

VCU Six-Year Plan – Part II (2016): 2016-18 through 2020-22

A. Institutional Mission

VCU developed its current mission and vision statements as part of its most recent strategic planning process. The resulting plan, *VCU Quest for Distinction*, provides guidance toward current and future priorities for the time period 2012-2018. In 2014-15, VCU undertook a refocusing of its strategic plan. This refocusing effort did not have any impact on VCU's mission and vision statements, which remain unchanged as cited below.

Mission statement

As the premier urban, public research university in Virginia, VCU's mission is to advance knowledge and student success through its commitments to:

- An engaged, learner-centered environment that fosters inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting;
- Research that expands the boundaries of new knowledge and creative expression and promotes translational applications to improve human health;
- Interdisciplinary collaborations that bring new perspectives to complex problems and mobilize creative energies that advance innovation and solve global challenges;
- Health care that strives to preserve and restore health for all people, to seek the cause and cure of diseases through groundbreaking research, and to educate those who serve humanity;
- Diversity that provides a climate of inclusion, a dedication to addressing disparities wherever they exist and an opportunity to explore and create in an environment of trust; and
- Sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of the communities VCU serves in Virginia and around the world.

In 2014-15, mid-way through the plan's timeframe, VCU stepped back to examine and acknowledge what it had accomplished to date and reassess its original strategic themes and outstanding goals. The result of this university-wide effort was a refined focus around three strategic themes:

- Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment;
- Attain distinction as a fully integrated urban, public research university through contributions in human health, research, scholarship and creative expression that advance knowledge and enhance the quality of life; and
- Become a national model for community engagement and regional impact.

Vision statement

VCU will be a premier urban, public research university distinguished by its commitment to:

- The intellectual and academic success of a diverse student body;
- Research and discovery that advances knowledge, inspires creativity and improves human health; and
- The global engagement of students, faculty and staff that transforms lives and communities.

B. Additional Description of Proposed Strategies

The State committed \$4.3M in FY17 and has currently appropriated a total of \$6.4M for FY18 to sustain VCU's ongoing investments in access, affordability, quality, and increase in degrees. The university is equally committed to maintaining a low tuition rate increase, holding this to 2.5% for fall 2016 and continuing to expand our overall support for in-state need-based-financial aid. The State's appropriations will supplement and align with the following VCU strategies:

- #5 - Improving 4 and 6 year graduation rates through continuing intensive advising and student engagement
- #7 - Improve retention through living-learning environments
- #9 - Reduce time to degree through online and summer programs;
- #12 - Strengthen career counseling.

1.A. Increase financial aid

During the 2016-18 biennium, VCU will complete the 3rd and 4th years of its 4-year cohort-based financial aid plan, begun in FY 2014. This form of longer-range financial aid planning has become embedded in our annual budgeting process. Over and above this planned growth in aid, VCU assessed an internal 1% reallocation as part of the FY 2017 budget process to provide an additional \$3.0 million in funding to financial aid.

As part of state-authorized appropriations, VCU was provided an additional \$4.4 million to provide need-based aid to in-state undergraduate students. The combination of an increase in appropriations dedicated to financial aid and VCU's success at reallocating internal funds to target steady growth in financial aid resources have significantly enhanced the university's continuing efforts to improve financial accessibility.

1.B. Provide faculty salary increases

A critical VCU priority is to provide competitive compensation for our faculty and to recognize their contributions with periodic opportunities to receive merit increases to base salaries. VCU would be strongly supportive of efforts by the State to provide funding for such increases for faculty annually. The state support for faculty merit increases averaging 2% in FY14 and again for FY16 was greatly appreciated. Those increases, along with the additional 2.5% merit option for teaching and research (T&R) faculty in FY16, have helped VCU to begin to address immediate salary concerns. The State's current commitment to fund a 3% merit increase in December 2016 represents another step towards addressing issues of salary compression and market inequities resulting from a five-year period without base increases.

VCU has made a change to the promotion policy. In previous years, faculty promotions provided a fixed dollar increase, depending upon rank achieved. FY16 saw this changed to the more common practice of a set percentage increase on base salary.

VCU's goal remains an increase to the 60th percentile of our national peers and/or faculty salaries comparable to the Commonwealth's research universities. Additional merit increases will be sought for FY18 to be supported partially through reallocation and general funds, as available.

2. Add full-time T&R faculty lines

A key priority for the institution remains strategic additions to the number of full-time T&R faculty. The university has made significant strides toward its goal of becoming a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high quality educational experiences focused on inquiry, discovery, and innovation in a global environment. Sufficient numbers of T&R faculty are necessary to achieve that goal and to advance research, scholarship and creative expression commensurate with a public research university. In a separate analysis prepared as part of its 2013 *Report on Academic Spending*, referenced above, JLARC reported VCU with just 36% of its faculty as tenured or tenure track for the FY 2012 period versus 60% for UVA and 66% for Virginia Tech. With the inclusion of non-tenure track faculty, VCU had 64% of its faculty in full-time roles while UVA was at 77% and Virginia Tech at 81%.

Strategic faculty growth is important for improving retention and graduation, building translational research in targeted areas and enhancing instruction in STEM-H disciplines and other high need areas. Hence VCU will be able to graduate more students who are ready to contribute to the workforce of tomorrow.

Last year's biennial plan, which called for an additional 58 new faculty lines, will largely be achieved. VCU increased its full-time T&R faculty count by 35 in FY16 and anticipates continued strategic faculty recruitments (18) in FY17. VCU's faculty cluster hire initiative, iCubed, is described in greater detail in strategy 13 below.

3. Administrative/professional faculty and classified staff salaries

The salary increase totals include the remaining 4 payrolls of the FY 2016 state increase, the impact of the appropriated 3% increase for FY17 plus the annualized impact for FY18. No other increase for FY18 is included; however, VCU fully supports, and is hopeful the State will be able to provide funding for, an increase for administrative and professional (A&P) faculty and classified staff in the final year of the 2016-2018 biennium.

4. Massey Cancer Center and research

One of VCU's most promising sponsored research areas is cancer research across many different disciplines. The cornerstone of these efforts is the Massey Cancer Center (Massey), one of only sixty-eight National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers in the United States. Massey is particularly focused on translating promising research from the laboratory directly to the patient's bedside. These new discoveries are needed for better treatments, and prevention and control of cancer that will be available first to Virginians.

Massey is a vital resource for cancer research, prevention, treatment, education, and clinical trials. The State award in FY17 of \$3 million to Massey will provide meaningful benefits as the Cancer Center continues its translational efforts on behalf of the Commonwealth and the world. As described last year, VCU has submitted the NCI core grant renewal for Massey and will hear results in early calendar 2017.

5. Improve 4 and 6 year graduation rates through continuing intensive advising and student engagement

VCU has made tremendous strides over the past several years in improving its graduation rates. From FY 2012 through FY 2015, the six-year graduation rate has increased from 53% to 62%, while four-year rates have grown from 30% to 39%. Key pillars of VCU's success have been through intensive advising and an expanded focus on student engagement.

Beginning in Fall 2014, VCU began significantly expanding professional advising staff throughout the university, supporting this expansion with various software tools to aid advisors and students, including Degree Works, a software platform that provides degree mapping and other completion assistance features; the Student Success Collaborative (SSC), a web-based advising system offered by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) that provides students and advisors with early warning alerts and identifies academic challenge areas that may delay time to graduation or prohibit success in a selected major; and College Scheduler, a platform that provides students with a web-based, highly personalized schedule planner, automating the traditional manual pen and paper process, and presenting the student with multiple scheduling options based upon course/faculty preferences, student times unavailable and bridging required courses from Degree Works. Using reallocated funds, supplemented by a portion of the State appropriation for FY17 targeting access, affordability, quality, and degrees (see previous description), VCU will continue to expand

its efforts around intensive advising, going live in July 2016 with the enhanced EAB platform SSC Campus and adding new professional advisors to support undergraduate students.

The next biennium will see a continued focus on leveraging advisors' abilities to be more proactive toward their students and to intervene more quickly, employing tactics such as mandatory advising and supplemental instruction for students receiving an early warning or low mid-term grade, and involving faculty more directly in the early alert efforts. Faculty will be

6. Add full-time staff lines to support safety and compliance

The current plan reflects the staffing impact associated with increased mandatory compliance with health and safety regulations, addressing network security and the growing number of attacks on university networks and data, as well as enhancing student and campus safety.

7. Improve retention through living-learning environments

With the success of the ASPIRE community engagement living-learning program in increasing second and third year retention as an example, VCU's second living-learning program, GLOBE, opened in fall 2013 with a focus on international engagement. VCU opened two additional living-learning residence halls in fall 2015: LEAD and INNOVATE. This is another key VCU initiative supported in part by the State's appropriation towards access, affordability, quality, and increased degrees.

LEAD focuses on leadership development and provides leadership opportunities and learning of increasing complexity over the four-year academic program. It is for first, second, third and fourth year students, providing the opportunity to learn about leadership and to apply leadership skills within the VCU community while majoring in a variety of academic areas. The second new living/learning residence, INNOVATE, focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship and is paired with instruction from VCU's highly successful da Vinci Center, again with credit hours earned toward a certificate with instruction and engagement provided in the residence hall.

8. Increase maintenance reserve

The needed on-going annual increase in maintenance reserves could not be realized in FY17 due to budget constraints such as needed funding for increased financial aid initiatives, salary increases and high priority faculty positions. Approximately \$400,000 was identified through internal savings to address critical needs. In FY18, the University hopes to restore the planned increase in reserve funds by \$1 million.

9. Reduce time to degree through online and summer programs

With its focus on student success, VCU continues to actively develop alternative and flexible opportunities for students to learn, particularly focused on online course delivery and increasing summer session course availability. Part of this focus has been reorganizing and rebranding VCU's former Center for Teaching Excellence to a new Academic Learning and Transformation Lab (ALT Lab), focused on new online course development to address issues around access and progression for undergraduate students, as well as a number of selective professional graduate programs. VCU has expanded both its summer and online programs, and will continue, over the next several years, to expand the number of online courses offered in summer session. The State's appropriation in FY17 to advance access, affordability, quality, and increased degrees aligns with the university in its continuing efforts to expand online and summer programming.

10. Increase graduate assistantships and stipend levels

VCU continues to lag behind its peer institutions in both the number of graduate assistantships supported and the stipend level offered, a significant disadvantage when competing against these institutions for the most promising Ph.D. students. The State provided an appropriation of \$0.3 million in FY17 to support graduate student financial aid.

11. Reduce tuition for doctoral students at candidacy

Many of VCU's research-intensive peers offer doctoral students reduced tuition, creating a significant competitive advantage when competing for promising Ph.D. students. VCU included dollars in its FY 2016 budget plan to fund a portion of tuition for full-time doctoral students at candidacy, with plans to increase the tuition coverage over coming years to reach as much as two-thirds of tuition, as funding permits.

12. Strengthen career counseling

VCU's Career Services Office will continue to expand programs and services, working closely with Student Advising to leverage and align efforts to enhance student success during and post-graduation. The State's \$4.3 million appropriation for access, affordability, quality and increased degrees also contributes to this key effort.

CSO's philosophy is to serve as a catalyst and coordinator for career services activities throughout VCU. Students have the opportunity to participate in internships, cooperative education arrangements (Co-ops), and field placements where they will be well prepared and experienced for entry-level work. Central roles of the CSO are to assist students and alumni to articulate the connection between their academic pursuits and career decisions, to be reflective and make informed career choices based on the marketplace and awareness of opportunities that exist, and to identify, prepare and pursue opportunities to gain experience.

13. Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation

VCU endeavors to be a national model for diversity and inclusive excellence among urban public research universities in the U.S. Our considerable growth in the number of underrepresented minority faculty and students over the past ten years has provided the university the unique opportunity to focus on challenges related to the systematic inclusion of diverse faculty and students in education enterprise and excellence. VCU has determined that its position at the nexus of access and opportunity and culture and race in Richmond can be leveraged to create pathways to include underrepresented minority faculty and students in the development of innovative approaches, practices and programs that enhance the vitality of urban communities. VCU has formed the Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation (I³ or the Institute) to lead this effort and to serve as an organizing principle that bridges diversity, inclusion and excellence across the university community.

ICubed is responsible for the administration of five programs to promote diversity and inclusion:

- Cluster Hiring Initiative and Program (CHIP): to support its signature initiative related to transdisciplinary core development;
- Pathways to the Professoriate (PATH): to support pipeline programs with HBCUs and MSIs;
- Commonwealth Scholars Program (CSP): to support the education and training of diverse undergraduate and graduate students;
- Center for Research on Culture, Race and Representation: to provide lecture series, research symposia and public teaching on topics of utmost importance to the university-community; and
- Commonwealth Citizen Award Program (CCAP): to promote collaborative science and consensus-building among diverse populations of faculty, staff and students.

14. Library enhancement

This funding is required to meet contract cost increases for access to scholarly journal content. Access to this content is imperative to maintaining the university's Carnegie classification as a very high research institution.

15. Enhance technology

Unfortunately, higher priority needs in FY17 and FY18 as noted above prevented funding of this initiative. Current budget conditions have not allowed for VCU to fully contribute to investment (along with other Virginia institutions) in infrastructure upgrades to the Mid-Atlantic Research Infrastructure Alliance Network (MariaNet) as an economical way to provide high-speed connectivity paths to support research and instruction.

16. O&M for new facilities

O&M for new facilities includes, particularly, the anticipated opening of the Institute for Contemporary Art as well as the full year cost of the Cabell Library addition. The request includes incremental increases in maintenance and utility costs for these facilities.

17. Utility cost increases

Reductions in unit costs and new efficiencies in billing will allow VCU to defer any planned cost increase until FY18. Utility cost increases represent the university's anticipated cost increases for electricity, natural gas and water and sewer service. The university maintains close working relationships with utility providers and uses this relationship and past experience with cost increases to formulate its estimated utility cost increase funding requirements.

18. Fringe/health insurance benefits increase

VCU's fringe benefit rate encompasses health care and Virginia Retirement System contributions as well as various other smaller benefits. The increase displayed represents 3% growth for both years of the biennium.

19. Attorneys in general counsel's office

The workload in VCU's general counsel's office continues to warrant additional staffing as approved by the Office of the Attorney General. The FY17 funding allows for the conversion of an existing Law Fellow Faculty position to Associate University Counsel.

20. Contract escalation and lease costs

Contract cost increases are related to VCU's central rent, contract with Groome Transportation for the shuttle service between the Monroe Park and Health Sciences campuses, and mail services. The increases displayed in the 6 year plan are estimates based on contract provisions.