

Elizabeth Prom-Wormley, Ph.D.

1999 Master of Public Health

School of Medicine

2007 Doctor of Philosophy

VCU Life Sciences



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Elizabeth Prom-Wormley, Ph.D., walked across the stage at VCU's Commencement in May 2017 and placed a hood around the neck of her first Ph.D. student. She found herself flashing back to her own hooding 10 years before as the first graduate of the doctoral program in integrative life sciences.

“As my newly minted doctor smiled broadly and walked across the stage, shaking hands with the president of the university, I remembered my excitement [as a new Ph.D.] and how hopeful I was for the future,” she says. “I also remembered how grateful I was at that time. I was grateful to my nuclear family, my parents, brother and husband, for supporting me. I was also deeply grateful to my academic family, the one that comes directly from being at VCU, because this institution was, and continues to be, the source of so many opportunities and possibilities for my career.”

With an undergraduate degree in kinesiology from the College of William & Mary, Prom-Wormley came to VCU in 1997 to pursue a master's in public health. After graduation, she worked as a research assistant at the Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics, housed in the VCU School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry. Inspired by a lecture on the genetic epidemiology of drug abuse and with the encouragement of her supervisor, she decided to apply to the newly formed Ph.D. in Integrative Life Sciences program in VCU Life Sciences, which gave her the space and training necessary to think about mental health outcomes as complex biological and social problems. She continued to research these principles as a Ph.D. candidate in life sciences and as an assistant professor in the VCU Department of Family Medicine and Population Health.

Her Ph.D. adviser, Lindon Eaves, Ph.D., professor emeritus in the VCU School of Medicine, evolved into “the most instrumental individual in my personal and professional life,” Prom-Wormley says. “In particular, our weekly meetings over tea on his patio promoted a great deal of fascinating work and inspired me to think carefully as a scientist.”

In fall 2011, she received the outstanding teacher award in the VCU Department of Human and Molecular Genetics. She also was honored for excellence in postdoctoral research by the Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics in 2010.

Prom-Wormley hopes to continue researching avenues for applying genetic epidemiology results within the public health framework, particularly in prevention and treatment of smoking and nicotine dependence. She has been working on community-engaged research involving residents, elected officials and organizational leaders in Richmond's East End.

She also hopes to continue developing as a mentor to students who someday will take that walk across the stage at Commencement, just like she did.