



Richard Bland College

A Model for **Higher Education *Innovation***



This report, submitted by Richard Bland College on November 1, 2022, has been developed in response to the General Assembly's request for RBC to provide a plan, that will begin implementation in the 2024-25 academic year, focused on the "steps necessary to transition to an innovative model for higher education" that prepares students for high-demand jobs in industries critical to the regional economic development of the Petersburg area, the Virginia Gateway Region, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.



Richard Bland College

November 1, 2022

Richard Bland College **A Model for Higher Education *Innovation***

Abstract:

Since 2014, Richard Bland College (RBC) has enthusiastically responded to General Assembly directives to model collaborative, innovative approaches to education that would yield improved attainment of higher education—and attendant credentials—for Virginia’s citizens and robust economic development for the Commonwealth. By leveraging its core academic programs, honing its agility, and strategically utilizing private and public partnerships to address market needs, RBC has emerged as an innovative, hybrid model for higher education in Virginia. RBC offers relevant academic programming, work-based learning, and industry-recognized credentials to deliver significant value for its students and the state. To continue this mission and bring the model to scale, RBC requires a dedicated Board of Visitors, which is a complementary resource that would require no additional state funding.

Executive Summary

1. Background

This report is provided in response to language in the 2022 Virginia State Budget, approved by the General Assembly and the Governor. This language required Richard Bland College to:

provide a plan to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by November 1, 2022 on the steps necessary to transition to an innovative model for higher education that prepares citizens for jobs in high-demand fields and in industries critical to the economic development of the Petersburg area, Virginia Gateway Region and Commonwealth of Virginia, to begin implementation in the 2024-25 academic year. Richard Bland College shall work in consultation with the Virginia Secretary of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the College of William and Mary, and regional post-secondary and secondary education institutions in the development of this plan.

Our country and our Commonwealth are undergoing an economic transformation. As the global and local economies shift toward a more digital, automated future, the Commonwealth must rethink how to educate, train, and retain talent.

DroneUp CEO and Founder Tom Walker, former Navy Seal

“The partnership between DroneUp and RBC to create the first of its kind, a commercial Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) Flight Academy, demonstrates how businesses and colleges can work collaboratively and effectively to support each other’s mission and, most importantly, the workforce. RBC has provided DroneUp—a company that is in rapid growth mode—the full array of customized services and programs that we needed, on our schedule, without long, complicated and tedious processes that can result in costly delays. RBC has proven to be in a league of its own as an agile higher education innovator. RBC is creating relevant, high-quality school-to-work pathways that are helping solve our workforce challenges today and for the foreseeable future.”

Virginia is doing well relative to other states in its citizens’ attainment of higher education (6th in the Nation); however, jobs remain unfilled, and the labor participation rate has been flat or declining since 2016 (63.8% in 2022). To connect jobs with those who can fill them, we must 1) expand access to historically underrepresented populations and 2) give these workers the skills needed to fill the jobs in high-need areas. Research shows that the rate of Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults with an associate degree or higher is 35.9% and 34.4%, respectively, while that of White adults is 55.6%. Rural populations experience similar discrepancies.

Richard Bland College is uniquely positioned to help fill this gap by delivering skills and credentials to those who will be the workforce of tomorrow. The institution can do this while also continuing to provide 1) opportunities for Virginia students to earn a high-value, two-year associate degree and transfer to one of RBC’s 45 transfer partner schools and 2) dual enrollment opportunities to high school students across Virginia.

Richard Bland is on track to be a nimble, innovative higher education institution that prepares citizens for jobs in high-demand fields and in industries critical to the economic development of the Petersburg area, Virginia Gateway Region, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Amsted Rail CEO, Global Bearing Operations, McIntyre R. Louthan, III

“As one of the first industry partners to sign on to receive paid interns through RBC’s FAME program, I assumed this would be the standard internship model that provides students some hands-on skills as they study to become engineers. The FAME program does provide the opportunity for students to go on to Virginia Tech, my alma mater, or another engineering school after they graduate from RBC, but the program is also designed to produce skilled technicians after two years. I have been impressed by RBC’s hybrid approach, which couples a rigorous academic program with an equally rigorous advanced manufacturing training program.”

Some obstacles remain, however, and this report addresses the steps needed to enable Richard Bland to fulfill its potential and become that innovative model for higher education that will serve the changing needs of the employers and workforce of Virginia for decades to come.

2. The College in the Present:

While colleges are generally categorized based on degrees offered (two-year vs. four-year), RBC operates as a “hybrid,” creatively delivering elements of both types of institutions to best serve its highly diverse student body and the needs of employers, both locally and statewide. Richard Bland College:

Despite a series of “accidents of history” that have limited RBC’s independence over the last century, RBC has proven to be agile, innovative, and highly efficient in delivering university-parallel first and second-year programming to local students and, more recently, in responding to high-demand industry needs, such as advanced manufacturing and unmanned aerial systems (UAS) technology.

For the Commonwealth of Virginia to meet its workforce needs—and realize its goal of becoming the “Best State for Education” by 2030—new higher education models, such as those represented by Richard Bland College, are necessary.

- Enables more than 1,500 high school students throughout the Commonwealth to get a jump-start on college through flexible dual enrollment programming;
- Offers a rigorous 1st- and 2nd-year liberal arts curriculum and a robust student life experience—including residential life and intercollegiate athletics;
- Utilizes existing capacity to empower students to complete baccalaureate degrees through guaranteed admission to dozens of universities or on the RBC campus; and
- Partners with industry to deliver customized credentials for high-demand jobs.

Richard Bland partners—those who reap the benefit of RBC’s unique service and delivery model—are best able to articulate what makes Richard Bland College unique in Virginia public higher education. The following quotes are just a few from corporate CEOs, community leaders, economic developers, and K-12 administrators.

Navitas North America President and CEO Brian J.R. Stevenson, PhD

“RBC and Navitas have enjoyed a successful partnership over the last five years. I am very pleased with how well our partnership has evolved, and the Global Student Success Program has been a highlight. RBC is a unique program in the Navitas portfolio, our only two-year college. International students are often attracted to RBC’s guaranteed admission agreements, but in addition to UVA, W&M, and VA Tech, GSSP graduates have completed their studies at prestigious colleges and universities such as Purdue University, New York University, University of British Columbia, UNC Chapel Hill, University of Michigan, University of Toronto, Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Georgia Tech, State University, and Penn State University.”

Richmond International Airport (RIC) CEO Perry Miller

“We are excited about partnering with Richard Bland College through our Aviation Reaching Communities (ARC) project. This partnership will offer dual enrollment, summer programs, and stackable credentials that lead to viable pathways in the aviation industry. RBC stands out for its existing emphasis on aviation programming, its first-rate residential facilities, and its flexibility.”

Chairman of Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors Harrison A. Moody

“RBC has untied the Gordian knot that confounds so many business-university partnerships. RBC is in a league of its own as an agile higher education innovator. While government, business, and higher education leaders continue a perpetual discussion about how to streamline relevant, high quality school-to-work pathways, RBC has already solved the problem. That’s why the campus of Richard Bland College is the ideal setting for [DroneUp] to establish its new \$20 million testing, training, and R&D center to train drone operators. DroneUp’s work complements RBC’s ongoing efforts to develop an unmanned aviation program. Drone technology is cutting-edge, and we are proud to be a part of it.”

Virginia’s Gateway Region (VGR) President and CEO Keith Boswell

“VGR was thrilled to partner with Richard Bland College on a GO Virginia grant that will soon yield a new 290-acre business park on the RBC campus. Now that RBC has secured DroneUp as their anchor tenant, the sky is truly the limit. There is real power in connecting RBC’s unmanned systems certificate with DroneUp’s live training. RBC is leading the way when it comes to streamlining career pathways. Economic development is a team sport, and we are only as strong as the skilled workers we have here in the Gateway Region.”

City of Petersburg Mayor Samuel J. Parham, RBC Alumnus

“Imagine a recent high school graduate earning \$18 an hour—with benefits—and enrolled in a college program that incorporates hands-on learning in a high-tech industry. Richard Bland College’s one-of-a-kind “earn and learn” program in advanced manufacturing (FAME) leads directly to an industry-recognized credential. FAME graduates have a transferable Associate of Science degree that counts toward a bachelor’s degree. What they don’t have is student debt. Thanks to RBC, the FAME program is a reality right here in Central Virginia, right now.”

Dinwiddie County Economic Development Director Morgan A. Ingram

RBC has a team of enthusiastic and professional employees that truly embody the mission and vision of the College. Likewise, it's not often that you see employees of a company with as much enthusiasm as [DroneUp], and their eagerness to partner with RBC speaks volumes about the College and its customized approach to delivering high value educational programs and services that support workforce development. As a veteran economic development leader, it has been remarkable to watch the RBC transformation, and I look forward to continuing to work on the DroneUp project and many more to come.

Virginia State University President Makola Abdullah, PhD

"Over the past decade, VSU and RBC have partnered productively on a variety of projects and initiatives as part of a shared commitment to increase opportunity for citizens of Petersburg and the Virginia Gateway Region. During my tenure as President of VSU, we have partnered with RBC to provide ROTC as an option for students; collaborated on COVID response efforts; and secured TAACCCT grant funding to advance the Statesman-Trojan Alliance, which provides a seamless transfer process from RBC to VSU. To advance the Commonwealth's goals for higher education, specifically the credentialing of more Virginians, plans are currently underway to establish a joint VSU-RBC Virtual School of Technical and Professional Studies. The establishment of this Virtual School would strengthen cross-institutional partnership and advance the strategic goals of both institutions, in addition to serving the growing demand for online educational options both locally and throughout the Commonwealth."

Superintendent of Hopewell City Public Schools Melody Hackney, EdD

"When Hopewell City Public Schools became the first school in Virginia to transition to a system-wide, year-round, balanced calendar, we looked to Richard Bland College to deliver our dual enrollment program. RBC is known for its quality instruction as well as its flexible and customizable "one size fits one" approach, and it was imperative during this transformative change that we accommodate the unique scheduling needs of Hopewell's dual enrollment students. Since the inception of our partnership, the RBC Academy at Hopewell has become a model that other schools seek to replicate, and I am proud that our strong partnership with RBC allowed us to get there first!"

Rock Ridge High School (Loudon County, VA) Director of School Counseling Kevin Terry

"Last year of 84% of our seniors graduated with dual enrollment credit from RBC. Our College persistence rate for students is 95% for 4-year institutions. This is a direct result of our dual enrollment programs! RBC faculty and staff are top-notch, and this longstanding partnership has not only been productive in terms of giving thousands of students a leg up on college; it has been a real pleasure to work with a team who cares about students and their success."

RBC fall 2022 student enrollment of 2,683 students mirrors our trend of attracting first generation students (32%) and students of color (55%). In January 2022, RBC was granted eligibility for Title III and Title V funding by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). RBC is also eligible for **Minority Serving Institution (MSI)** designation through USDOE. This eligibility creates opportunity for RBC to apply for programs such as Gear UP, TRIO, and other related programs that are earmarked to support underserved populations. Since January, RBC has submitted \$22 million in grant applications and has been approved for \$1.2 million dollars in the current fiscal year.

3. The College in the Future:

Over the last two years, a reputable higher education consulting firm, Huron, assisted RBC in envisioning a transformative, future-state vision as well as designing a business model to achieve that vision.

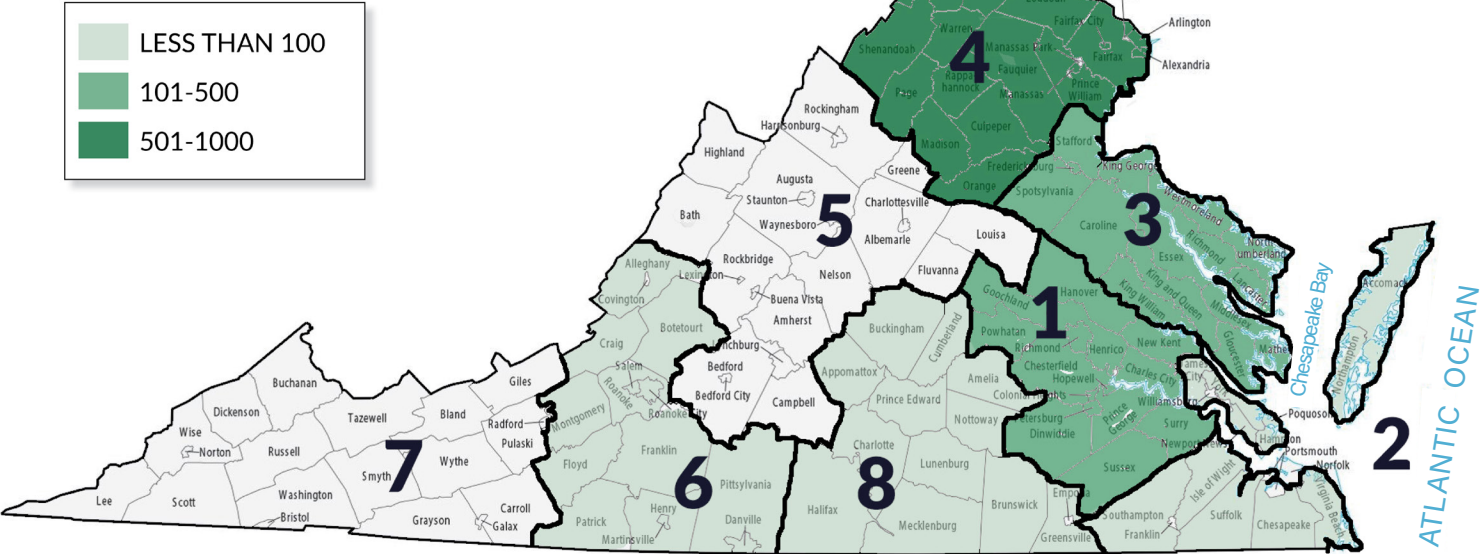
Without adding significant cost, RBC is leveraging its core, existing infrastructure to expand program offerings—including micro-credentials, associate degrees, and work-based learning experiences—that align with regional, educational and workforce needs.

Since 2014, RBC has enthusiastically responded to and executed on General Assembly directives that called on the institution to identify and implement innovative strategies to strengthen educational pathways from high school to postsecondary education, improve educational access and attainment, and support economic and community development by preparing citizens for jobs in high-demand fields.

To provide unique programs and educational pathways and nurture the talent pipeline, RBC partners with public and private high school and postsecondary institutions throughout the Commonwealth:

- **Public and Private High Schools** – RBC partners with 21 school districts and private schools to deliver dual enrollment to more than 1,500 high school students annually throughout Virginia.

2022-2023 RBC Dual Enrollment Student Population by Region



- RBC aspires to partner with 4 universities to offer an on-site **Lab School** that would prepare high school students for STEM professions through applied learning. Understanding that only one lab school proposal will be accepted in each region, RBC has deferred its proposal submission in the first round of funding as a demonstration of support for VSU’s proposal. A proposal will be submitted in the next cycle.
- **Universities** – RBC students enjoy guaranteed admission to 45 public and private universities, including a **Joint RBC-VSU School of Technical and Professional Studies**.

In addition, to closing the gaps between its students and employers, RBC strategically partners with myriad companies and organizations, including:

- **DroneUp** - RBC and DroneUp partner to train drone flight pilots on the RBC campus. DroneUp plans to build a \$22 million R&D and training facility at the RBC Innovation Business Park. This partnership is projected to yield \$1.2 million in net revenue for FY23.
- **FAME** – RBC oversees Virginia’s only Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education chapter. This program provides students “earn and learn” opportunities at 12 participating advanced manufacturing companies in the region. Most graduates receive job offers.
- **Virginia Gateway Region** – RBC is partnering with VGR and the Dinwiddie County economic development team to develop an Innovation Business Park on underutilized campus land to attract emerging UAS-related industries to the region.
- **Navitas** – RBC and Navitas partner to deliver a Global Student Success Program for international students that has netted nearly \$2 million in new revenue since 2017.

Leveraging partnerships enables RBC to maintain a nimble and affordable model that is adaptable to maintain continuous alignment with industry/student demand and competitive when market conditions change.

4. The Necessary Steps:

A board of visitors dedicated to sole governance of RBC is a valuable resource that would require no additional state funding. An independent, dedicated governing board would help to:

- Further position RBC as an incubator for higher education innovation;
- Ensure success of the Innovation Business Park at RBC, with the \$22M DroneUp Flight Academy and R&D facility as its anchor tenant;
- Secure RBC’s role as a catalyst for economic growth by creating viable pathways to employment in the Gateway region and throughout the Commonwealth.

To scale successful initiatives and continue to meet the changing workforce needs of the Petersburg/Virginia Gateway Region with targeted solutions, RBC now requires a dedicated governing board to help guide that mission and vision and bring its model to scale.

RBC is already independent in every respect except board governance. RBC is independently accredited, directly funded by the General Assembly, independently audited, operates its own 501(c)(3) corporation (RBC Foundation), and has every hallmark of an independent institution, other than its board structure.

RBC has broad public support for this governance change from multiple credible actors, including the College’s accrediting body (SACSCOC), RBC’s legislative delegation, RBC’s alumni base, Virginia State University, and William & Mary’s Board of Visitors.

RBC, Brightpoint Community College, and neighboring VSU (an HBCU) are strong partners, not competitors. Each institution leverages its unique mission and programs to serve the educational needs of the region and the Commonwealth.

RBC is aware of the steps needed for successful transition, including legislative requirements, and plans to work with the State Council of Higher Education to navigate accordingly.

1. The Communities We Serve

Context

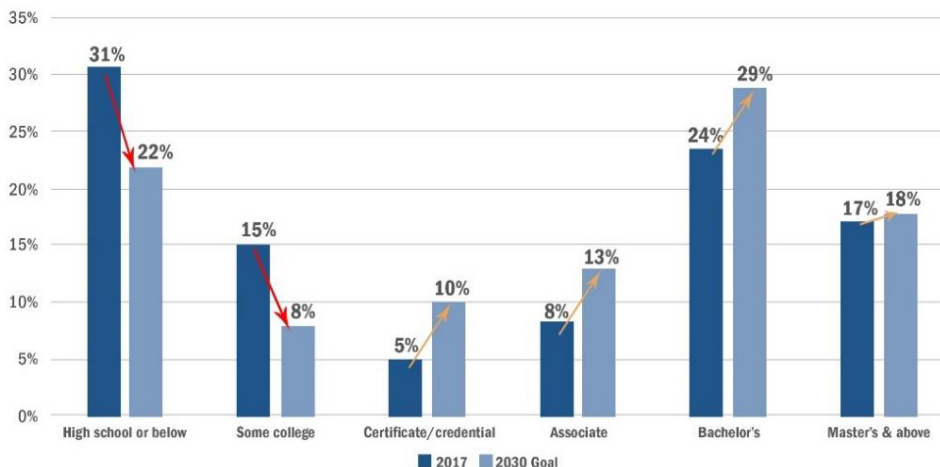
The Commonwealth currently sits in the wake of the fourth industrial revolution, driven primarily by the rise of artificial intelligence and automation. The rapidly shifting economic conditions facing the Commonwealth of Virginia require us to rethink how we educate and train our population and workforce. Over 95% of jobs created across the United States since the Great Recession have gone to workers with at least some college education. This trend is likely to continue, which could contribute to a broadening difference in economic outcomes based on educational attainment. The Commonwealth's strategic plan, Pathways to Opportunity, calls for the Commonwealth to be the "Best State for Education."

To realize this ambition, Virginia estimates that 70% of the working-age population (ages 25-64) will need a postsecondary credential or degree (certificate, associate, bachelor's, or greater) by 2030. To support this goal, the Virginia Business Higher Education Council's Growth 4VA campaign emphasizes the need to make Virginia a talent-to-opportunity leader for the Nation, providing affordable talent pathways for students of varied backgrounds. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and the Virginia Chamber have emphasized the production and retention of talent as a competitive differentiator in statewide economic development. To maintain this pipeline, SCHEV has stood up federal assistance programs such as the Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) to incentivize financially needy students to consider higher education as an achievable outcome in their future.

As of 2019, Virginia's higher educational attainment rate is 57.4%, ranking sixth in the nation, and performing 5.5 percentage points higher than the national average (51.9%). On the other hand, there are currently more jobs in Virginia than can be filled. As of July 2022, the labor force participation rate sits at 63.8% (Fred Economic Research). This rate has been flat or slightly declining since 2016, indicating a persistent "employment gap" between Virginia's labor market needs and the capacity of the workforce to meet them.

These factors and forces are especially pronounced in the Petersburg area. Petersburg's rates of high school graduation and baccalaureate degree attainment lag behind both the United States and Virginia rates (2021 American Community Survey). In order to address these trends and enhance the well-being of the Petersburg region, in general, Governor Youngkin recently announced the Partnership for Petersburg initiative, through which state, local, community, and faith leaders will collaborate to revitalize the city and region's economic health, with a significant focus on education.

Virginia's Current Attainment Compared to 2030 Goal



Source: SCHEV Staff Analysis of Goal, Economic Demands and Projections

The demographic landscape of Virginia is changing, contributing to the challenge of workforce development. Compared to its neighbors, Virginia's overall population growth has slowed, and more people are moving out of state than moving in. The total net migration for Virginia in 2020 was -8,595 ([Virginia REALTORS](#)). Most notably, the population of college students and working adults ages 20-34 in Virginia is projected to decline by 2030 (Lightcast). To reverse the current outmigration trends and its negative impact on the economy, Virginia needs to expand the talent pool of the residential population and build pathways to develop and retain talented young people in every region of the Commonwealth.

Due to migration patterns, much of the gain needed will come from historically underrepresented populations and regions with the largest number of residents without postsecondary credentials. According to Lumina, the rate of White adults in Virginia with an associate degree or higher is 55.6%, while the rate of Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults is 35.9% and 34.4%, respectively. The percentage of undergraduate degrees and credentials conferred to White students in the state outperformed the percentage of students enrolled (57% compared to 53%). For Black and Hispanic/Latinx students, however, the percentage of students enrolled was 2 percentage points higher than the total awards produced.

Along with minority populations, Virginia's rural regions are also underrepresented in the postsecondary system. The outmigration from rural communities mentioned above results in lower attainment levels than in more developed parts of the state. Although Virginia has a 57.4% attainment rate, over half of the state's cities and counties have a degree attainment level 20 percentage points below the state's average. These areas include Petersburg (26.1%), which is adjacent to the rural counties of Dinwiddie and Prince George. As of 2021, only 12.6% of Petersburg residents possess a bachelor's degree (7.7% below the national average) and 6.2% hold an associate degree (2.5% below the national average) (Lightcast). The pipeline of graduates in Petersburg has shrunk by 18% between 2016 and 2020 (Lightcast). For communities in the Virginia Gateway Region, educational attainment has also declined: Surry fell by 27.1% and Colonial Heights fell by 36.9% ([Lumina](#)). The pipeline of graduates in the Virginia Gateway Region has shrunk by 7% between 2016 and 2020 (Lightcast).

To reach the Commonwealth's attainment targets by 2030, every Virginian needs equitable, affordable access to quality post-secondary education, from micro-credentials such as skilled trade certificates to professional degrees. To be equitable, the pathways must also be affordable. The rising cost of higher education continues to be a major obstacle for the Commonwealth to reach the status of "best-educated state." The average tuition and all mandatory fees for in-state undergraduates for the 2022-23 academic year increased by \$366 (2.8%) from the prior year ([VA General Assembly](#)). While the estimated total charges at Virginia's baccalaureate public institutions as a percentage of per-capita disposable income (44.9%) is lower than the previous historical high in 2019-20, it is still higher than the national average. Recognizing that individuals who are more educated are more attractive to employers, it is imperative that Virginia reduce cost burdens to allow for affordable credentials.

The Challenge

In 2030, the Commonwealth's working-age population (age 25-64) will be approximately 4.6 million people. In order for Virginia to meet its projected workforce needs, 70% of this population, or 3.3 million Virginians, will need a higher education credential. Based on current attainment levels and trends, the Commonwealth will need about 1.4 million additional students with higher education credentials to reach this goal ([Growth4VA](#)).

Virginia's Workforce Challenge

Traditional higher education institutions in the Commonwealth of Virginia are not structured to meet the training needs of the present and near-future.

¹ Lightcast (previously Emsi) is a database that gathers and integrates economic, labor market, demographic, education, profile, and job posting data from government and private-sector sources to provide comprehensive, complex labor market analyses.

To keep pace, the population of those who have a “high school diploma and below” and those with “some college” but no degree needs to decrease, attainment for certificates must effectively double, and degrees (Associate and Bachelor’s) must increase by 5%. To meet its goal, Virginia needs new strategies that emphasize access and success for underrepresented students who are traditionally less likely to enroll in and graduate from higher education due to regional, financial, and time constraints.

The current credential attainment gaps in Virginia exist because traditional higher education models have not been successful in addressing these communities of learners. Virginia needs higher education providers who are agile and can adjust to deliver the credentials students and employers require while maintaining state educational attainment goals. According to VEDP, while Virginia has one of the highest levels of educational attainment in the country, the Commonwealth underperforms against other states’ workforce development programs. When employers struggle to hire talent, the impact on their productivity not only hurts their own bottom line but the Commonwealth’s overall potential for economic growth. National economic analysts forecast that, in the absence of bold action to change the Commonwealth’s economic trajectory, Virginia will economically underperform its top competitors (e.g., Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) over the next decade. In addition, several regions in the Commonwealth (e.g., much of southwest and southern Virginia) face losing employment in that timeframe relative to states that can develop, attract, and retain talented workers. **The Commonwealth needs institutions that are nimble and can provide innovative models to adapt to changing regional needs, including the demographics of students and requirements of employers who hire them after graduation.**

2. The College

History

At the time of RBC’s inception, the Commonwealth faced the “third industrial revolution” of the post-World War II era. The rapid shift from agriculture to a high-tech manufacturing and information economy catalyzed university on-ramps and technical pathways to keep regional economies strong, resulting in a larger number of students seeking admission to colleges and universities. To meet the rising student demand and subsequent need for space, the Commonwealth supported the expansion of two-year colleges stewarded by existing governing boards. Thus, in 1960, the Petersburg Division (now Richard Bland College) was established by the General Assembly of Virginia as a branch of the College of William & Mary through a short-lived educational system that also included the Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University), the Norfolk Division (now Old Dominion University), and the Newport News division (now Christopher Newport University). Each of the colleges were separate from the others and reported to the Board of Visitors through a Chancellor.

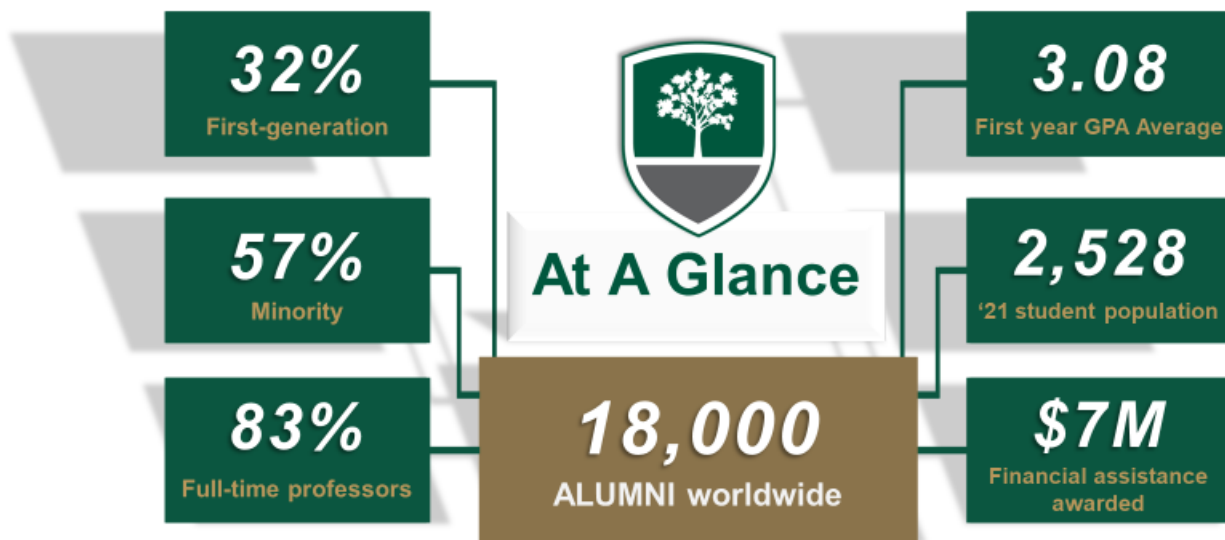
While the other junior colleges at the time would eventually become independent four-year colleges, and later universities, a series of idiosyncratic factors and events in the 1960s and 70s precluded RBC’s achievement of this elevated status:

- In 1966, Virginia’s General Assembly established the Virginia Community College System, proliferating even more two-year colleges, redirecting many RBC students to new options with similar offerings at institutions even closer to their homes. A 1967 report by the State Council of Higher Education recommended absorption of RBC into the two-year community college system.
- The Virginia General Assembly Appropriations Act of 1970, chapter 461, Item 600, approved the escalation of RBC into a four-year college. However, in 1971, faculty and students of Virginia State College (now Virginia State University), a predominantly Black, four-year institution

located nearby, opposed RBC's escalation due to its interference with Virginia State's efforts to desegregate ([Norris v. SCHEV](#)).

- On May 12, 1971, the three-judge panel that presided over the Norris v. SCHEV case enjoined the William & Mary Board of Visitors and the President of RBC from attaining four-year status.

The court's injunction against the escalation of RBC was not bound by the passage of time or other condition; therefore, RBC has continued as the Commonwealth's only public two-year college that is not a part of the Virginia Community College System. RBC remains governed by and subject to the W&M Board of Visitors (BOV). The BOV is the only governing board in the state responsible for both a baccalaureate institution and an independent associate-degree granting institution.

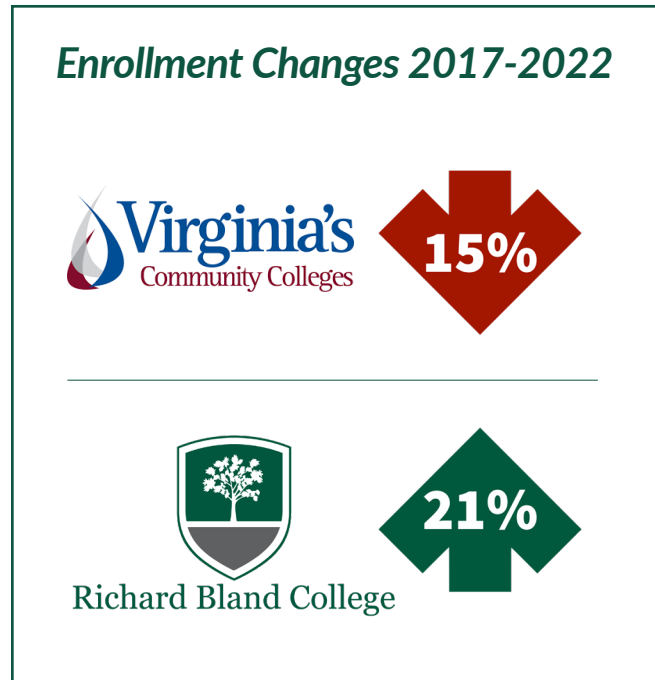


RBC Today

RBC has advanced well beyond a commuter campus, adding residence halls in 2008, a new science and technology building in 2010, and a completely renovated social science, humanities and language building in 2015. Today, serving students throughout the Commonwealth, Richard Bland is a selective, residential, two-year institution dedicated to providing each student a personalized Guided Pathway to Success (GPS) and connecting each student to meaningful work experience through “earn and learn” opportunities at a time when there is increasing demand to prepare citizens for jobs in industries critical to the economic development of Petersburg, the Virginia Gateway Region, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Despite its small size and rural location, RBC has attracted a significant number of students during a period when higher education enrollment is in decline. As highlighted in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, RBC's student enrollment has grown 21% over the last four years (2017-2021). These cohorts also represent a diverse student profile. In 2021, of the 2,528 students, over half were students of color (57%), and 32% were first-generation. By contrast, over these four years, the Commonwealth lost 23,000 community college students, an unprecedented 14% decline, and 9 of the 17 public four-year colleges in the Commonwealth had significant declines.

RBC has also evolved to distinguish itself as an innovative model of higher education in the Commonwealth, continuously restructuring to ensure that all resources are directly aligned with student success and employment. For the 2021-22 academic year, tuition was 29% cheaper than the average Virginia tuition for 2-year colleges, providing unique affordability while maintaining high quality. By remaining agile and entrepreneurial in a changing higher education landscape, RBC has demonstrated its innovative approach to addressing 21st century workforce needs. Most notably, RBC launched the first Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) chapter in Virginia, linking regional manufacturing companies with student apprentices. These “earn and learn” models save students time and money by allowing them to explore their career interests and build credentials without significant financial burden. Also, most FAME students move directly into a job after completing an associate degree.



RBC Economic Impact

- ✓ **\$24 million annual economic impact on the state of Virginia**
- ✓ **Distributes \$3.1 million dollars in need-based funding annually**

RBC continues to be a major economic driver for the city of Petersburg. In a regional economic impact study, Weldon Cooper Center estimated that RBC had an employment effect of 255 jobs and generated \$14 million in state GDP and \$1 million in state revenues. Human capital improvements are estimated to contribute a present value of \$7 million in GDP and approximately \$1 million in state tax revenue. Richard Bland’s total economic contribution in FY17 equaled \$21 million in GDP and State Tax revenues. Today, RBC has an annual impact of \$24 million on the Virginia economy and distributes \$3.1 million dollars in need-based funding. This track record of economic impact has been praised by other Commonwealth higher education leaders, including Makola M. Abdullah, President of Virginia State University.

RBC's Recent Strategic Planning

Due to its unique higher education model, neither a community college nor a comprehensive university, RBC has challenged itself to answer the key question: What is the role of a two-year, residential, liberal arts transfer institution within the Commonwealth’s higher education system?

In 2013, W&M’s BOV approved RBC-19, a five-year strategic plan focused on improving student enrollment and outcomes by bolstering the quality and diversity of academic programs and services, the student profile, and personnel, while stabilizing college finances and streamlining operations. A few of the highlighted successes of RBC-19 include:

- Since 2012, RBC **increased its 3-year average retention rate** for first-time, degree-seeking students as well as minority and Pell-eligible students.
- During the span of RBC-19, the College secured **eleven new guaranteed transfer agreements**.
- In 2018, RBC launched the **Promise Scholars Program** which provides financial assistance for high-ability, low-income (Pell-eligible) students to ensure their success at RBC and after transferring to W&M.
- Most notably, in 2016, RBC launched the **Exceptional Student Experience (ESE@RBC)** program, which includes a highly personalized academic support and advising model that pairs each student with a “Learner Mentor” to guide and ensure their engagement and achievement from Day 1. As a means of addressing the needs of its largely first-generation and socio-economically disadvantaged student body, ESE@RBC utilizes predictive analytics tools to improve student retention and on-time completion of degrees.

In February 2020, RBC’s current strategic plan, *Seize your Potential 2025*, was approved, articulating a bold new vision that reimagined the way RBC serves its students beyond just a pipeline to a four-year university.

To continue attracting a diverse student population and to meet their specific needs, the College participated in the American Council on Education Learner Success Lab project and built a delivery model outside the traditional parameters that aligns to students’ core needs. The Strategic Plan articulated a new College mission: **To prepare our students for a lifetime of endless potential.**

As part of this learner-centric mission, the College further developed the educational experience (ESE@RBC) of RBC-19 into a fully implemented guided pathways framework which provides a well-defined **student value proposition** (i.e., a measurable return on student’s investment in college). This comprehensive program, Guided Pathways for Success (GPS@RBC), is the primary focal point of the future-focused strategic plan of the College. This “one size fits one” approach allows students an affordable option to explore and identify realistic goals for their future, offering personalized, well-defined pathways to high-demand fields.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which unexpectedly coincided with the College’s strategic plan launch, changed how students choose to learn and where they choose to apply and enroll. There is now a natural trend of students moving away from traditional academic classrooms to innovative experiences and applied learning methods. The value of education is no longer singularly defined by the possession of a degree; educational value is assessed on the basis of cost, time, and the development of skills to meet the demands of the workforce.

“Rather than thinking of a two-year college as a pipeline to a four-year university, this vision describes a more expansive menu of well-defined pathways to high-demand fields, all radiating from a curriculum constructed around the development of soft skills that define the liberal arts experience: critical thinking, written communication, analytical reasoning, civic engagement and oral communication.”

RBC President Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D.

*Introduction to 2020-2025 Strategic Plan,
Seize Your Potential*

3. The Future of RBC

Richard Bland College is **uniquely equipped to educate and train the people of Virginia to fill workforce needs**. RBC serves learners from diverse, historically underrepresented communities; provides unique programs; and connects them with employment pathways. Unlike many higher education providers, RBC adapts to the needs of its learners, emphasizing a custom, “one size fits one” approach throughout its programming.

“RBC is well positioned as a model for transformation.”

VA Senator Frank Ruff and Delegate Emily Brewer

Richmond Times-Dispatch, Feb 11, 2022

Since 2014, RBC has responded to and executed on General Assembly directives that called on the College to identify and implement innovative strategies to strengthen educational pathways from high school to postsecondary education, improve educational access and attainment, and support economic and community development by preparing citizens for jobs in high-demand fields.

The Commonwealth must close equity gaps to reach its goal of “Best Educated State” by 2030. RBC has direct access to these underrepresented populations, as the campus is physically positioned in the Petersburg community. More than 90% of its student body is located in the Virginia Gateway Region ([VA General Assembly](#)). Additionally, at a time when college age students are migrating out of the state, 97% of RBC enrollees are from Virginia and 72% are from within 45 miles of the College.

The Commonwealth must also close gaps between employers and higher education providers. The Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority (VIPA) is developing the Virginia Innovation Index which provides a cohesive and comprehensive framework to encourage collaboration between the Commonwealth’s public institutions of higher education, private sector industries, and economic development entities. **RBC has access to growing industries through partnerships with apprenticeship programs, nonprofit economic development organizations, and companies seeking to expand their operations.**



RBC’s higher education model includes innovative configurations designed to uniquely address both high school and adult pipelines into higher education attainment. **RBC’s higher education model has established proof of concept through several innovative projects and initiatives that align with statewide education and workforce development goals, each at various stages of completion.** In a recent op-ed in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Senator Frank Ruff and Delegate Emily Brewer stated that based on these recent efforts, “RBC is well positioned as a model for transformation.”

Additional details on each of the initiatives below can be found in Appendix A.

High School

Dual Enrollment Initiatives

- **RBC's dual enrollment programs** provide high school junior, senior and homeschooled students from 21 different partner schools across the Commonwealth an affordable, efficient pathway to earn college credits up to an associate degree, in various modalities, while completing their high school diplomas.
- In the 2021-22 academic year, RBC enabled **over 1,500 students to earn college credits, 47 (3% of total) of whom graduated with an associate degree.**

Lab School

- In the next funding cycle, RBC aspires to partner with VSU and CodeRVA to form a **laboratory school which exposes high school students to immersive learning experiences in STEM fields**, preparing them early on with credentials necessary to enter the Virginia technical workforce which is expected to expand by 12% in the next ten years.
- RBC Lab School students would **graduate with a high school diploma and up to 60 college credits, with credentials in UAS, GIS, project management, leadership and a STEM associate degree in Computer Science.**

Adult Market

Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME)

- **RBC launched the first FAME Chapter in Virginia**, which provides students an apprenticeship “earn and learn” pathway that combines an **Associate of Science and Advanced Manufacturing Technician certification with paid, on-the-job training** that, ultimately, nets out tuition and fees.
- RBC currently has **12 industry partners** in the field of advanced manufacturing, an industry that will experience a **4% projected growth** by 2032 with an **average \$81k earnings per worker.**

Innovation Park

- RBC is partnering with Virginia Gateway Region to develop an **innovation (business) park** on an **underutilized, 185-acre parcel of campus land to attract businesses in emerging industries** to expand their services and form a lasting relationship with RBC.
- RBC's recent **partnership with DroneUp has established a new testing, training, and R&D center on RBC's campus.** Once the permanent \$22 million facility is completed at the innovation park, **655 new jobs will be added, new internship and apprenticeship opportunities** with drone experts will be available, **and there will be higher demand for UAS related credentials.**

RBC-VSU School of Technical and Professional Studies (TPS)

- In partnership with VSU, RBC will pursue a joint online school of technical and professional studies, “Virtual TPS School,” to provide flexible, cost-effective pathways (e.g., prior learning assessments and stackable credentials) for various types of adult learners that lead to traditional and non-traditional degrees
- The Virtual TPS school is projected to **bolster retention rates at all three colleges** and **increase the number of Virginia residents with a bachelor’s degree** at a time when employers are seeking higher credentials.

University Center

- In partnership with VSU and Virginia Wesleyan University (WVU), RBC will pursue the establishment of the “University Center,” which provides students an **affordable, diverse pathway to obtaining a VSU bachelor’s degree**. The University Center model would allow RBC students to stay on campus on the same two-year tuition plan while receiving college credit for their third (WVU and VSU) and fourth years (VSU).
- The Virtual TPS school is projected to **bolster retention rates at all three colleges** and **increase the number of Virginia residents with a bachelor’s degree** at a time when employers are seeking higher credentials.

Global Student Success Program (GSSP)

- The Global Student Success Program (GSSP) at RBC, sponsored by Navitas, **provides international students a direct, successful educational pathway** from RBC to a top-100 school in North America.
- In the 2017-18 academic year, GSSP provided almost 3,500 credit hours to 115 FTE students and **by 2027, RBC aims to reach 400 international students**.

Academic Innovation Center

- An **Academic Innovation Center** is currently under construction at RBC. A portion of the existing library is being renovated and new space is being added to 1) **create technology-enhanced, hands-on teaching and learning space that fosters hybrid learning** in an innovative, collaborative environment and 2) **enable the development of new high-tech and online academic offerings** to students.

4. The Necessary Steps

As RBC looks to scale elements of this model to robustly serve constituents and respond to shifting needs of the region and the Commonwealth, the College would benefit from an independent governing board.

Historically, RBC has operated independently. Currently, RBC possesses independence in every respect except board governance. RBC is:

- Independently accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).
- Directly funded by the General Assembly.
- Independently collecting tuition and fees, and auxiliary revenue.
- Independently audited by Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts (APA).
- Independently structured as a Level One institution (W&M is Level Three).
- Independently reporting required institutional data to the federal Department of Education and to SCHEV.
- Operating a 501(c)(3) corporation ("RBC Foundation") to solely support RBC.

With dedicated governance, at no additional cost to the Commonwealth, RBC can better position itself to deliver future-state opportunities. These opportunities include:

- Extend the impact of RBC's innovative higher education model by enhancing and expanding on partnerships beyond RBC's current 40+ transfer colleges and universities and 21 high school partners. This would include solidifying relationships with more local high schools to retain a competitive talent pipeline. An independent board would be able to facilitate connections and support the executive team to help nurture and grow critical K-12 and university partnerships.
- Leverage nimbleness to grow by tapping into new markets, such as expanding relationships with virtual high schools to gain an edge in the online secondary education market. An independent board will have more bandwidth to assess the costs and benefits of this type of arrangement and, in general, effect its unique fiduciary role.
- Stand up a new set of program offerings, including micro-credentials aligned with high-demand occupational fields. Enhancing the diversity of the academic portfolio will allow RBC to continue to meet the needs of all Virginia learners in a tailored manner that reflects the evolving workforce needs of the Commonwealth. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) describes shared governance as a critical tenet of higher education. As the body responsible for guiding future direction and ongoing sustainability, a dedicated governing board would fulfill its role in a manner that complements the roles of faculty and executive leadership.
- Empower continued sources of funding, capitalizing on awarded grants for further development efforts. An independent board will provide RBC with the credibility and networking opportunities needed to enhance and continue to build new revenue streams.
- Leverage public support to ensure that RBC's future direction is aligned with the needs of the communities in the Petersburg area and the Commonwealth.

An independent board will furthermore allow RBC to effectively navigate risks and obstacles that the College will inevitably encounter as it grows and as conditions evolve. RBC will need to enhance awareness of its brand as an innovative institution, ensure continuance of programs with W&M (Promise Scholars, Bridge, and Honors), and maintain relationships with transfer and industry partners who may be hesitant to embrace the change in governance structure. Independent, dedicated governance will be crucial to RBC's capacity to surmount these hurdles and any others that may arise.

With regard to implementation and the steps to transition to dedicated board governance, RBC is aware of the timeline and considerate of requirements. Most importantly, the College understands the need for legislative approval to change the overall structure of RBC and W&M in the Code of Virginia (enacted in 1962), requiring significant lobbying and legislative support. The College will be working with the Secretary of Education and SCHEV to navigate this transition appropriately and welcomes the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

5. Appendix A: Additional Detail on Key Initiatives

High School

Dual Enrollment Initiatives

RBC's dual enrollment programs allow high school junior, senior and homeschool students to take college-level courses to earn college credits or obtain an associate degree while completing their diplomas. RBC provides in-person, livestream, or asynchronous modules to cater to the learner's flexible needs so they can earn their degree on their own schedule.

With these credits, RBC's dual enrollment students are prepared for seamless transfer to 40+ public and private 4-year institutions throughout Virginia and out of state. In partnership with 21 high schools, RBC enables concurrent degree completion through various pathways that are transferrable, affordable, and that satisfy lower-division general education requirements at any Virginia public institution of higher education, or an associate degree. The dual enrollment program addresses gaps in college access by reducing the average time to degree completion and future college expenses, lowering the cost of a two-year or four-year degree and connecting universities more directly with their surrounding communities. Dual enrollment also removes barriers to college readiness by exposing students to the rigor of college coursework early on. [A 2022 Dual Enrollment Report](#) by SCHEV shows that dual enrolled students are more likely than others to graduate from high school, enroll in college and complete college degrees.

By the numbers, dual enrollment through RBC has grown dramatically over the past decade, experiencing a 365% increase from 2011-12 academic year to 2021-22. In 2021-22 academic year, RBC enabled over 1,500 students to earn college credits, 47 (3% of total) of which graduated with an Associate degree. This growth in dual enrollment has contributed to the increase in overall enrollment at RBC which has grown 21% over the past few years and has generated almost half a million dollars of revenue over the past two years.

Lab School

In the next funding cycle, RBC intends to submit a proposal to establish a residential, STEM-focused college laboratory high school that will utilize virtual reality to increase STEM interest and performance, including a diversity in leadership certification program for practitioners, teachers, and teachers in training. The lab school program has 4 aims:

- Provide a collaborative STEM training program designed to promote diverse learning environments to enhance STEM performance among underrepresented High School students
- Establish an intensive and immersive 9-12th grade STEM focus lab school with two branches (commuter and residential):
- Establish an innovative hub for new strategies for teaching STEM content and applied learning to diverse audience (Teacher Component lead by William & Mary College of Education)
- Provide guided pathway to STEM careers by developing new pathways to pursue robotics and automation training through advance manufacturing (FAME), and Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and computer systems

RBC's envisioned Lab School would partner with VSU and CodeRVA, a regional public high school focused on computer science, to offer innovative, immersive learning experiences that help prepare high-ability

students, teachers, and teachers-in training for high-demand STEM disciplines. In collaboration with FAME and other industry partners, students would graduate from RBC's Lab School with a high school diploma (standard or advanced) and up to 60 college credits, with credentials in UAS, GIS, project management, leadership and a STEM Associate degree in Computer Science.

Currently, there are no Lab Schools operating in the Commonwealth during a time when Virginia has the third highest concentration of tech workers in the country, and its tech workforce is set to expand by 12% in the next ten years. Through its robust dual enrollment network, RBC has a competitive edge. RBC is paving the way for the future to increase accessibility to hands-on sciences and innovation for all student types, creating a talent pipeline that directly meets economic demands.

Adult Market

Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME)

In spring of 2021, through a GO Virginia grant and in collaboration with the Commonwealth's Center for Advanced Manufacturing (CCAM), RBC launched the first Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) Chapter in Virginia to help fill the Commonwealth's gaps for Advanced Manufacturing jobs and careers. Manufacturing is ranked as one of the top 10 industries in the Commonwealth; the industry will experience a 4% projected growth in jobs in the next ten years with an average \$81k earnings per worker.

Under the FAME program, RBC students are provided an apprenticeship model that combines a relevant Associate of Science degree and certification as an Advanced Manufacturing Technician (AMT) with paid, on-the-job training with a local, sponsoring employer. Through this "earn and learn" program, the wages RBC students receive from employers cover all tuition and fees as well as a stipend for the students' living expenses, creating an affordable pathway for learners that typically leaves them debt-free.

RBC currently has 12 industry partners in the Petersburg area across varied industries. Through this network, nearly all FAME graduates are provided full-time employment. In addition, employers' engagement with postsecondary technical education allows for a targeted curriculum directly aligned to skills associated with in-demand jobs.

Innovation Park

In partnership with Virginia's Gateway Region, RBC is in the process of developing an innovative business park, which will be known as the Innovation Park (IP), on underutilized campus property, a 185-acre parcel of land surrounding main campus. The park will attract businesses in emerging industries looking to expand their operations and provide RBC students with internship and work opportunities to support these companies. Businesses selected will sign long term ground leases for specific periods of time and formally commit to a relationship with RBC.

In August of this year, the first IP partnership was formally launched with DroneUp to establish a pilot academy on RBC's campus. DroneUp will build a new testing, training and R&D center for drone operators on campus. While many universities in the Commonwealth offer traditional engineering programs and a number of focused degrees in unmanned systems, RBC's partnership with DroneUp offers the first and most advanced specialized drone training facility. Aerospace & Unmanned Aerial Systems is a key industry in the Commonwealth, home to one of seven FAA-designated UAS test sites and two NASA facilities focusing on UAS research. This innovative partnership provides students with real world experience and marketable credentials that prepare them for success in high demand jobs with higher than median wage earnings.

Students in the pilot academy will reside on RBC's campus in residential units and earn nine college credits for specialized training, which equates to a Federal Aviation Administration micro-credential in unmanned aerial systems. Training will be year-round in cohorts of ten to thirty students. With a training facility physically on campus, RBC students will also have access to work-based learning opportunities as part of their two-year curriculum, as well as connect with drone experts and future employers through internships. Additionally, RBC faculty will be trained to provide an even more robust, applicable curriculum. While developing talent to fill workforce gaps, this initiative will also support the UAS industry by adding a projected total of 655 new jobs, increased by DroneUp's expansion of its headquarters in Virginia Beach. DroneUp will also construct three drone hubs in the Commonwealth as part of a million-dollar contract with Walmart to provide drone delivery services nationwide, creating even more demand for trained operators.

The master plan for the park is set to be completed by fall of 2022 and submitted to the W&M Board of Visitors with a request to authorize the RBC Foundation to engage in long-term ground leases for IP development.

RBC-VSU School of Technical and Professional Studies (TPS)

RBC and Virginia State University (VSU) have partnered to establish an online school of technical and professional studies to provide quick, cost-effective options for students seeking credentials for high demand jobs. The Virtual TPS School aims to serve the adult learner market, degree completers, career changers, military personnel, and those seeking educational flexibility. The "Virtual School" will aid in developing and delivering new, collaborative educational pathways and innovative educational models, including distance learning, technology-based instruction, prior learning assessments, stackable credentials, and competency-based programs that lead to high demand credentials and careers. These traditional degrees and non-traditional offerings will be competitively priced and meet the labor market demand for occupations expected to grow in the Petersburg region and the Commonwealth. As a diverse two-year college and an HBCU respectively, RBC and VSU will further advance the mission of their respective institutions and meet the needs of the population in Virginia, especially the historically underserved audiences. The Virtual TPS School is planned to launch its first term in Fall 2023.

University Center

The University Center will allow RBC students to obtain a bachelor's degree in partnership with VSU and Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU). Students will stay on RBC's campus for their third and fourth years and continue to be taught by RBC professors while receiving college credit toward their four-year degree at their respective institution. This approach maintains RBC's affordability by charging RBC tuition for another institution's 3rd and 4th year college credits. The University Center will provide RBC students additional university and program options for completing their baccalaureate degree over time. It is anticipated that the Center will further bolster retention rates at RBC and its partner institutions and increase the number of Virginia residents with a bachelor's degree who are ready to enter the workforce or embark upon terminal degrees.

Global Student Success Program (GSSP)

RBC's Global Student Success Program (GSSP), sponsored by Navitas, recruits international students from across the world to RBC, diversifying RBC's student profile. Since the inception of the partnership with Navitas in the 2017-18 academic year, GSSP has provided almost 3,500 credit hours to 115 full-time equivalent students and realized over \$3.5 million in new revenue. RBC has experienced nearly 100% retention and of the students that have graduated, 100% have transferred to top 100 schools in North America. In the most recent Navitas study, international students in GSSP have ranked faculty satisfaction at 100% and overall college experience at 83%. With this successful track record, RBC and Navitas have set a goal of 400 international students by 2027.

Academic Innovation Center

The new Academic Innovation Center, which was approved for detailed planning during FY 2018, will feature a renovated portion of the existing academic library and new classroom space for students who want to do hybrid learning. The \$15.7 million Center will enable the addition of new high-tech and online offerings at RBC. The Center will contain walls to expand or minimize class sizes to focus more on student collaboration, creating a flexible, equipped space for a networked world through faculty development, student engagement, communities of practice, and technology-enhanced active learning. The Academic Innovation Center broke ground in July 2022.



Richard Bland College

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