

October 16, 2020

President Michael Rao
Office of the President
Virginia Commonwealth University
910 West Franklin Street
Box 842512
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2512



President Rao,

We read your announcement from late last month of the retirement of VCU Provost Gail Hackett at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year. We join you in thanking Dr. Hackett for her service to the university.

Your announcement includes the comment, “Details on this executive recruitment will be forthcoming.” As you consider moving forward with finding VCU’s next provost, we respectfully request that you guarantee a strong teaching and research faculty presence as part of this search process.

In their statement, [“Faculty Participation in the Selection, Evaluation, and Retention of Administrators,”](#) the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) says:

The composition of the search committee should reflect the primacy of faculty interest, and the faculty component of the committee should be chosen by the faculty of the unit or by a representative body of the faculty. The person chosen for an administrative position should be selected from among the names submitted by the search committee. The president, after fully weighing the views of the committee, will make the final choice. Nonetheless, sound academic practice dictates that the president not choose a person over the reasoned opposition of the faculty.

As the VCU chapter of AAUP, we wholeheartedly agree with this thoughtful position statement. Since the provost is the university’s chief academic officer, faculty interest in this administrative position is very high; therefore, the search committee membership should have a majority number of faculty members either chosen by the full-time teaching and research faculty (e.g., at the departmental or college/school level) or by a representative body of the faculty (e.g., Faculty Senate) who have full voting rights on the committee. After the committee selects final candidates, it should be allowed to continue contributing to the search process by providing you with perspectives that you would hopefully welcome as part of your selection deliberations.

Of course, the ongoing global pandemic has made almost everything more difficult, and a national provost search will be no exception. When final candidates are invited to address

campus groups, we request that scheduling and accommodations favor the highest faculty involvement in whatever format (e.g., in person, virtual), including multiple sessions for each candidate in order to encourage participation by faculty who are stretched thin delivering instruction in multiple modalities and completing research remotely. We likewise request robust opportunities for faculty feedback, and that this feedback be taken into serious consideration when making your final choice and that you, as the above statement says, “not choose a person over the reasoned opposition of the faculty”.

We look forward to seeing a successful search for VCU’s next provost and welcome the opportunity to meet with you about this important next step for our university.

With highest regards,

Everett Carpenter, Ph.D.
President, VCU Chapter of AAUP