing market in higher education of underserved populations. The University boasts that approximately 51% of the enrolled population is comprised of at-risk students.
- Marketing and communication initiatives were modified to emphasize career opportunities and the success of graduates.

Academic Reorganization

The President and leadership team completed an academic reorganization to better align the University with current programmatic and market imperatives.

- Dr. Miller led the organization through the complex transition from college to university status.
- The Batten Honors College was established to attract and retain the most academically talented students. The design of the program offers excellent academic, social and research opportunities for students, along with scholarship support.

Program Expansion

As demographics in the United States have shifted, the University has responded with aggressive program expansion to meet the needs of myriad populations:

- International students can now benefit from the Jane P. Batten and David R. Black School for International Studies in Lakeland Japan.

- Lives are being transformed and communities elevated through participation in the VWU-Chesapeake Incarcerated Persons ReEntry Program.
- VWU Global is an inclusive program grounded in the liberal arts and dedicated to scholarship and lifelong learning.
- The healthcare needs of the local community will be served by the establishment of the Sentara College of Health Sciences at Virginia Wesleyan University in 2026.
- The University created new, online offerings including degree completion tracts for both associate and bachelor’s degrees. Online graduate degrees are now offered in Human Services, Teacher Leadership, Applied Psychology, Environmental Studies, Business and more.
- The new Advanced Scholars Institute provides early enrollment, dual credit and a dual enrollment consortium.
- Continuing Education and Workforce Development have been embraced. The University now offers several opportunities to elevate skills including micro credentials, free workshops and high demand certifications.

Enrollment Growth

The enrollment outcomes over the last decade have been impressive during a time when dozens of other institutions have retrenched, rightsized or closed. Consider the following:

| Type | 2015 | 2025 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Undergraduates (FT) | 1,441 | 1,281 |
| Undergraduates (PT) | 31 | 535 |
| Graduate | 0 | 107 |
| Talent Development | 0 | 1,750 |
| Lifelong Learning | 0 | 1,836 |
| Grand Total | 1,472 | 5,509 |

Includes Online, Prison Education Program, Batten & Black School for International Studies (Lakeland Japan), Advanced Scholars Institute and VWU Global.

Resources

Fundraising is a critical component for any college or university and endowment growth at Virginia Wesleyan has been transformational. Despite economic challenges in recent years, support for the University has more than tripled.

| Endowment 2015 | Endowment 2025 |
|----------------|----------------|
| \$54,000,000 | \$184,000,000 |

The Physical Plant

A series of upgrades and additions have been made to the physical plant, including the addition of new buildings on campus:

- Greer Environmental Sciences Center
- Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art
- Frank Blocker Youth Center
- Susan S. Goode Fine and Performing Arts Center
- Oxford Village (eight buildings and 250 apartments)
- Birdsong Field for lacrosse and field hockey
- Betty S. Rogers Track and Field Center

Physical plant upgrades serve to make the institution more attractive to prospective students and better support institutional mission.

The future can be brighter for most colleges and universities willing to make bold changes. The successful colleges and universities in the future will be those with nimble and dynamic programming plans and the ability and will to make data-informed decisions to adjust, maintain, alter, expand and sometimes discontinue critical components of the institution.

Control of discount rates along with aggressive fundraising will be imperative. That means brand new approaches to enrollment and financial aid in response to evolving market conditions, and wise investment of scarce institutional resources. Continuing the old ways and hoping for better outcomes is a recipe for disaster.

**HAPPY
NEW
YEAR!**

ATTENTION!

OUR LAST PRINT EDITION!

To do our part in saving our planet, we are going to a digital-only format.

Starting with the April 2026 issue, **ENROLLMENT MANAGER** will be available exclusively online.

With our new electronic-only format, you will have access to the newsletter as soon as it's published, enjoy the convenience of interactive links and embedded information and help reduce our reliance on paper and fossil fuels.

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THE DYSART GROUP is a higher education consulting firm specializing in enrollment management. We have provided consultation services to more than 250 colleges and universities throughout the United States with extraordinary results.

We have worked collaboratively with colleges and universities to significantly grow enrollment. Our institution-specific recommendations have helped increase the number of admission applications as much as three-fold. Improved communication strategies and new tracking metrics have resulted in higher folder completion rates and increased the number of students accepted for admission. New student enrollments have grown by as much as 70% in a single cycle while discount rates have been controlled. Proven strategies have increased retention rates by as much as 7% in one year.

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