

Virginia State University Outstanding Faculty Award 2020-2021
Rising Star Award in Teaching

Andrea R. Beyer, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Biology
College of Natural and Health Sciences

Dr. Andrea Beyer, Assistant Professor of Biology, holds a doctoral degree in Microbiology and Immunology from Pennsylvania State University's College of Medicine. Since joining the VSU faculty in 2017, she has become a valuable resource of innovative teaching at VSU. She is responsible for designing, preparing, and teaching multiple sections of Introduction to Microbiology Laboratory to undergraduate biology students, in addition to instructing the corresponding lecture sections with flipped classroom styling. She is also the Lead instructor for design, preparation and teaching of the Virology lecture course and serves as rotating instructor for Biology program core courses. She completed Quality Matters Online Teaching Workshops including online coursework and workshops on topics of Teaching Online: An Introduction to Online Delivery, Applying the Quality Matters Rubric, and Designing Your Online Course. Dr. Beyer also completed a training program that blends biomedical research and teaching training and learned practical and innovative ways to improve teaching effectiveness.

In January 2021, Dr. Beyer was the Guest Speaker for Baltimore-area Teacher Enrichment Program "Bite of Science" event sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Education. In addition, she served as an oral presentation and poster judge at the annual VA-ASM meeting and served on the VSU Provost's Committee for Medical Scholars Program.

From high school, to college, to graduate school, Dr. Beyer took note of what her favorite teachers and professors did inside and outside of the classroom that enabled her to trust them, learn from them, and be inspired by them. A few of the key takeaways were that fairness, compassion, energy, and any activity aside from straight-up pedagogy made for engaging and memorable classroom experiences. These aspects are key to her own teaching style. Although her training prepared her for undergraduate teaching and the "faculty life", the relationships that she had with her teachers are the biggest influence on the way that she teaches today. One central tenet to her teaching is building connections and trust with her students. As with any relationship, this means investing time into listening, being there for them, and communicating. She likes to use "Meet and Greet" opportunities for students to share anything that she can use to make their classroom experience better. Dr. Beyer also finds it important to allow students to feel like a valued part of the class, and that their ideas matter. She often asks for student feedback throughout her classes and incorporates those changes whenever possible so that they see the effects in real time. One of her favorite activities is to have students write questions for the class exams so that they get a sense of ownership in the classroom experience, while creating material that is often more complex than the typical exam. Her instruction embraces technology and other new tools and methods for learning.

Dr. Beyer notes that she is constantly seeking ways to improve her classroom instruction and evolve as an educator, stating that "we as educators also need to be perpetual students in order to deliver effective and relevant information."