

# THE TORCH

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The Official Newsletter from the Virginia Nursing Students Association

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## Spring/Summer 2020 edition:

- Our mission
- Meet the 2020-2021 Board of directors
- 2020 VNSA Convention
- NSNA Statement
- COVID-19 testimonials

## Our Mission:

**Our Mission:** to advance professional nursing practice through student mentorship, community service and scholarship.

Our meetings are open to all VNSA members, so come see what it's like to be on the VNSA board. If you would like to attend a meeting, please feel free to contact anyone on our board of directors for finalized dates, times, and location. Once you see firsthand how great being a board member would be, come to our annual VNSA convention and run for a position!

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## Board of Directors:

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Ruben Vigil, President  
[vnsapresident@gmail.com](mailto:vnsapresident@gmail.com)

Hello there VNSA members! My name is Ruben Vigil, and I am so honored to be serving you, our Virginia nursing students as your 2020-2021 VNSA President. I am currently a Senior in the School of Nursing at Liberty University, located in Lynchburg, VA. It is my desire to see our state continue to facilitate the creation of new local chapters within our state where possible so that we can introduce more members to the benefits that being a VNSA member can bring, while also assisting existing local chapters however possible in order to

generate more excitement and activity towards local and state goals. While COVID-19 is a major issue looking to affect our schools this year, I also hope that we can continue to bring people

The Torch, June 2020

together through various means to help stay connected during these times. Please feel free to reach out at any time should you have any questions or concerns, as I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible!

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Brittany Benson, 1st Vice President  
contactvnsa@gmail.com

My name is Brittany Benson and I am a Junior Nursing student at South University in Richmond, VA. I received my bachelor's degree in Psychology with a specialization in counseling and human development at Liberty University back in 2012. I am married to an incredible, supportive husband with two amazing little girls, so life tends to stay busy, but I like it that way! I am looking forward to graduating with my BSN this December and am hoping to pursue a career in pediatrics or women's health. I am excited to be a part of this great organization and to work as a team to create more opportunities for nursing students become the best nurses they were called to be.



Trisha Le, 2nd Vice President  
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Hi all! My name is Trisha Le and I am so honored and excited to serve as the 2020-2021 VNSA 2nd Vice President. I am currently a senior at Radford University's BSN program and am an aspiring pediatric nurse. I am also part of the Children's Miracle Network, the historian of Radford's Student Nurse Organization, and an active member of RUEMS. In addition to these organizations, I love being involved in other experiences including my past international travels to the Dominican Republic for a medical mission trip

The Torch, June 2020

and shadowing nurses in Pavia, Italy for a summer. During this chapter of VNSA I really hope to inspire other students to become involved in extracurricular nursing activities to grow their skills and the profession, along with bringing in as many schools' student nurse organizations into the VNSA team.



**Bailey Elkins, Secretary**  
[contactvnsa@gmail.com](mailto:contactvnsa@gmail.com)

Hello! My name is Bailey Elkins and I am the 2020-2021 VNSA Secretary. I am a Radford University Nursing Student and will be a rising senior in the fall. I love volunteering internationally with my nursing program in places like the Dominican Republic and in Asia. Within my university, I am also involved in my campus ministry, the Citizen Leader Program, and am also the secretary for my school's Student Nursing Organization (SNO). Some of my favorite things to do aside from school involve hiking, being with my family, and

working out. I look forward to a great year with the rest of the VNSA Board and am excited to see what we are able to do!



**Leilani Peterson, Treasurer**  
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Hello Virginia nursing students! My name is Leilani Peterson, and I am currently in the accelerated Bachelor of Science Nursing program at South University in Richmond. I graduated from Arizona State University in 2017 with a Bachelors in Kinesiology and was a member of the Kinesiology Honor Society. I have always had the heart and passion for helping others and for providing service that surpasses the expectation of practice. I am thrilled to be

serving as the VNSA Treasurer. My goal is to prepare and present budgets for new or ongoing work and to ensure we maintain a firm budget. I am looking forward to serving on the board of directors and can't wait to see what this year brings us!



Camryn NeSmith, Public Relations Director  
[contactvnsa@gmail.com](mailto:contactvnsa@gmail.com)

Hi everyone! My name is Camryn NeSmith and I am honored to be serving as the Public Relations Director for the VNSA. I am a rising junior in the BSN program at Liberty University with a minor in psychology. I am also a member of LU's NSA chapter. I was inspired to pursue nursing because of many strong nurses that I have met throughout my life. In the future, I am interested in working as an Interventional Radiology RN. As VNSA's

Public Relations Director, I am looking forward to working with the Board of Directors to grow the VNSA. I plan to use social media to connect and engage with other nursing students and organizations in Virginia. I hope to connect more nursing students and encourage them during their time in nursing school. My goal is to further our mission statement which is to advance professional nursing practice through student mentorship, community service, and scholarship. I am beyond excited to engage with the nursing students of Virginia and I am looking forward to a great year with the VNSA!





Justin Yert, Nominations and Elections Chairperson  
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Hello Future Nurses! My name is Justin Yert, and I am honored and humbled to serve as your Nominations and Elections Chairperson for the 2020-21 term. My goal this upcoming year is to encourage scholarship and leadership throughout our incredible state, so be on the lookout for some unique informational videos. I am a husband to my stunning wife and father of 2 beautiful daughters and I am an avid Seattle Seahawks fan. I am Active Duty Navy attending Old Dominion University

and hope to one day become a CRNA or an FNP, we will see which way the wind blows. I believe we as nurses are leaders in the health profession and what better way to start leading than now. I also hope to empower more students financially through the various scholarships that VNSA offers. If you have any questions on how the election process works or how you can be more involved in leadership or if you have any recommendations regarding scholarships, please do not hesitate to reach out; I would love to talk with you!



Logan Voegelé, Breakthrough to Nursing  
Director  
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Hi, I'm Logan Voegelé, I am a junior level nursing student. I am so excited to have the opportunity of being the "Breakthrough to Nursing Director" on the VNSA this year. Previously, I had not had the availability to be

a part of something like an organization or that type of leadership position as I was homeschooled. But, as I've grown through my college experience, It's given me the chance to develop more passions for the things I'm doing, and that's why I decided to be a part of the

## The Torch, June 2020

VNSA, and to try to make real changes for the betterment of our nursing students and nursing as a whole. Whether that be through my role, or through the conference providing vital information to so many new people. I hope to be a successful member of the board this year, and I can't wait to see our plans come to fruition.



Kristina Shurtleff, Torch Editor  
[vnsaeditor@gmail.com](mailto:vnsaeditor@gmail.com)

Hello nursing students of Virginia!! My name is Kristina Shurtleff. I am currently a junior earning my BSN through Liberty University's nursing program in Lynchburg, Virginia. I am pursuing a degree in nursing to achieve my dream job while changing lives and helping others along the way. I aspire to be a nurse-midwife so that I can offer pregnant women a personalized and compassionate pregnancy/birth

experience. I am so excited for the opportunity to serve as VNSA's torch editor for the 2020-2021 school year. I am looking forward to this journey, and I am excited to see all of the skills I will learn in this role that I can take with me to my future career.



Nicole Escobar, Director at Large  
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Hello! My name is Nicole Escobar, and I am a junior nursing student with a minor in Family Studies at James Madison University, and I will graduate in December of 2021. I am honored to be serving as your 2020-2021 VNSA Director at Large and I look forward to connecting with all of you. I hope to foster and expand close connections with underrepresented universities and facilitate intercollegiate collaboration for future VNSA events. I believe VNSA is a

great opportunity to network with other fellow, motivating nursing students, so it is an important goal for me to welcome and support all those who are interested! I am excited for the year to come!



Haley Bendell, Historian  
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Hey ya'll! I am very honored and excited to be your VNSA Historian for the 2020-2021 year. I am a Sophomore at Longwood University pursuing my Bachelor of Science in Nursing. At Longwood, I am the Director of Public Relations for our SNA Board. I am an active member of the Farmville Volunteer Fire Department as well as the Safety Officer for the club softball team. My goal as the Historian is to document each event with pictures so that we as an organization can look back and remember all of the great times that we spent together. I look forward to an amazing year with all of you!



Madeline Larimore, Pre-Nursing  
Representative  
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Hello! My name is Madeline Larimore and I am the Pre-Nursing Student Representative on the VNSA Board for my very first time. I attend Old Dominion University and I start my school's nursing program this coming Fall semester. This past year I served on the board of ODU's chapter of SNA as the Pre-Nursing Rep. Outside of school and being involved in SNA, I also work as a Resident Assistant on campus, and I



enjoy working as a Nursing Care Partner/CNA at Sentara VB General Hospital on the Cardiac Unit. I also love to workout and go to the gym, listen to music and podcasts, as well as volunteer at my church's children's church and foster-care charities. I am working towards my long term goal of becoming a Traveling Neonatal Nurse, and eventually a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner.



Amanda Degen, Graduate Advisor  
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My name is Amanda Degen and I am the 2020-2021 Graduate Advisor. I recently graduated from South University's accelerated BSN program. I previously attended Christopher Newport and received a degree in Biology in 2015. I am working at VCU Medical Center on the Neonatal Unit. I plan to enroll in a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner program within the next few years. Last year, I served as President on the Board of Directors. I am excited to work with the incoming board over the next year and help them prepare for Convention 2021.



Sandra Annan, Faculty  
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**So far this year..**

**68th NSNA Annual  
Convention  
Leaping Into Action  
at Liberty University**

This year's annual state convention was a good time for all. Our keynote speaker this year was Dr. Janice Hawkins, Ph.D., RN, who serves as a Clinical Associate Professor at Old Dominion University. Her speech, "Beyond the bedside: An Open Letter to Future Nurse Leaders," was inspiring and motivational as she taught us about the importance of developing leadership skills that we will take with us through our careers as Registered Nurses.

Endnote speaker Dr. Dena Woody DNP, RN, is an Associate Professor for Liberty University's School of Nursing. Her speech, "Workplace Violence: VOICE in ACTION," was incredibly valuable because she stressed the importance of speaking out on workplace violence, which is crucial for nursing students to understand.



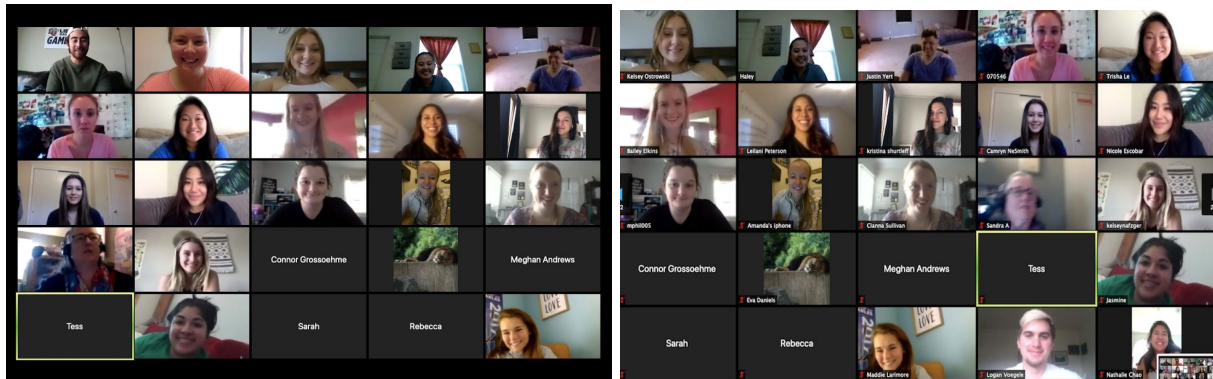
The Torch, June 2020

A few of our outgoing board members with incoming members at convention:



## Transition Student Board Meeting

Untraditionally, the VNSA board transition meeting was over Zoom this year. Our historian had the idea to keep the tradition alive of taking a photo of the old board with the new board. Here are the photos from that meeting:



## NSNA released a statement regarding the Black Lives Matter movement.

“As an organization that represents students from multiple backgrounds and cultures the National Student Nurses’ Association (NSNA) acknowledges all who are impacted by the recent tragedy which took place in our nation.”

Full article link: <https://www.nsna.org/>.

## COVID-19 Testimonials

### Students discuss the impact of COVID on them as healthcare workers and students.

#### How COVID impacted hospital workers:

The unit I specifically work on is designed to be a unit to support all COVID patients, as well as patients that possibly have the virus as well. These patients are here until they test negative two times in a row and get moved to another floor, or unless they go to our designated ICU in the event they have declined and/or need to be intubated. Due to this being the kind of unit it is, nurses and CNAs are having to take on a patient ratio in comparison to before. This also means that more work is required of the medical staff because the least amount of people we have on that unit, the better. Phlebotomists, house keeping, dietary, and more are having to come only if they absolutely have to or not at all. Each morning we come in, we have to 'don and doff.' This includes changing into hospital scrubs, a hair cover, shoe covers, and a mask. Doors are shut at all time and activities are very limited throughout the day.

#### How COVID affected spring semester:

Our semester started changing in the spring around spring break. Instead of coming back to school, spring break was pushed to being one week longer, then we were told that we were cancelled for meeting in person for the rest of the semester. Our professors did such a good job as we converted to being online and made sure that we all still met our clinical and still understood all of the information that we were taught.

#### What it was like working with COVID patients:

While I am still working with COVID patients, my experience has been so educational. When COVID first started being a concern, I knew that I wanted to help any way I could since I was no longer able to have clinical 'in-person.' I figured the best way to do that was to find a job that would allow me to work as a CNA and do so! I have learned that this virus does not skip anybody of any age, race, gender, or background. I have been able to see how the virus can look so different person to person and how lab values still don't quite make sense yet. Also in this time, I have learned the importance of PPE and proper hand hygiene as I take care of numerous patients a day. This not only protects myself and the patients, but also the family I come home to every day.

By Bailey Elkins, Radford University

#### How COVID impacted hospital workers:

The unit I work on is the designated COVID medical unit of the hospital, it is where all COVID and suspected COVID patients go that do not require intubation or intensive care. This has meant many changes on the unit such as alterations in nursing and CNA ratios, the absence of phlebotomists and housekeeping staff on the unit, the absolute necessity of patient doors always being closed, and the donning of full PPE every time a room is entered. Because the unit only currently accepts COVID or suspected COVID patients, staff is often floated to other areas of the hospital if the patient population on the unit is not high enough to require their help. Working on this unit has taught me a great deal about the need for safety and teamwork and has overall been a great experience.

#### How COVID affected spring semester:

Due to COVID, my school went completely online after spring break. We completed sim labs, case studies and other alternate assignments to complete our clinical hours and adjusted to Zoom and pre-recorded lectures. It was a pretty jarring change, but thankfully most of our professors went above and beyond to help us finish out the semester as positively as possible.

#### What it was like working with COVID patients:

My experience with COVID patients has been a humbling one, not necessarily because of the patients themselves but the nondiscrimination of the virus. While the majority of the patients I see are senior citizens, I have also seen patients not much older than myself needing to be put on oxygen or being transferred to a more intensive care unit. It has really emphasized the importance of social distancing, proper PPE and of course good hand hygiene to protect as many people as possible.

By Annsley Eckert, Radford University



**CONNECT:**  
*Learn More about VNSA!*

VNSA Official Website- <http://www.vnsa.us>

VNSA Facebook- VNSA Nursing Students' Association

Twitter- @vnsapr

Instagram- @vnsa.us

Want to share your local chapter's accomplishments? Interested in what other chapters are doing or what upcoming events are happening? Have an interest in writing an article or publishing your research? Let us know!! The Torch is your newsletter and publisher! Send us any articles, pictures, event information, and your contact information and we'll publish it in the next issue!!

Email: [vnsatorcheditor@gmail.com](mailto:vnsatorcheditor@gmail.com) We look forward to hearing from you!!



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