

EVERY RAMPS A RESEARCHER

Spring 2026 VCU ConnectEd Research-Supportive Project-Based Learning Courses

RAMPS (Real-world Applications in Multidisciplinary and Project-based Studies)

Interior Design IDES 261: **What is Good Design?** • Sara Reed

Section 002: TR 12:30–1:45 Hybrid Asynchronous • 3 credits • CRN 46831

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Creativity, Innovation and Aesthetic Inquiry

This course invites students to explore the question “What is good design?” through lectures, research, reflection, and collaborative experimentation. Students examine how designers have responded to shifts in technology, politics, and the environment from the early 20th century to today. Through the study of a chosen design, they will map its life cycle—from conception to end of life—and evaluate it through the lenses of function, aesthetics, sustainability, accessibility, and culture. In partnership with the VCU da Vinci Center for Innovation, students will be introduced to design thinking as a framework for creative problem solving and human-centered innovation. A project-based module allows students to prototype improvements and envision new design possibilities. By the end of the course, students synthesize their insights into a final presentation that defines what good design means to them.

Philosophy PHIL 202: **The Ethics of AI** • Frank Faries

Section 004 • Online Asynchronous • 3 credits • CRN 47829

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts, Scientific and Logical Reasoning

An exploration of the nature of artificial intelligence and the ethical questions raised by its use and creation. This course’s Privacy Project is a semester-long, research-driven experience that lets students investigate how real technologies collect and use personal data. Working collaboratively and individually, students analyze privacy policies, map data flows, and evaluate whether these practices respect ethical norms. The project connects classroom philosophy to real-world application, aligning with VCU’s REAL and RAMPS initiatives by treating every student as a researcher. Along the way, students also practice professionalism by meeting deadlines, communicating clearly, and taking responsibility for shared work.

Focused Inquiry UNIV 299: **What’s the Big Idea? Creativity** • Patty Paine Gibbons

VCU Qatar Section Q01 • MW 9:30–10:50 • Face-to-Face Instruction • 3 credits • CRN 46932

VCU Qatar Section Q02 • MW 11:00–12:20 • Face-to-Face Instruction • 3 credits • CRN 50553

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Diversities in the Human Experience

This project-based course invites students to explore creativity as both a process and a practice for understanding and transforming the world. Students will go through the entire inquiry cycle, from defining a problem and conducting research to identifying a contemporary issue that sparks their curiosity. Working together, students will design creative interventions that address real-world issues through research, experimentation, and reflection. The course emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and reflection as essential practices for learning and problem-solving. Guided by the principles of project-based learning, the course

focuses on inquiry, collaboration, and real-world innovation, culminating in a final project that showcases both individual insight and collective imagination and inquiry.

Focused Inquiry UNIV 299: What's the Big Idea about Leadership? • Julianne Guillard

Section 004 • MWF 10–10:50 • Hybrid Asynchronous • 3 credits • CRN 29979

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Diversities in the Human Experience

Who's a good or bad leader, and what makes leadership successful? How do leaders inspire innovation and change (for better or worse)? What does leadership entail in different social contexts? This course will invite you to explore the complexities, similarities, and differences among various leaders. Special attention will be given to the broader role of leadership and collaboration in these social contexts, examining how leaders influence change across key institutions, including family, religion, politics, media, economy, education, and sports. The course encourages active engagement with these themes, whereby students create and present a variety of qualitative research projects that analyze how leaders have shaped, and may continue to shape, these institutions.

Focused Inquiry UNIV 299: What's the Big Idea? A Fair Trial • Andrew Marx

Section 001: MWF 2–2:50 • Hybrid Asynchronous • 3 credits • CRN 42961

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Diversities in the Human Experience

The idea of a fair trial is seen as essential to free societies around the world, but why? And what does the idea of a fair trial entail? It involves notions of rights and equality that many of us take for granted. As we examine them carefully, however, they will lead us to a number of fascinating and challenging questions. We'll consider them from legal, historical, philosophical, and social scientific perspectives. This course can serve as an introduction to legal studies for those who are interested in such a path, but the ideas we take up are also vital for each of us as citizens.

Focused Inquiry UNIV 299: What's the Big Idea? Environmental Justice • Beth Kreydatus

Section 003: MWF 2–2:50 • Face-to-Face Instruction and Service-Learning • 3 credits • CRN 46257

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Diversities in the Human Experience

Environmental justice, or “EJ,” is the belief that all people, regardless of race or class, should have access to a healthy and clean environment. Virginia has long been home to an active and diverse environmental justice movement, as EJ advocates have worked to ensure that state and local policies are truly just. In this course, we'll explore some of the issues local activists have addressed, such as concerns about energy costs for low-income households, the impacts of construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure, the siting of landfills and other toxic projects in minority or working-class neighborhoods, the distribution of green energy jobs and resources, and concerns about the transparency of the environmental regulatory process. In this project-based course, students will first learn about EJ issues, and then they will pursue research that serves a local environmental justice organization. Over the course of the semester, students will complete 20 hours of service to a local organization, gaining first-hand experience and community connections, while developing and completing a research based-project that serves that community partner.



Focused Inquiry UNIV 299: What's the Big Idea? The Future of Work • Virginia Totaro

Section 052 • MWF 11–11:50 • Hybrid Asynchronous • 3 credits • CRN 49316

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Diversities in the Human Experience

Research shows that over our lifetimes, we will spend more time working than anything other activity other than sleeping. But how often do we stop to really think about “work” as an area to study? In this seminar, students will explore the history, current challenges, and expectations for the workforce of the future. How did the Industrial Revolution upend gender roles in the US? Why are most jobs today in the service sector? How can entrepreneurial thinking impact your future? Will AI transform your job prospects? The final project will lead students through a process of investigating a work-related industry, job, or problem to help them develop a real-world understanding of how to achieve their goals or work towards solving challenges of the future.

Sociology SOCY 101: Introduction to Sociology • Tara Stamm

Section 003 • MWF 10–10:50 • Face-to-Face Instruction • 3 credits • CRN 39962

Section 008 • MWF 9–9:50 • Face-to-Face Instruction • 3 credits • CRN 32036

ConnectEd Knowledge/Inquiry Areas: Social Behavior Sciences; Diversities in the Human Experience

This course will relentlessly and thoughtfully push you to investigate how the everyday world —work, family, leisure, politics, media — shape what it means to be human in this particular time and place. We will also fuse micro and macro perspectives on social life: you will learn, for example, to apply the founding figures of sociology to current political conflicts over globalization and environmental disasters at the macro level and to analyze how even children at play in preschool reveal a universe of meanings at the micro level. This course takes a hands-on approach to the study of social life, trying out different theoretical perspectives and methodological techniques.



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