



VCU Faculty Senate

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes, February 6, 2018.
Commonwealth Ballrooms A-B, Monroe Park Campus, 4-6pm.
<http://www.vcu.edu/maps/acmap/wm>

Attendance was not taken, since this was a general faculty meeting.

4:05pm--Call to Order (Scott Street)

Guest

4:10pm--President of VCU (Michael Rao)

- Rao's remarks: Rao focused his remarks on VCU's priorities for this academic year, focusing on the undergraduate experience. In no particular order, these are (1) the undergraduate experience, (2) research, (3) the VCU medical center, and (4) the budget and economic status.
- Rao noted the importance of Focused Inquiry to the undergraduate experience, and discussed the ongoing update to VCU's general education curriculum, and our need to provide a broad-based learning experience while also preparing VCU's students for their majors and specific careers.
- Rao spoke about the importance of diversity and inclusion, and his commitment to advancing both more rapidly at VCU.
- Rao explained that he spent a great deal of time working with the Virginia General Assembly this year. At the General Assembly, Rao highlighted the fact that VCU's student body, made up largely of in-state students, provides less tuition revenue than at the state's other Tier 3 institutions, which includes a higher percentage of out-of-state students. This situation has placed VCU at a financial disadvantage, which has limited its ability to provide for faculty raises and to set aside funding for other priorities. In exchange, Rao promised legislators that VCU will look to reallocate resources within its Education & General (E&G) funds.
- Rao noted the construction of new facilities and the ongoing effort to link the medical and Monroe Park campuses.
- Rao explained that another focus this year is to expand VCU's research profile. He noted that VCU is already a national leader in addiction studies, neurological research, cancer treatment, and several additional areas. As a university, we will work to expand our research profile, as well as to prioritize our research specialties, in the future.
- Discussion topics: Senator Moslow-Benway asked about the response from legislators to Rao's concerns about VCU's state funding. Rao explained that he is hoping for some legislative assistance, but that VCU is working to recruit more out-of-state students, and online studies, while it attempts to address the disparity in state funding.

- Discussion topics: Senator Lehman asked about Navitas, the company hired by the university to help recruit additional international students, and if VCU had outlined specific expectations for the organization. Rao responded that he did not know the precise numbers, but that targets had been outlined and agreed to, and that he would have someone from the Provost's Office provide the details.
- Discussion topics: Senator Price noted that the growth and development of VCU's academic departments, and departmental priorities, has sometimes differed from university priorities, but led to successful results. Rao agreed that in many cases this has been successful (such as addiction studies), but he noted that in other areas the university will need to provide guidance on initiatives and research areas that would prove most beneficial to the entire university moving forward. Peter Buckley, dean of VCU Health, added that the goal will be to capitalize on VCU's strengths and its impact on Virginia.
- Discussion topics: Kate Nash mentioned the undergraduate experience and revisions to VCU's general education curriculum, and asked if President Rao is committed to the specificity that being suggested in the latest revisions, especially with regard to the concept of civic engagement. Rao explained that he believes students will benefit from the proposed revisions, even if they do not recognize it now.
- Discussion topics: Senator Ottens asked about focused research, and how potential changes might impact graduate education, including funding of graduate students. Rao responded that this is a concern, and will be a key aspect of planning for such changes.
- Discussion topics: Senator Kunkes asked President Rao to expand upon the issue of diversity, and the differences between diversity and inclusion, and how VCU might improve in terms of inclusion. Rao responded that while he does not want to impose ideas or changes in this regard from the top down, he thinks VCU needs to carefully consider ways in which the university can ensure that individuals are able to achieve their full potential. He reiterated that VCU's evaluation processes need to involve all units and aspects of the university.
- Discussion topics: Jennifer Johnson asked about VCU's research priorities, particularly the role of the College of Humanities and Sciences. Rao responded that he thinks many individuals and departments within the CHS will be drawn to, and involved in, VCU's research priorities. Rao added that he hopes interdisciplinary research will be a large part of VCU's success moving forward.
- Discussion topics: Senator An asked VCU's efforts toward globalization, and the international opportunities for the university. Rao responded that VCU needs to continue to engage in international opportunities, and to build relationships on campus that can be connected to a broader, international audience, and that VCU needs to expand its efforts in this regard.
- Discussion topics: Senator Alcaine asked how faculty can assist VCU in conversations today about the value of higher education. Rao explained that a recent Wilder School study has shown the tremendous value that VCU brings to Virginia, and to the Richmond region, in terms of jobs, economic growth, and other measures. Rao added that revising VCU's curriculum, and increasing our graduation rate, will be important in order to convince the general public of the value of institutions of higher education.
- Discussion topics: Senator Street asked President Rao about the urgency of planning for VCU's future, in terms of how quickly the university needs to plan for, and implement,

many of the changes President Rao has mentioned today. Rao responded that he needs faculty input on these initiatives, including pilot programs that demonstrate certain successes.

- Discussion topics: Senator Boyes asked about undergraduate research at VCU, particularly ways the institution can work to meet the research needs of all undergraduates. Boyes indicated, for instance, that each year one of the major undergraduate research initiatives is forced to place hundreds of students on a wait-list. Rao responded that it is essential to allow students to explore what they love, and what interests them, and that he hopes that the new gen ed curriculum may be helpful, and that Focused Inquiry might also play a greater role in undergraduate research. Boyes asked a follow-up question about allowing students to present or display their research, and Rao responded that this aspect of the research experience is important, and that social media might provide an additional outlet, or that experts in the Robertson School of Mass Communications could possibly offer useful ideas.
- Discussion topics: Diane Jennings asked about the role of teaching faculty in VCU's research profile. Rao responded that the undergraduate classroom experience has to be linked to research opportunities, and that faculty should be committed to both teaching and research. Rao reiterated that the two should not be mutually exclusive, and that research and teaching are both integral to VCU's success.
- Discussion topics: Senator Secret asked a follow-up question about teaching versus research, revolving around the perceived differences in status between research faculty (who are often tenured) and teaching faculty. Rao responded that it will be important for VCU to revisit its promotion and tenure guidelines, in terms of teaching. Senator Secret agreed, and asked that we consider the possibility of granting tenure based on teaching. Senator Price responded that evaluating teaching is quite difficult. Senator Wayne noted that many of the proposals for VCU's new strategic plan seem to place research on a higher level or pedestal than teaching, and Rao indicated that he hoped that Senator Wayne offered her own ideas during the strategic planning process, especially the importance of teaching.
- Discussion topics: Heather Jones asked about VCU's faculty of color, specifically efforts to retain faculty of color. Rao mentioned that the Office of Inclusive Excellence plays a key role in this regard, but that departments also need to play a role. Kevin Allison added that VCU is carefully monitoring its faculty of color to determine strategies for both recruitment and retention, and that it is extremely important to work with VCU's faculty, who are most directly linked to faculty recruitment. Aashir Nasim added that revising VCU's curriculum, and making it more inclusive, will help, as will the development of professional networks among faculty of color.
- Discussion topics: Jennifer Johnson argued that it would be worthwhile to initiate a listening session made up of the President's Office, the Provost's Office, and VCU's department chairs, in order to give chairs the opportunity to highlight day-to-day challenges they face, which often prevent them from implementing novel ideas, new initiatives, and so on. Rao responded that he would like to connect department chairs, collectively, more directly to the university's central operations.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45pm. Minutes respectfully submitted by Brian Daugherty.