Virginia Commonwealth University Faculty Climate Emergency Declaration

WHEREAS, there is an overwhelming consensus among scientists, as described in the recent United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, that industrialized countries must reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 45 percent from 2010 levels by no later than 2030, and achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050, to prevent temperatures from rising above 1.5°C (2.4°F) and thereby avoid disastrous impacts on the city’s local climate, ecosystem, and communities; and

WHEREAS, realizing VCU’s Strategic Research goals to enhance the human experience, achieve a just and equitable society, optimize health, depends on addressing the climate emergency and responsibly restoring and protecting the natural world by supporting sustainable energy and environments; and

WHEREAS, in its 2010 Climate Action Plan, as part of the American Colleges and Universities Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), VCU committed to work toward the goals established by the Paris Accord; and

WHEREAS, as of 2019, VCU has reduced emissions from the 2008 baseline by less than 12%; and while these reductions are substantial, the rate of reduction is far below the level required to achieve the IPCC targets; and

WHEREAS VCU is currently developing a new 10-year sustainability plan; and

WHEREAS, vulnerable populations are already disproportionately impacted by climate change, and will increasingly bear an excess burden from warming temperatures, sea level rise, the spread of disease and the socioeconomic consequences of inaction on the climate crisis; and

WHEREAS, the City of Richmond declared a climate emergency on September 13, 2021, joining 2,045 other local governments and 23 national governments representing over 1 billion people; and

WHEREAS, VCU affirms its role as a major partner with the City of Richmond by galvanizing its considerable academic, research, and health promoting resources and personnel to partner with RVA to achieve its RVAGreen 2050 goal to ensure that historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged communities are climate-ready and resilient; and

WHEREAS, VCU recognizes that environmental racism is a systemic structure that undermines the health and wellbeing of Black residents, low-income residents, and other residents of color in Richmond and is committed to dismantling this structure and empowering these residents; and

WHEREAS, over 2000 local governments representing over 1 billion people have already declared a state of climate emergency, including New York City, New York, Austin, Texas, Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, California, Alexandria, Virginia, and 58 other localities within
the United States, as well as 23 national governments, including those of the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Ireland and Argentina.

WHEREAS, on October 28, 2021, in advance of the 2021 COP26, over 1050 universities and colleges from 68 countries announced they have pledged to halve their emissions by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050 at the very latest, impacting over 10 million students. This includes, at last count, 336 US Institutions of Higher Learning, including VCU.

THEREFORE, THE FACULTY OF VCU (1) CALLS ON PRESIDENT RAO TO DECLARE A CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY; (2) CALLS ON THE VCU ADMINISTRATION TO WORK TOGETHER WITH US TO CREATIVELY AND UNCOMPROMISINGLY MEET THE CRISIS AND SERVE AS A PARTNER WITH AND SUSTAINABILITY MODEL FOR OUR CITY AND BEYOND; AND (3) AFFIRMS THAT THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE INCLUDED AS ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE ONE VCU SUSTAINABILITY MASTER PLAN:

- Declare a climate and ecological emergency that threatens the health and wellbeing of its students, staff, and faculty; the residents of Richmond and the Commonwealth of Virginia; as well as our fellow global citizens and the natural world; and commits to pursuing the goals outlined in this resolution and its upcoming Sustainability Action Plan.

- Reduce VCU’s greenhouse gas emissions 50% by 2030, as is commensurate with the percentage reduction specified by the 2018 IPCC Report to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, and to achieve 100% renewable energy sources by 2050.

- Commit to full transparency in reporting emissions on a regular basis on the Sustainability dashboard.

- Highlight the climate and ecological emergency in the VCU Mission Statement and recalibrated Quest 2025 Strategic Plan to prioritize the importance of contributing to sustainability in every aspect of VCU’s operations as well as teaching, research, and service.

- Affirm VCU’s role as a major partner with the City of Richmond by orienting/organizing its considerable academic, research, and health resources and personnel to partner with the City and RVA to achieve their goals of building an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable city.

- Divest from financial instruments that invest in fossil fuel, including those portfolios managed by VCU Investment Management Company (VCIMCO), and demand that the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) do so as well.

- Use the Strategic Research Priorities Plan to incentivize timely and practical climate and environmental justice-centered research, similar to VCU’s model Covid-19 Rapid Research Funding Opportunity.
Monitor and report VCU’s compliance with Executive Order 77 calling for the phasing out of non-medical single-use plastic items by 25% each year, reaching a 100% reduction by 2025.

Implement best environmental protection practices, including but not limited to: building stormwater infrastructure (e.g., green roofs, rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling, bioretention tree wells, etc.); increasing urban tree canopy; meeting high-performance building standards that will achieve Net Zero Energy construction on new campus buildings; electrification of VCU's fleet; utilizing organic pest mitigation methods and fertilizers in the maintenance of VCU properties; utilize non-toxic cleaning custodial materials; shift to local agriculture and plant-based food sources; support circular economics in all areas.