

Case Study 2

■ *A Community-Engaged Course Exhibition and Sustained Community Partnership*

Title: *Through It All: Families Moving Richmond*

Organizers: University of Richmond and GRTC Transit Company

Location & Dates: GRTC Transit Company headquarters and [Fight for Knowledge website](#), November 2021 to present

Total Budget: \$1,764

Project Team and Partners: Ashley Mason and Carrie Rose Pace, GRTC Transit Company; Laura Browder, Patricia Herrera, and Alexandra Byrum, University of Richmond; Alex Fulton, web developer; Public Transportation in the Time of Two Pandemics students; Tania del Carmen Fernández, photographer; Stephen Duggins, University of Richmond Museums

The Spark

The ongoing collaboration between GRTC Transit System and the University of Richmond, as well as a shared energy around telling the stories of public transportation and the opportunity to engage students in an exciting community-based learning class, were the motivations for this exhibition.

Prior to this project, the GRTC Transit Company and the University of Richmond partnered on two other exhibitions:

- [*Driving Richmond: Stories and Portraits of GRTC Bus Drivers*](#), an exhibition for the 2013 RVA Street Festival curated by University of Richmond professor Laura Browder
- [*RIDE: Public Transit in Richmond Since 1888*](#), a 2015 exhibition at GRTC's new headquarters that was curated by Laura Browder and Alexandra Byrum's Busing in America students with GRTC operator Bruce Korusek

In 2020, GRTC's Carrie Rose Pace reached out to Browder and Byrum again to explore the opportunity to install a new exhibition, setting in motion plans for *Through It All: Families Moving Richmond*.

Community Context

Since 1860, Richmond has been a leading force in public transportation. The first American city to put electric transit on the streets, Richmond connects community members across Greater Richmond every day through the tireless work and dedication of GRTC employees.

The University of Richmond's campus is in a leafy suburb of Richmond. Today, students can take the bus from campus for free, but they don't always take advantage of this opportunity. Community-based learning classes like Public Transportation in the Time of Two Pandemics, from which this exhibition emerged, are critical for deepening learning and for generating high impact off-campus experiences.

Exhibition Purpose

Although the exhibition purposes weren't written down in advance of its opening, many goals for the project emerged from multiple meetings between GRTC staff and UR faculty, including:

- Refreshing the exhibition at GRTC headquarters
- Celebrating and honoring GRTC staff
- Providing UR students a rich, community-based learning opportunity
- Continuing to build on the oral history archive of bus operators in Richmond



Budget Details

Item	Quantity	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Di-bond ACM box panels at 36"x24"	16	\$193.20	\$3,091
Exhibition text panels	16	\$13.20	\$211.20
Total			\$3,302.20

The exhibition was partially funded by a grant from Virginia Humanities.

Exhibition Content & Design

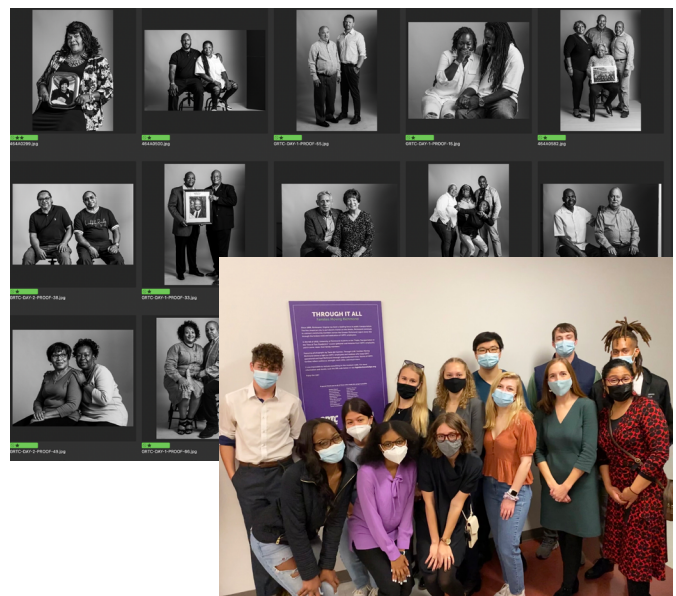
History Harvests, where students conducted oral histories and invited object donations, was an important part of curating the 2015 exhibition *RIDE: Public Transit in Richmond Since 1888* and would be a central piece of this project.

Students in Laura Browder and Patricia Herrera's Public Transportation in the Time of Two Pandemics course collected oral histories from GRTC operators, mechanics, and relatives. To promote the [History Harvests](#), project organizers created an event flyer and Ashley Mason of GRTC invited participants and scheduled interviews. Excerpts from these oral histories were central to the exhibition. At the History Harvests, photographer Tania del Carmen Fernández took portraits of families to be included in the exhibition.

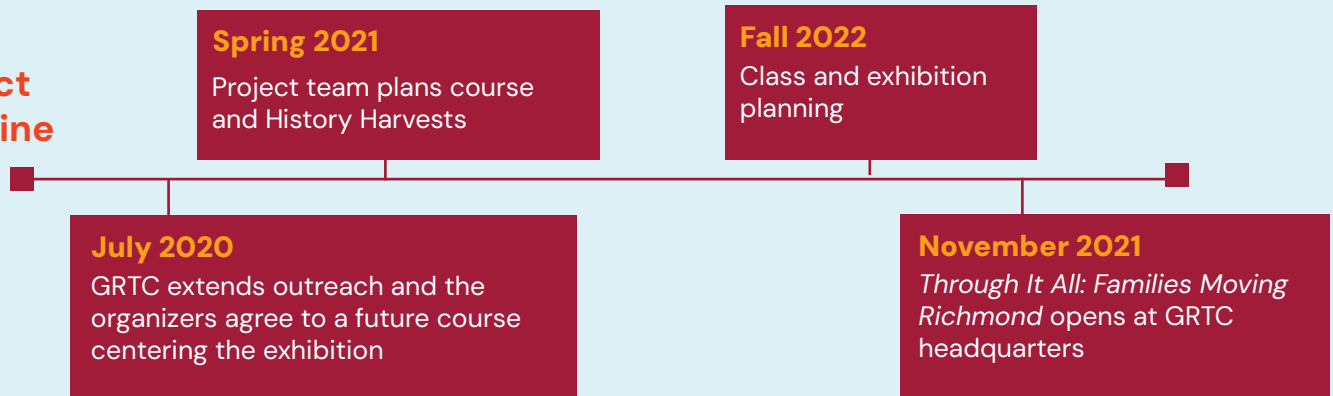
The class was then divided into three working groups: a curatorial team, an online exhibition team, and a dramaturgical team which worked with associate professor of dance Alicia Díaz and the University Dancers to help them prepare for a spring performance inspired by the project. Throughout the semester, there were a series of activities that guided the students to better understand public transit in Richmond, the process of creating a museum or online exhibition, and a historically-based dance performance.

The exhibition for GRTC headquarters emerged from working group sessions focused on curatorial decisions, exhibition design and writing,

exhibition materials, and publicity. Feedback from GRTC staff was emphasized throughout the process. The exhibition centered around the chosen family of GRTC Transit Company, a theme that the GRTC staff presented as a possibility in initial meetings prior to the start of the semester. The online exhibition team had the opportunity to explore other themes: race, family, pandemic, technology, history, and time. Their work is still publicly accessible online at fightforknowledge.org/through-it-all.



Project Timeline



Marketing

An invitation to the exhibition opening was sent to the GRTC and University communities, as well as local partners. A [press release](#) was sent by University Communications.

“My biggest takeaway is the importance of public transit to the health of a community . . . once you jump in, you see that there are layers upon layers of issues but also stories of joy within . . . the GRTC.”

Liam Keenan, '24



Impact

In addition to the student learning, the exhibition received positive feedback from the GRTC community and [local press](#). The dance work *Through It All* was performed by University Dancers at their 37th Annual Concert: MOVE! and dedicated to the GRTC trailblazers of public transportation in Richmond, Virginia. Other classes continued to engage with GRTC operators and families in subsequent semesters.

Lessons Learned

Curating an exhibition within the space of a semester is never easy due to the time constraints, but well worth the effort. The project team experienced pandemic-related challenges in the delivery of the panels, but the exhibition opened on time to honor and uplift the inspiring stories of GRTC operators and families. Nearly three years later, the exhibition remains on view.

“The collaboration (story mapping), and ultimately the exhibit, cemented the rich family history of GRTC. For me, the concept of family took on a deeper meaning as I learned how the GRTC family connections were forged through love, respect, and equally as important, a sense of duty to the agency.”

Ashley Mason, GRTC