



Provost's Report to VCU Faculty Senate -- Jan. 31, 2023

Discussions: The State of VCU Academic Affairs

As I mentioned in my [message to all faculty last week](#), your deans and I will co-host discussions on the future of teaching and learning specific to each school and college. I will provide a brief presentation to set the stage for our discussion - the current higher education landscape; workforce needs; and strategies to prepare for the future, ensure fiscal stability, and elevate faculty career success and student success. The remainder of our time will be a discussion. I'm thankful to the faculty of the College of Humanities and Sciences who engaged with me and each other during our first session last week. I hope that you, as faculty senators, will encourage your faculty constituents to attend and participate in the sessions as well. Look for invitations from your deans soon.

Celebrating VCU Faculty

- [Michael Hindle, Ph.D., the Peter R Byron Distinguished Professor in the VCU School of Pharmacy](#) and leader of the Aerosol Research Group at VCU has been selected by the National Academy of Inventors (NAI) as one of 169 distinguished academic inventors to be NAI fellows. The NAI Fellows Program highlights academic inventors who have demonstrated a spirit of innovation in creating or facilitating outstanding inventions that have made a tangible impact on quality of life, economic development and the welfare of society. Election as a NAI fellow is the highest professional distinction awarded to academic inventors who are highly regarded in their respective fields.
- [Puru Jena, Ph.D., distinguished professor in the Department of Physics in the College of Humanities and Sciences and director of VCU's Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment](#), has been awarded the Professor A. K. Chandra Memorial Award. The annual award of the Indian Chemical Society recognizes scholastic contributions to the field of chemical sciences. Jena received the award recently at the 58th annual Convention of Chemists of the Indian Chemical Society.
- [Cristina Stanciu, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of English in the College of Humanities and Sciences and director of the Humanities Research Center](#) at VCU has published a new book through Yale University Press. "[The Makings and Unmakings of Americans: Indians and Immigrants in American Literature and Culture, 1879-1924](#)", explores how new immigrants and Native Americans shaped the intellectual and cultural debates over inclusion and exclusion during the nation's Progressive Era.

- [The School of Education has been awarded a Virginia Department of Education grant](#) to develop teacher apprentice residency programs in partnership with the school systems in Prince William County, Fairfax County and Surry County. The grant is [one of nine awarded](#) to Virginia universities to allow school divisions to hire classroom aides, paraprofessionals, substitutes and other unlicensed school employees as teacher apprentices and provide a mentored pathway for them to complete the coursework required to become fully licensed teachers. At VCU, the project will be led by [RTR Teacher Residency](#), a school-based teacher preparation program that integrates research with practice to equip residents with the knowledge, skills and experience to be effective in high-needs and hard-to-staff classrooms.
- VCU has received more national recognition **made possible by our outstanding faculty**. In December VCU hit yet another milestone when the National Science Foundation's Higher Education Research and Development fiscal year 2021 survey ranked [VCU as No. 50 in the country for fiscal research expenditures](#). Reaching this ranking came well ahead of the timeline set out by VCU's Quest 2028 goals. VCU ranked No. 58 last year. And in January [U.S. News & World Report ranked six of Virginia Commonwealth University's online programs among the best in the country, with four of the programs ranking in the top 25](#).

Leadership Updates

- **Arturo P. Saavedra, M.D., Ph.D.**, has been named [dean of the VCU School of Medicine, effective April 15](#). He also will serve as VCU Health System executive vice president for medical affairs. Prior to his current roles, Saavedra served as chief of population health and health policy of University of Virginia Health System and as chief of ambulatory strategy and operations for the medical center.
- **Andrew Daire, Ph.D.**, dean of the School of Education, has accepted the position of provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, effective June 1, 2023.
- **Susan Parish, Ph.D.**, dean of the College of Health Professions, has been named the next president of Mercy College, effective July 1, 2023.

Leadership Searches

- [Dean of the College of Engineering](#): Finalists will be on campus in mid-late spring.
- **Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success**: Search will launch publicly in February.
- Additional searches will be launched later this year for other senior leadership roles.

Important initiatives in progress

Interim Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Policy

The interim P&T policy includes minor revisions regarding external letters. It is applicable to all faculty hired beginning January 2023. The revisions were shared at the Council of Deans meeting in Dec 2022. The proposal is being placed before the Cabinet for approval; if approved, it will be good for one year. The revisions, which pertain to the external letters submitted with P&T dossier, are in §7.1.1 and §7.2.1 of the policy:

- Five (5) external letters are required.
 - To ensure there is no conflict of interest between the candidate and the letter writers: “Persons who have co-authored publications, collaborated on research, or been institutional colleagues, or academic mentors/advisors/dissertation chair of the applicant should be excluded from consideration as outside evaluators.”
 - The five (5) external letters received for review and the selection of external reviewers “should be from Doctoral Universities - Very high research activity (R1). A detailed justification should be provided for the selection of an external reviewer from a university with a different Carnegie Classification. Each academic unit must develop an approval process, including dean review and approval, for inclusion of external reviewers not at R1 universities. All solicited letters received must be included in the file.”

Next steps: Following the process for revisions indicated in the P&T policy (§12.0), a fuller revision will start by the end of the semester.

Transformative research seed grants

The Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation will be partnering again to support faculty in transformative research.

- The [Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences fund](#), which launched in 2022, is accepting applications through Feb. 10, 2023.
- A new **Transformative Learning Fund: Vertically Integrated Projects** will launch in the coming weeks.

Quality Enhancement Plan

The topic for [VCU's next Quality Enhancement Plan \(QEP\) – Scaling Undergraduate Research at VCU: Equitable Engagement in Transformative Learning](#) – was announced in December. A writing team will be convened soon with subject-matter experts who will start writing the full QEP. Updates will be posted on the [QEP web page](#).

Online strategy and implementation

Our students continue to expect increased options for high quality online and flexible instruction and learning. The Online Strategy Task Force, which completed its work in fall 2022, submitted their [final report and recommendations](#) in the areas of academic integrity in online exams, high

quality online education, innovation in teaching and learning, marketable credentials, and the student and faculty experience.

The online strategy implementation phase has now launched with the appointment of a new Online Advisory Group (OAG). The OAG will inform the implementation of key recommendations with the goal of increasing VCU's capacity and competitiveness in offering high-quality, accessible programs and courses to an increasing number of students. The OAG will hold its initial meeting in February. For this year the group will be focusing on high quality online course rubrics; a faculty incentive structure for online course development; online proctoring guidelines; and the intellectual property policy.

Important dates

TODAY - [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) in the Learning Environment](#): Tues., Jan. 31, 2023; noon-1:30 p.m. in the Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballrooms. A faculty panel, which includes **Milos Manic** and **Thea Pepperl** from the College of Engineering; and **Oscar Keyes** from the VCU Libraries, will discuss the Generative AI - or Gen-AI - models, such as ChatGPT. This discussion will support faculty in recognizing Gen-AI tools; engaging with students to explore the benefits and limitations of these tools; and options for discouraging the use of Gen-AI in critical learning assessments.

Coming Feb. 12, 2023 - Call for Proposals: VCU Online's inaugural Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Regional Conference. The conference will be held live online Oct. 24-25, 2023. [Additional information is available on the event webpage.](#)

Now - Feb. 13: Early notification: student progress reports due. Progress reports are due now through Feb. 13. One way to continue building a learning environment of belonging and care for your students is by providing early feedback - regardless of the level of the course - in the form of progress reports and mid-term grades. Mid-term grades will be due Feb. 17 - March 17. Step-by-step information on [early notification programs is online.](#)

Open now - feedback on the Draft VCU Hybrid University Statement. In the context of online strategies, a draft *VCU Hybrid University Statement* has been developed. Please read the statement below and [provide any feedback using this online form.](#) We will collect your feedback throughout the spring and anticipate presenting a final version to you prior to the close of the semester.

Virginia Commonwealth University is a HYBRID institution that supports students' diverse educational, personal, and professional needs by offering courses and programs in multiple pedagogical modalities. Through embedding and leveraging technology in all aspects of the university experience, students may complete their degrees (inclusive of certificates and digital credentials) through a flexible combination of in-person and online courses offered asynchronously, synchronously, in a hybrid format (a combination of asynchronous and onsite), and/or completely onsite/in person. This flexible approach to pedagogical and student service modalities enhances all students' access to and progress in a continuous degree path and student support services that best fits their needs growing student retention and timely graduation.