



# VCU

## College of Health Professions



### PHYSICAL THERAPY

## BUILDING ON A RICH LEGACY



**Benjamin Darter, PT, Ph.D.**  
CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF  
PHYSICAL THERAPY  
VCU COLLEGE OF HEALTH  
PROFESSIONS

Twelve years ago, I joined the VCU Department of Physical Therapy as a faculty member. This year, I was honored to be named as its chair. As steward of one of the oldest and most storied programs, my singular goal is to ensure its continued excellence and leadership in physical therapy.

Over the past several years, we've experienced changes that create opportunities to celebrate our past and for future growth. Our resources for cutting-edge research and innovative teaching start with our 12,000-square-foot home in the College of Health Professions building that opened shortly before the pandemic.

Here, we work to expand our research programs and prepare our students to flourish in an evolving healthcare environment. We also recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of leading faculty members who are retiring, while recruiting top talent to build on their legacy. Lastly, we're continually inspired for the future by our students, who are actively engaged in serving our community and advocating for our profession.

I'm excited for all that can happen in the years ahead as we build on our strong foundation. Read on for a few highlights of what the VCU Physical Therapy department is doing to deliver meaningful answers for patients and prepare the next generation of physical therapists.

## New faculty join the department



**Michael Kiefer, PT, Ph.D., assistant professor.** His research interests include the development and validation of standardized clinical outcome assessments of health-related functioning in children with genetic and neuromuscular conditions. He earned his Ph.D. and served as a research fellow at MGH Institute of Health Professions.



**Tamara Buck, DPT, assistant professor.** Board certified as a pediatric clinical specialist, Buck aligns her research with examining the effects of physical activity for children of varying abilities and exploring how different teaching and learning opportunities impact DPT students' education. She earned her transitional DPT from Rocky Mountain University, where she is a Ph.D. candidate in her dissertation phase.

## Our DPT Program

- A leading program with a mission to:
  - Advance excellence in entry-level and post entry-level education
  - Generate innovative scientific discovery
  - Impact the health of the community through leadership
- Founded in 1931
- Ranked in the top 20 (*U.S. News & World Report*)
- 3 faculty members with FAPTA designation
- Neurology PT, Pediatric PT, Sports residencies
- Ph.D. programs in Rehabilitation and Movements Sciences and Health-Related Sciences (Hybrid)

## Faculty Research

- Secured \$2.6 million in external funding in 2023 (AY)
- Focused in biomechanics, motor control and integration of biomedical technology.
  - Applied Movement Performance Lab
  - Engineering and Biomechanics Research Lab
  - Motor Control Lab
  - Motor Development Lab

## Our Students

- Embrace a quest for learning and community service, as well as respect for diverse life experiences.
- 172 DPT students
  - 38% identify as a person of color
  - 14% first-generation college students
- Run a pro bono PT clinic for underserved patients in Richmond community
- Winner of the 2023 VCU-Marquette Challenge

# White coat ceremony welcomes DPT students



During our annual welcome ceremony, the 57 students of the Class of 2026 received their white coats, a symbol of knowledge and compassion as they begin their DPT quest. After receiving their coats, the students recited their pledge to the profession. Faculty, upperclass students, clinicians and Virginia Physical Therapy Association representatives – along with family and friends – celebrated the incoming class.

In addressing the class, American Physical Therapy Association President **Roger Herr, MPA, PT**, shared learnings and experiences from his 35-year career. His contributions include implementing multiple post-acute care regulatory changes in home health, hospice and long-term care.



## Leader receives APTA Minority Scholarship

Class of 2023 President **Jonathan Mack, DPT**, became the second VCU student to receive the APTA Minority Scholarship, awarded for professional character, academic excellence and positive impact on minority affairs. The VCU PT Sports resident volunteers in the CARES pro bono clinic.



Mack noticed growing diversity among his VCU cohort, which is important in caring for patients from different backgrounds. “People come to you in a vulnerable state, where it’s an injury or whatever they’re dealing with, and you’re going to have to take the time to learn about them,” he said.



## VCU wins the Marquette Challenge again

By raising more than \$25,000, VCU again took first place in the VCU-Marquette Challenge, which supports Foundation for Physical Therapy research. Each year’s winner joins Marquette as co-host the following year, and VCU has finished in one of top two spots for the past seven years. VCU students have collected more than \$300,000 over the past 20 years, earning membership in the Champion Society. The challenge attracts 150 schools nationwide.

## Hicks delivers Annual Lamb Lecture

**Gregory Hicks, Ph.D., FAPTA**, delivered this year’s Robert Lamb Distinguished Lecture, established in 2012 to recognize an individual with significant contributions in PT research. Drawing on his research in improving function and activity in older adults, Hicks spoke on “Developing a Tailored Rehabilitation Approach for Geriatric Low Back Pain: Should We Focus on the Hip?” He is distinguished professor of health sciences and associate vice president of clinical and translational research at the University of Delaware.