

TO: VCU Faculty Senate

FROM: D&IE Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate

RE: Resolution: Defending Academic Freedom to Lead Discussions About Racial, Class and Gender Justice

Date: November 19, 2021; Amended March 2022; Amended May 2022

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS state legislative proposals are being introduced across the United States that target academic discussions of racism and related issues in American history, culture and politics in schools, colleges and universities.

WHEREAS Virginia Commonwealth University's Faculty Handbook affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities.

WHEREAS academic freedom (and its concurrent responsibilities) are clearly outlined in the American Association of University Professors' 1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

WHEREAS faculty have responsibility for the curriculum at their universities, as stated in AAUP's Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, "The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process," and in VCU's own policy, "the faculty through a system of appointed or elected departmental, school, and University committees shall have the right to develop and recommend – or otherwise, to participate in decisions involving – new degree programs, new course offerings, modifications of existing courses, and degree requirements."

WHEREAS the term "divisive" is indeterminate, subjective, and diminishes the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on subjective criteria that are inapposite from the goals of education and the development of essential critical thinking skills; WHEREAS educating about systemic barriers to actualizing a multiracial democracy based on race or gender should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21 st century to produce engaged and informed citizens;

WHEREAS over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History (June 16, 2021) stating their "firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities . . . In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning."

WHEREAS Virginia Commonwealth University's mission features "Deeply engrained [sic] core values of diversity, inclusion and equity that provide a safe, trusting and supportive environment to explore, create, learn and serve."

WHEREAS Virginia Commonwealth University's Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness and Success's website affirms the importance of racial and social justice.

WHEREAS the Faculty Senate of Virginia Commonwealth University has crafted its own anti-racism statement which states, “The VCU Faculty Senate recognizes that structural and systemic racism across our educational and social institutions affect the psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being of our entire VCU campus and broader community.”

WHEREAS in a nation that has for centuries struggled with issues of racial inequity and injustice, many students do not have adequate knowledge of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual) history and the policies that have contributed to inequities, Virginia Commonwealth University has a responsibility and opportunity to help build equity and social justice.

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty, accrediting bodies, or coordinating bodies (like SCHEV) to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or non-faculty entities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate stands with our K-12 colleagues throughout the country when they seek to teach historically accurate and evidence-based accounts of U.S. history and civics education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Faculty Senate calls upon ~~President Michael Rao and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos to affirm that they reject any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or non-faculty entities.~~ VCU senior administrators and faculty to uphold the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and to advance these principles in a manner that preserves the integrity of our curriculum; subject matter and methods of instruction; research, scholarship and practice; and faculty status.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Faculty Senate affirms the Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism, authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.