

2019-2020 Common Book Annual Report

The VCU Common Book Program is one of the largest initiatives in University College. Building upon the nationally recognized Summer Reading program, this initiative expands the previous program into a university-wide opportunity to welcome our first-year students into the vibrant intellectual culture of VCU. The Common Book is intended to create the opportunity to explore complex social issues through an interdisciplinary lens. In addition to integrating the book into the Focused Inquiry curriculum of UNIV 111 and UNIV 112, faculty in University College foster partnerships across both campuses and within the broader Richmond community. Students are provided opportunities to explore the real-world application and problem-solving each fall. Faculty and students across campus, in addition to community partners, share in the program by incorporating the book into courses and programming in a range of disciplines and for an audience that includes a range of members of the VCU and Richmond communities.

Each book is recommended for selection to the Provost by a committee of faculty, administrative staff, and students from both the Monroe Park and MVC Campuses. Selected books share the following traits:

- they prompt students to think deeply and analytically about an important current issue
- they encourage students to consider issues from differing perspectives, promoting VCU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- they address an issue that is illuminated by interdisciplinary inquiry, making it appropriate for students and faculty with a wide range of academic interests
- they allow students to understand the importance of civil debate about difficult problems, providing an opportunity to model the nature of academic inquiry for incoming students
- they encourage students to think for themselves about “wicked” problems that face the 21st-century

The 2019-2020 Common Book: Matthew Desmond: *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

[Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City](#), by [Matthew Desmond](#), Ph.D., recipient of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction, was the 2019 Common Book. It is an ethnographic study that follows eight families in Milwaukee as they struggle to keep their homes while falling deeper into poverty. It reveals the impact of the nationwide eviction crisis that affects millions of families and has consequences — poverty, homelessness, educational disparities and health care among many others — for the wider community. (See the full [press release](#) by Brian McNeill).

Evicted was selected because of its relevance to both the VCU community and the city of Richmond, which was through a study conducted in 2016 by the Princeton Eviction Lab, to have had the second highest rate of evictions of major metropolitan regions in the country. Additionally, four other Virginia cities, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Chesapeake, also appeared had eviction rates that placed them in the top 10 worst cities. The L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Policy has founded its own Eviction Lab to study and work to address regional poverty and housing insecurity issues.

Book Distribution Across Campus

Each new first-year student received a copy of *Evicted* when they attended New Student Orientation during the Summer of 2019. In addition, books were distributed to the following groups:

- New VCU faculty
- First-Year Graduate Students

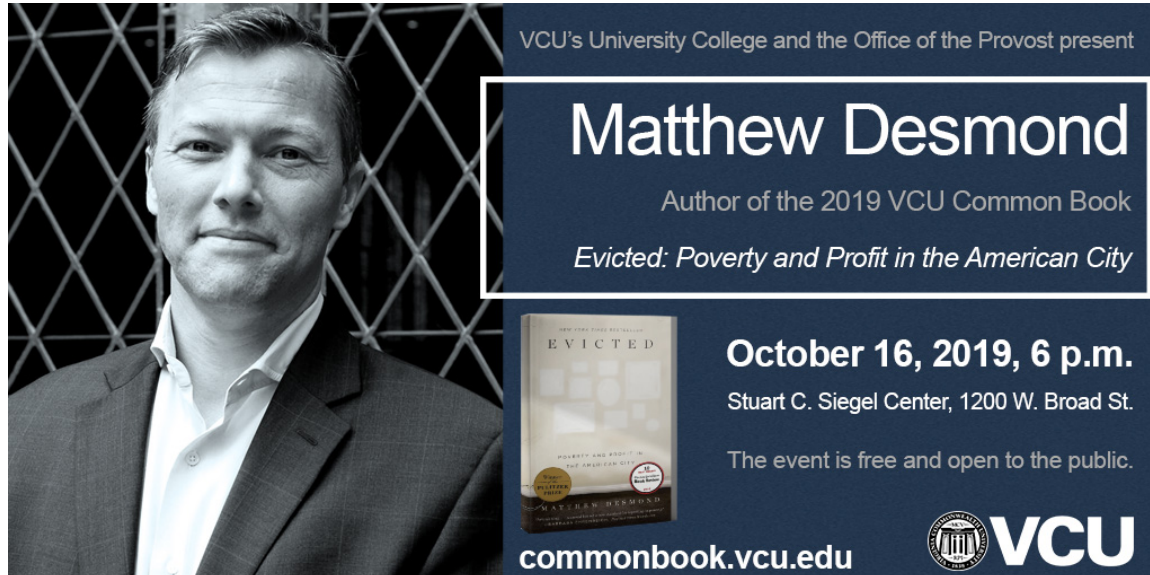
Weeks of Welcome (Welcome Week) Discussion Groups

Integral to the VCU Common Book Program is the Welcome Week Discussion Group Program. This event, generally held the day before Fall semester classes begins, pairs groups of 15-20 students with a faculty or staff volunteer discussion leader, for a 50-minute introductory discussion about the Common Book. The sessions provide an opportunity to model the kind of academic discussion that will occur in the Focused Inquiry classrooms, help the students adjust to VCU academic life, and permit them to get to know other members of their residence hall floor (the most typical strategy for grouping students for discussion sessions), and permit them to meet a faculty member.

Focused Inquiry Classroom Engagement

Evicted was a required text in all Fall 2019 sections of UNIV 111: Focused Inquiry I and UNIV 112: Focused Inquiry II. The text formed the basis for classroom discussions, presentations, research projects, and reflections.

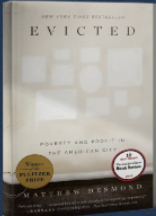
Author Visit




VCU's University College and the Office of the Provost present

Matthew Desmond

Author of the 2019 VCU Common Book
Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City



October 16, 2019, 6 p.m.
Stuart C. Siegel Center, 1200 W. Broad St.
The event is free and open to the public.

commonbook.vcu.edu  **VCU**

On October 16-17, Matthew Desmond visited VCU. Activities included the following:

On the VCU Campus--

- Lunch with selected Focused Inquiry students to discuss their responses to his book
- Panel discussion with Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom for Sociology, Social Work, and social sciences students
- Public keynote lecture at the Stuart C. Siegel Center following a reception for partners and dignitaries (including Richmond Mayor Stoney)

In the Community--

- The Richmond Public Library on Oct. 17, 2020, hosted *P.S. Matthew Desmond*, a Q & A and work session with stakeholders actively working on the issues of eviction and housing affordability in the Richmond area. Monique Johnson, of the Better Housing Coalition, served as the moderator for the question and answer session with Matthew Desmond.

Additional 2019-2020 Common Book Activities

Events sponsored by VCU schools, departments and programs

Department of Focused Inquiry

In addition to the college-wide programming of University College, individual faculty in the Department of Focused Inquiry instituted programming in conjunction with the Common Book.

- Sept. 24, 2020, the film, *Imitation of Life*, hosted by Chris Martiniano, in conjunction with the Common Book Team. Focused Inquiry faculty David Pratt and Kiara Lee facilitated a discussion around other themes that result from housing insecurity, including issues of identity and quiet suffering.

- Sept. 30, 2020, the second film in the Common Book film series was *99 Homes* shown. The film focuses on construction worker Dennis Nash who is evicted from his home. Humiliated and homeless, Nash has no choice but to move his mom and nine-year old son into a shabby, dangerous motel. The event was hosted by Focused Inquiry faculty Troy Martin. A moderated discussion with Focused Inquiry faculty Thad Fortney followed the film.
- Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2020, the third and final film in the Common Book film series *The Big Short* was shown. The film portrays events leading up to the U.S. housing bubble and contributing to the 2008 Great Recession. This event was hosted by Jake Khoury. A moderated discussion with Focused Inquiry faculty Thad Fortney followed the film.
- Nov. 8, and Nov. 13, 2020 respectively, After Matthew Desmond's keynote address, Martin Wegbreit, director of litigation for Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and Tommy Herbert, manager of government affairs for the Virginia Apartment Association, presented perspectives from tenants and landlords/property managers, in two Focused Inquiry classes.

Honors College

- Nov. 14, 2020, the Honors College hosted Monica Jefferson, Vice Pres. and Chief Operating Officer of Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) of VA. who presented as part of the Humans of RVA (HONR 170 course) speaker series. The presentation was titled Addressing the Eviction Crisis: City of Richmond Eviction Diversion Program.

School of Dentistry

- Incoming first year Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) and Dental Hygiene (DH) students participate in group discussions of the *Evicted* during their orientation.

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

- Sept. 26, 2020, In conjunction with Virginia Commonwealth University's 2019 *Common Book*, "*Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*," the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs hosted a panel discussion on eviction policy and the impact of housing instability. The event, "*Eviction Beyond the Numbers: Community Impacts and Policy Landscape of Housing Instability*," was held from 5 to 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 26 at the W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts.

VCU Libraries

- Sept. 17, 2020, Tompkins-McCaw Library had a film screening of ***Give Me a Shot of Anything***. The film follows a street doctor and his team as they make house calls to the homeless, offering their patients hope and a chance to feel whole again. A buffet-style dinner was provided. After the film screening there was a group discussion on topics addressed in the film and related to [2019 VCU Common Book *Evicted*](#) with facilitators Sally Santen, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the Office of Assessment, Evaluation, and

Scholarship, VCU School of Medicine and Lorae Ponder, M.Div., M.S.W., Executive Director, [Home Again Richmond](#).

- November 13, 2020, in celebration of the importance of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and maps and their ability to connect people, regions and systems, VCU Libraries joined with hundreds of organizations around the world to mark [GIS Day](#) on Wednesday, November 13, 2019. In connection with this year's [VCU Common Book](#), *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond, the speakers discussed GIS-related work they do for the [RVA Eviction Lab](#).

VCU ASPIRE, Departments of Music and School of Social Work

- Sept. 18 – Oct. 16, 2020, VCU ASPIRE collaborated with University College to collect donations in support of programs and services that align with the VCU Common Book. This year collected items were shared with the [RVA Street Singers](#) and [REAL Life](#) Program in support of persons who experience housing instability.

School of Medicine: The International/Inner City/Rural Preceptorship (I²CRP) Program

- March 23, 2020, the I²CRP program will host a panel on the medical campus that will discuss public health and eviction. The program enrolls 24 medical students each year. The students commit to working with underserved medical populations in urban, rural or international settings. Event details are still being planned.

Events sponsored by Community Partners

Richmond Community Foundation

- Sept. 25, 2020, Constance Relihan, University College Dean, participated in a book club discussion to discuss *Evicted*
- Oct. 3, 2020, Felecia Williams, Director of Common Book Program, participated in a book club discussion to discuss *Evicted*

THE CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE EVICTIONS (comprised of representatives from the League of Women Voters of the Richmond Metropolitan Area and the Richmond Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority)

- Oct. 10, THE CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE EVICTIONS presented a Candidates Forum on Eviction 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture Robins Family Forum. Virginia House of Delegates candidates shared their positions on how to reduce eviction rates across the Commonwealth.

The Richmond Public Library

- As part of the visit by Matthew Desmond, on Oct. 17, 2020, the Richmond Public Libraries hosted *P.S. Matthew Desmond*. The event was a Q & A and work session with

stakeholders actively working on the issues of eviction and housing affordability in the Richmond area. Monique Johnson, of the Better Housing Coalition, served as the moderator for the question and answer session with Matthew Desmond.

- Jan. 17, 2020, Lunch Hour Book Discussion of *Evicted*. The event will be held in the Gellman Room from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m.

The Richmond Public Law Library and the Virginia Poverty Law Center

- Jan. 28, 2020, the Richmond Public Law Library presented a forum on Tenants' Rights featuring a presentation by, attorney, Daryl F. Hayott of the Virginia Poverty Law Center.
- Feb. 4, 2020, 6:00 – 8:00, p.m. The Valentine's Controversy/History series partnered with [Richmond 300](#), the city's master planning process, to present "Who's Putting Our House in Order?", which focused on Richmond's eviction and housing challenge. It explored big questions about the kind of city we hope to become. By comparing the debates of the past with contemporary data and modern issues, they explored how Richmond's complicated history can help shape our shared future.