

# Discussions with the Provost: Prototyping the future of higher education

Spring 2023

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The State of Academic Affairs discussions with faculty have been completed on the Monroe Park Campus. My thanks to all of the faculty in the colleges and schools for your participation in these discussions and for providing great insight for me and your deans regarding your ideas and opportunities, as well as your concerns about VCU’s future.

In addition to the questions answered live in our discussions, faculty submitted questions, which are compiled and categorized on the following pages. [The slides used at those presentations are available here.](#)

This document will be an important resource for the new Academic Repositioning Task Force in accomplishing their important work.

## CATEGORIES

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Are we being asked to do "more with less" when we are already running on empty? (College of Engineering)

***No. We are working with all units to establish transparent and equitable workload guidelines for all our faculty and asking everyone to find ways to do what they do more efficiently.***

Considering the nearly \$20 million dollar shortfall, where are the budget cuts most likely going to come from? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***VCU's shortfall, as of April 2023, is closer to \$59 million. Adjustments will be made university wide.***

How does the administration operationalize "low performing programs" that will lose their resources? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***The academic administration of each college and school works together with their faculty to make determinations for academic program resources.***

Does "re-imagining current organizational structures" include consolidating or breaking apart colleges and schools? (University College)

***VCU's academic enterprise is faced with two challenges - increasing efficiencies to mitigate budget shortfalls and increasing enrollment by offering new and exciting degree programs that are both attractive and meaningful to prospective students. Recommendations for academic repositioning at VCU will be in the hands of a soon-to-be-announced Task Force.***

If financial concerns continue to exist with SOE. Could we reduce the number of Associate Deans and/or department chairs by one? (School of Education)

***This decision would be at the discretion of the dean.***

### Grouped questions:

- Is the executive team considering forgoing their state raise this year to help offset the College's financial situation? (College of Engineering)
- In the military, the commanding officer eats last. At VCU, upper-level admin pays itself higher raises and then tells everyone else to cut costs. Change? (School of Education)

***Everything is on the table for the university's budget discussions.***

The number of highly paid administrators at VCU continues to grow while we struggle to hire faculty. How do we reconcile this dissonance? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***A study, requested by faculty, to review these concerns was completed by an independent consultant last year. The steering committee for the review, which included the president of the VCU Faculty Senate, selected six benchmark universities as comparators: University of Alabama-Birmingham; University of Cincinnati; University of Louisville; University of South Carolina-Columbia; George Mason University; and University of Virginia.***

***Five key findings emerged from this review:***

- ***VCU increased its management staff by 23% between 2016-2020, while tenured/tenure-track faculty increased by 3%. Despite this increase, VCU has a smaller ratio of management employees –roughly half – than most benchmarked universities (6% at VCU vs the median of 12%).***
- ***VCU has a smaller percentage of tenure-track faculty than all other peer benchmarks.***
- ***The percentage of VCU’s budget allocated to instructional expenses is above the median of benchmark comparators (42% at VCU vs the median of 33%).***
- ***The percentage of VCU’s budget allocated to institutional expenses is lower than the benchmark comparators’ median (9% at VCU vs the median of 12%).***
- ***Staffing within VCU’s colleges and administrative units is comparable to its benchmark comparators.***

***In summary, VCU spends more of its budget on instructional expenses, less on institutional infrastructure, and has only half the management employees of comparable institutions.***

Retention is a very important goal for VCU. Advisors are so valuable in this aspect. How is VCU going to retain high quality advisors (compensation)? (University College)

***A specific request for a market increase for academic advisors is in the proposed 23-24 VCU Budget.***

Grouped questions:

- Considering the frightening amount of staff and faculty turnover the College has seen over the past two years due to inadequate salary and compensation for work performed, as well as continued refusal to backfill previously held, essential positions (causing those of us who are left to take on additional roles), will there be any plans to increase salary ranges/provide raises for current staff and/or faculty members? One would think

we would like to retain the employees we do have at current. For example, my current salary at VCU is approximately \$20k less than the local average range for someone in the junior level of the same position I currently hold. (College of Engineering)

- The term "market value" is offensive. The value is determined by a system that knows who'll take cuts, who cares more for students than for their own fame & fortune. Would anybody else's "market value" suffer to balance out what teachers have given up already while others' value remained untouchable? (University College)
- Staff wages at VCU Engineering are significantly below market rates. What plans are there to proactively realign pay scales for current staff in order to retain talent that will help the college grow? (College of Engineering)

***The Governor has proposed a salary increase in the current budget, which we expect to be finalized in the summer. Additional details will be provided to VCU faculty and staff as information is available.***

***VCU takes very seriously the significance of job and performance appropriate salary ranges for both faculty and staff. Information and processes are in place to provide guidance to employees and supervisors in this area.***

***Classified Staff and University Academic Professionals should review information on [market-based salary ranges online](#). Talent@VCU and the performance evaluation process, in conjunction with established [job families](#) and [salary ranges](#), provide the opportunity for staff to discuss their current salary with their supervisor.***

***Faculty should review [VCU's Faculty Salary Administration Guidelines](#), which state that "Market-based salary structures are developed for faculty in each college/school/unit based on rank, discipline, and specialty. The deans/unit heads are provided with these salary structures and are required to effectively manage individual pay within the applicable salary structure. Education, experience, performance, and proficiency drive where an individual's salary position should be within the salary range."***

Grouped questions:

- There has been a considerable amount of staff turnover at the College over the past year or so, in various departments like Career Services, Recruiting & Enrollment and Marketing & Communications. These departments are critical to furthering the strategic goals of the College, as well as the University. Are there opportunities to fully staff these key departments, or, at the very least, backfill positions that have been turned over? (College of Engineering)
- Are there plans to help promote and support staff (fiscal, grant management) within units so that these folks can be promoted WITHIN units? (School of Education)

- How are we expected to work more efficiently? e.g. without significant staff support that is provided at other institutions (i.e. 1 admin assist 20+ faculty). (College of Engineering)

***These valid concerns are among the reasons that we must seek efficiencies and alignments throughout our schools and colleges. VCU's academic enterprise is faced with two challenges - increasing efficiencies and reducing costs to mitigate budget shortfalls and increasing enrollment by offering new and exciting degree programs that are both attractive and meaningful to prospective students. Recommendations for academic repositioning at VCU will be in the hands of a soon-to-be-announced Academic Repositioning Task Force.***

Are there plans to study work flows at VCU to eliminate bottlenecks, and/or to invest in administrative operations that are understaffed or undertrained? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***We are committed to identifying, reducing, and removing the barriers that unnecessarily prevent academic innovations from receiving the support and advocacy they deserve. Our policies and practices will receive the same level of scrutiny. Should you have ideas about specific circumstances, and solutions to improve them, please pass them along.***

VCU policy states that program/curricular decisions are faculty purview but that deans/chairs may close programs during exigency. Are we in an exigency? (School of Education)

***VCU is NOT in exigency. View the [Procedures for Declaration of Financial Emergency and Consequent Reduction, Reorganization, or Elimination of Programs Requiring Termination of Faculty Members](#) online.***

The best the colleges can do to address budget shortfalls is to increase enrollment, but with additional students, additional resources are needed. The call to increase enrollment, but also retention and graduation rates, but also save money everywhere you can feels like an unreasonable expectation. How do we do all that without the money for new faculty to teach more sections, more TAs, more advisors, more support staff, etc? How do you balance the budget without destroying the culture and personal well-being of the students, faculty, and staff of the College of Engineering? (College of Engineering)

***Increased enrollments bring increased resources via the VCU budget model, which will augment our ability to teach and better support the success of more students.***

How do you plan to evaluate administrative (e.g., HR employees) and administration (e.g., dean, associate dean) in a meaningful way & eliminate poor performers? (School of Business)

***All administrative employees, including deans and cabinet members, are evaluated based on annual performance goals, which are derived from a common rubric.***

## STUDENT ENROLLMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

I'm curious if you can provide any data about the role of retention vs. recruitment in terms of our enrollment woes -- it seems to me that recruitment is a major issue that needs to be addressed. (College of Humanities & Sciences)

***Through extensive marketing and recruitment efforts, VCU received a record number of applications (19,378) for our Fall 2022 first-year freshman class. In Virginia's competitive higher education landscape, converting admitted applicants to enrolled students (yield) remains a challenge.***

***VCU's yield rate (percent of admitted students who enroll) hit an all-time low of 24.3% during Covid. It has increased to 25.3% since then, but SEMSS continues to partner with the colleges and schools on both campuses to increase this rate in order to meet the university's enrollment goals. This partnership with academic units, which can include engagement with dynamic and caring faculty, is critical at this point in the recruitment process.***

***Overall enrollment at VCU is a balance of new student admissions, retention of continuing students, and successful progression/degree completion of continuing students. Quest 2028 metrics of success include reaching a 90% first-year retention rate for first-time/full-time freshmen, while also reaching a 78% 6-year graduation rate. These improved retention and graduation goals mean more students will be retained year to year while also graduating faster (sooner) with less debt. [The Student Success Theme in Quest 2028 articulates how we plan to accomplish these student success goals.](#)***

***For more detailed information on the admissions, enrollment, retention and graduation rates of each college/school, please visit the [Data Portal](#) located on the IRDS website. We encourage all university faculty and staff to engage with their Deans to discuss their targeted enrollment plans.***

Is there a plan to work with admissions regarding our first year retention? Students waitlisted at places like UVA and VT will not come to VCU, forcing us to accept students who are less prepared for higher education. What is our plan to increase retention by 10% with a student body that will be less prepared to succeed than previous cohorts? (College of Humanities & Sciences)



***The academic profile of VCU's first-year class has increased from an average high school GPA of 3.6 for Fall 2012 to an average high school GPA of 3.72 for Fall 2022. Other specifics for the Fall 2022 first-year class:***

***50% of all incoming first-year students brought in prior earned college credits through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or Dual Enrollment Programs.***

***The number of VCU freshmen who have completed AP exams ranks third among Virginia colleges.***

- ***1 in 3 are first-generation college students.***
- ***2 in 5 are underrepresented minorities.***
- ***1 in 3 are Pell eligible students***

***However, according to the Ruffalo Noel Levitz College Student Inventory, even with this increased academic profile, the confidence level of VCU's freshmen has steadily decreased over the past four years. Compared to prior years, students in our Fall 2022 freshman class expressed a decreased willingness to make necessary sacrifices for academic success and an increased belief that their academic abilities are at or below average. These dramatic national shifts in confidence and perceived value of higher education speak to the importance we must place on ensuring our courses and our curriculum provide opportunities for inclusiveness, student engagement, timely student feedback, and relevance to their career goals. We must harness innovations in technology to minimize faculty administrative tasks to return more time for 1:1 student interaction/feedback.***

Most CHS students aren't choosing to come to VCU because of our reputation as an R1 (obviously some programs do attract students for that reason) -- retaining them seems to require a renewed and meaningful investment in our teaching mission. I know there are a lot of cool initiatives you've launched for teaching, but the basics are things like class size, new hires, and even seemingly small things like re-introducing 1 hr/15 min. on-campus courses on MW (plus retaining and restaffing the staff students count on!) It doesn't seem like teaching is the priority based on some of the decisions that have been made over the last few years. This pertains to both term and tenured faculty. (College of Humanities & Sciences)

***The VCU scheduling grid currently includes MW 75 minute classes (7:30-8:45 am, 12:-1:15 pm, 2:00-3:15 pm and 3:30-4:45 pm, 5:30-6:45pm, and 7:15-8:30 p.m.). Course scheduling is driven by the schools/colleges, so additional questions should be directed to the department chairs and/or Dean's office. However, it is critical to offer courses on days/times and semester frequencies that are not only***

***desirable to students but also ensure timely degree progression according to the plans of study outlined in the VCU undergraduate bulletin.***

Continuous & never-ending growth in enrollments is impossible with the cliff plus and faculty and staff already stretched thin. How will this be addressed? (School of Education)

***VCU's enrollment goals are articulated in the university's Quest 2028 strategic plan. VCU seeks to serve 32,000 and reach a six-year graduation rate of at least 78%. Reaching those goals requires creativity and collaboration across our campuses. Currently, VCU's academic enterprise is faced with two challenges - increasing efficiencies to mitigate budget shortfalls and increasing enrollment by offering new and exciting degree programs that are both attractive and meaningful to prospective students. Recommendations for academic repositioning at VCU will be in the hands of a soon-to-be-announced Task Force.***

With increased undergrad class sizes, I'm concerned that we are privileging financial considerations over learning outcomes. What is the strategy for this? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***VCU's overall enrollment is a combination of multiple variables: student enrolled hours, student retention rates, students repeating failed/withdrawn classes, applications to our programs and the overall yield of those applicants, as well as general fluctuations in interest/demand in our programs. If one piece of this equation declines, other pieces of the equation need to counterbalance. This not only includes undergraduate programs, but graduate and professional programs as well. The VCU community must work across all components of the enrollment formula in order to achieve our strategic enrollment goals.***

Grouped questions:

- How will VCU address the concerns of the academic advisor compensation study given the high importance of the academic advisor role in student success? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Retention is a very important goal for VCU. Advisors are so valuable in this aspect. How is VCU going to retain high quality advisors (compensation)? (University College)

***VCU completed its comprehensive study regarding advisor classification, compensation, and future path forward to ensure VCU offers a vibrant advising foundation of care and support for both students and our staff. In December 2022, 33% of the advising community received reclassifications/compensation to address inaccurate job slotting. The VCU advising community, along with Deans and Associate Deans across campus, are currently in the final stages of finalizing and approving***



***policies that support stronger advising partnership as well as a career ladder that aligns and details career development milestones and associated pay adjustments, to ensure we retain and support advisors in their critical student success roles. This Spring, a funding request was presented to the University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC) that outlined and requested refreshed pay ranges and proposed salary increases to ensure the successful retention and recruitment of VCU's advisor corps. While this request is in the proposed university budget, that budget has not yet been approved.***

***Looking forward, VCU is also developing "VCU Advising 2.0" - which will further outline additional opportunities to strengthen the processes, support mechanisms, and enhanced leadership throughout the advising structure.***

Given the fiscal uncertainty, how do we realistically balance research and supporting students as a MSI institution, many who require additional support? (University College)

***VCU continues to innovate and succeed at securing additional funding resources to support the uncommon students we pride ourselves on recruiting and retaining. Examples of programs funded through private, state and federal resources include: [TRIO programs](#), [McNair Scholars](#), [Mellon Pathways to the Arts and Humanities Program](#), [Howard Hughes Medical Institute \(HHMI\) Excellence program](#), and [You First](#). VCU is also leveraging alumni and donor giving to fund critical career development opportunities like the [Internship Funding Program](#), which allows students to take on unpaid/underpaid internships while still being able to pay for their housing, childcare, professional attire, supplies, etc.***

Student mental health is at an all time low. What is the plan to invest more in mental health services? (University College)

***One of the greatest challenges in addressing student mental health needs nationally is related to recruiting and retaining mental health staff – master's level clinicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and others. A national survey of counseling center staff indicated that staff leave due to low salaries, work conditions (increased student clinical acuity and increased numbers of students seeking assistance), and a desire to leave the profession. Currently, university counseling centers are among the lowest paid workplaces for clinicians who are very much in demand. We have created a currently unfunded proposal to align clinician salaries to professional salary midpoints to address staff recruitment and retention issues. We have also proposed an unfunded staffing plan to increase crisis intake appointments and triage.***

***We have continued to look at technological supplements to address student mental health needs. This year we initiated TimelyCare to extend service hours and provider choice. Efforts to increase the visibility of this service option are ongoing. A funding proposal has been submitted for an online chat community platform in recognition of students seeking assistance and support from peers.***

***Kognito, an online conversation simulation, was secured this year to assist faculty and staff in recognizing signs of distress, techniques to discuss concerns, and appropriate referral resources. We are currently exploring some more systemic approaches to health and wellness initiatives on other university campuses in recognition of the reality that health and wellness, including mental health, is the responsibility of our entire university community, not just a handful of offices across campus.***

RE: enrollment & competitive, Any discussions 2 offer out-of-state students in-state tuition 4 those who want to enroll online? UVA does. Why would they choose VCU? (School of Education)

***VCU continues to explore the best tuition model for our online undergraduate programs, both in-state and out-of-state.***

## FACULTY AFFAIRS

With increasing reliance on adjuncts for teaching (versus hiring new full time faculty), how do we develop innovative & new degree programs? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***Our strategy for faculty hiring is to increase the number of full-time faculty.***

Grouped questions:

- How do we maintain retention of students amidst increasingly larger class sizes & increased workloads for faculty? Where does this fit into a "culture of care"? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Can you please describe exactly what a "culture of care" looks like at VCU? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***For faculty, a culture of care involves equitable teaching loads, research, scholarship and overall career development opportunities, professional mentoring and an overall sense of belonging and support. This is not something that is only accomplished through the Office of the Provost. It involves the deans, the department chairs and fellow faculty members. It requires a concerted effort***

***to work collaboratively and collegially. The various resources that are, and will be, made available from the Provost's Office can be accessed by faculty.***

VCU has a reputation for not being able to retain faculty of color, esp black women. What are we doing to materially support retention of faculty of color? (University College)

***The [Office of the Provost](#) provides numerous resources designed to support faculty retention. The [Faculty Peer Mentoring Program](#) and the [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#) have a particular focus on URM faculty. As of Fall 2022, VCU has 7.9% Black faculty, compared to 4.6% at George Mason University, 4.1% at University of Virginia, and 3.4% at Virginia Tech. We plan to continue diversifying faculty using both opportunity hiring and cluster hiring. Being cognizant of retention, we have planned some initiatives from the Provost's Office starting with the inaugural conference for term faculty. Additional programs will include a mentoring initiative for assistant and associate professors as well as a conference for associate professors. We hope faculty will participate and engage in these initiatives as well as provide constructive feedback to further enhance their quality.***

Could you talk about university hiring plans and where the College fits into those plans? Thank you! (By that I mean hiring faculty.) (College of Humanities & Sciences)

***Faculty hires are determined by the deans. In addition, we are planning for cluster hires across disciplines that we expect will foster interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Cluster hires will also be a means to diversify faculty.***

A couple of staff members want to know if there is a possibility of someone with a non-engineering background to get a faculty position at the VCU College of Engineering? Thank you (College of Engineering)

***The university and the college must meet specific accreditation standards, which often dictate the credentials needed by faculty. Your dean is the best person to answer this question.***

Grouped questions:

- Will the faculty mentorship program return for the 2023-2024 school year? (University College)
- What is a mentorship program going to look like for our faculty? Existing programs have not been effective. (College of Engineering)

***Yes. Faculty Affairs in the Office of the Provost is putting together a mentoring program, particularly for assistant and associate professors that we expect to announce at the start of fall 2023.***

Could you say more to explain what "modernizing promotion policies" means? (University College)

***The University P&T policy is almost a decade old and needs to be updated. We need greater clarity in the structure/process and criteria to recognize the varied contributions of the faculty. We also need to better ensure equitable academic excellence standards across the institution commensurate with our top-50 R1 status.***

Do you plan to evaluate teaching using real quality metrics? Student feedback is biased and not enough. (College of Engineering)

***Yes. We will revisit consideration of a more holistic approach to considering teaching effectiveness.***

Grouped questions:

- What does "faculty excellence" mean for an R1 that still does not have the resources or supports of a typical R1 in terms of teaching loads and research support. (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Does "strengthen excellence" = raise expectations? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***Units are developing equitable and discipline-appropriate workload guidelines for all faculty balancing teaching, research and service in a manner that is commensurate to a top-50 R1 University like VCU. And yes, strengthening excellence does mean raising expectations and measuring performance via continuous assessment of institutional productivity relative to aspirational peer institutions***

Grouped questions:

- Faculty retention is an important part of excellence and innovation. What is VCU doing to ensure annual merit pay increases that help retain exemplary faculty? (School of Education)
- High quality work is oftentimes invisible or unrecognized despite efforts to demonstrate it. How can we acknowledge it in meaningful and tangible ways? (University College)
- Innovation is great! But it needs to be sustainable and compensated. What commitments does the provost's office have for recognizing/compensating innovation? Re: tying performance to compensation, what metrics will be used to evaluate teaching innovation outside student evaluations? (University College)
- Teaching performance evaluations have historically been less focused (& valued) than research. What specific changes will be made to address this? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

- How will you calibrate differences in discipline & methodology (ie, stem vs non stem; community engaged research, qualitative, etc) in evaluating output, etc (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***Evaluating output/performance is discipline-based and units are best placed to put that in place. Additionally, performance evaluations are based on the aforementioned faculty workloads laid out for research, teaching, and service. The soon to be launched Fall 2023 semester P&T Task Force will consider ways and means for integrating innovation in teaching as part of the criteria.***

Grouped questions:

- The presentation mentioned post tenure review. Does VCU envision universal post tenure review or triggered review? Based on what kind of triggers? (School of Education)
- What is the purpose of the post-tenure review? If someone receives a bad review post-tenure, could they lose tenure? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***The current post-tenure review process is vague. So, in addition to the P&T policy Task Force, we will be putting together a faculty committee to consider annual reviews for all faculty, including a post-tenure review. The committee will lay out the implementation strategy including the consequences for a weak/poor review. Post tenure review would be part of the annual review process and will be universal. It will ensure faculty performance and productivity continue.***

Could you discuss how restructuring the Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness and Success prioritizes VCUs commitment to equity and diversity? (University College)

***This was outlined in President Rao's email on Feb. 17.***

How will the changes to Academic Affairs impact Gen Ed, and how does Gen Ed fit with the emphasis on “academic strategy” for the revised the SVP position? (University College)

***General Education is a crucial part of academic strategy, as is the entirety of the university's curriculum. While the new position is still being structured, I expect to get input from the teams and committees that work closely with the Academic Affairs unit regarding priorities and needs.***

## TEACHING

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### Grouped questions:

- Most CHS students aren't choosing to come to VCU because of our reputation as an R1 (obviously some programs do attract students for that reason) -- retaining them seems to require a renewed and meaningful investment in our teaching mission. I know there are a lot of cool initiatives you've launched for teaching, but the basics are things like class size, new hires, and even seemingly small things like re-introducing 1 hr/15 min. on-campus courses on MW (plus retaining and restaffing the staff students count on!) It doesn't seem like teaching is the priority based on some of the decisions that have been made over the last few years. This pertains to both term and tenured faculty. (College of Humanities & Sciences)
- Teachers disseminate knowledge w/thousands of students, yet this is worth much less compared to research-track faculty (financially & in job stability). Why? (University College)

***First, teaching is a priority at VCU. Performance standards and goals for tenure-track faculty - in order to achieve promotion and tenure - are multi-faceted and based on workloads and level of achievement. The University promotion and Tenure policy and units guidelines, lay out the criteria for accomplishments in the areas of teaching, research and service. The Faculty Affairs unit in the Office of the Provost is creating multiple opportunities for focused teaching support. On May 8, the first annual conference for non tenure track faculty/term faculty took place with a focus on the unique aspects of term faculty needs and career trajectories.***

## TERM FACULTY

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### Grouped questions:

- How do we reconcile "students deserve to be taught by scholars and researchers" with increasing number of term faculty without research responsibilities? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Has the administration given any consideration on how to better recognize and leverage the expertise of term faculty that are already here? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)



- Term faculty are most impacted by increased class sizes. What can be done to support term faculty? Term faculty have one year contracts--can that be changed? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- With continued budget cuts, I'd love to hear more about the plan for supporting and retaining term faculty with heavy teaching loads. (University College)
- What's an example you could share of "excellent" work for term, teaching faculty? (University College)

***The Office of the Provost will be offering professional development opportunities for term faculty, such as the inaugural conference for non tenure track/term faculty that was held on May 8, 2023. Decisions on budget cuts are made at the unit level and so they would be best placed to find ways to support term faculty with heavy teaching loads. Some examples: innovation in teaching, experimentation, mentoring, contributing to experiential learning.***

Grouped questions:

- In light of the financial conditions, has there any consideration in regards to increasing the teaching loads of tenure-track/tenured faculty members? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Faculty responsibilities have shifted to student enrollment & retention, yet workload expectations & performance metrics remain the same. Plans to change this? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- In terms of "meaningful workload", how are we to balance the needs of the academic programs with the individual workloads of faculty? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- The SOE Dean's Office has proposed increasing faculty teaching loads by 25%. How do we square that with the mission around research excellence and productivity? (School of Education)
- Our course loads and caps are much higher than nationally recommended. What are steps to lower these so we can serve our students more fully? (University College)
- Our recent workload policy discussion raised 2 issues: 1) We are overworking, with excessive service and other work on top of a full teaching load. 2) Many faculty fear not "looking busy" as we feel our positions are precarious. Can you offer guidance re focusing energy on teaching vs. other work? (University College)
- Re: the workload policy we've been asked to write (ex. 36 hrs teaching/4 service), many are worried: will/how this be measured, evaluated, or enforced? (University College)
- Re ur q in mtg: Course cap: ideal is 15 (NCTE & CCCC, quick google). Our cap is abt to be 21. Course load data: ideal is 3/3 (external review). Ours is 4/4. (University College)

***Units are developing equitable and discipline-appropriate workload guidelines for all faculty balancing teaching, research and service in a***

*manner that is commensurate to a top-50 R1 University like VCU. These guidelines will serve as the basis for evaluating output/performance..*

## ONLINE

What is your vision for determining course delivery modality? Based on instructor preference? Program preference? School preference? Student poll? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***We maintain that 70-75% of class sections should have some face-to-face component (inclusive of the hybrid modality). This is a commitment we have made to our students and their families who are paying for an in-person education. Faculty should work with their department chairs and deans to ensure the appropriate mix of modalities is met.***

We get pressure for more online programs from admin. However, our technology infrastructure and online course support is insufficient. How can VCU address this? (School of Education)

***VCU Online provides support for faculty in developing online programs and individual online courses. If you are ready to build a course or courses and find that you do not have the resources you need, contact your department chair or dean. They can work with VCU Online to review and provide support. Please contact VCU Online with your needs. Additionally, we are reviewing current and future infrastructure technology needs to determine how best to support online program and course development..***

Grouped questions:

- After COVID, there was an emphasis on over 75% of the classes being offered in-person. Now, we are promoting our Hybrid, online programs. Why the sudden shift? Many of our students have multiple personal and professional commitments that keep them from coming to campus on occasion. Affording them the opportunity to take some courses online will allow them to be retained and to complete. (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- I feel like we get mixed signals re: online programs. “Yes: they’re key to future enrollment, No: we can’t have all those sections online” Also, an investment should be made in promoting & supporting our online pathway programs! (College of Humanities & Sciences)

***There is a difference between online courses and programs and hybrid courses and programs. In some cases, confusion over similar-sounding language has led programs to pursue different priorities creating an***

***uneven experience for the students who take classes across the disciplines.***

***Standalone online courses are taught entirely online. Hybrid courses are taught as a combination of online and in-person. Online can be synchronous or asynchronous and are part of a larger portfolio of courses that a student may take toward the requirements of an onsite degree program. Online programs are a series of online courses that meet the requirements for a degree program. A third modality, hyflex, is where some students can be in the classroom and others can be online simultaneously.***

***Our greatest opportunity for fully online programs that will lead to enrollment growth lies in graduate studies, professional education, and re-skilling and upskilling degrees and certificates that will expand our student base by targeting non-traditional learners. Online programs are vital for meeting our recruitment goals, but also for providing opportunities for students who are not able to achieve their academic goals in the traditional on-campus format – especially those who work fulltime and seek a way to advance in their career.***

How does VCU make a case for the proven value of F2F education, campus culture, and community engagement while also increasing investment in online education? (University College)

***Face to face education and online education are both important options to ensure an educated citizenry and ensure job skills that will meet the demand of the job market into the future. Providing students the option of different modalities will enhance student satisfaction, retention, and completion.***

The School of Business has developed online degrees. How will your office support growth through central recruiting/services to ease and boost enrollment? (School of Business)

***Admissions applications for fall 2024 are giving prospective students the option of applying directly into a fully online program. In addition, we are currently working on adding selected undergraduate online degree programs for the Fall 2024 semester. This includes mapping out the support services needed for implementation.***

To what degree does your office favor and would be willing to finance VCU's On-Line course offerings/expansion - into India, Latin America, Africa, etc.? (School of Business)

***International growth in our online programs would require a partnership between VCU Online and the Global Education Office to ensure that strategic priorities align. Our current online programs are available internationally within the***

*parameters established by the USDOE and other governmental agencies for online students who do not attend in person classes in the United States.*

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

VCU is a public uni and community-engaged & R1. How do you reconcile these missions with an entrepreneurial mindset and serving those who don't generate \$? (School of Education)

***An entrepreneurial mindset is not just about making money or starting a business. An entrepreneurial mindset, as defined so succinctly by the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), "is a set of skills that enable people to identify and make the most of opportunities, overcome and learn from setbacks, and succeed in a variety of settings." These are the very skills that we seek to instill in our students. And each of us MUST think in these terms in order to move forward.***

PhD programs require competitive funding. Besides grants, we need fellowship and development support. How might we partner with the Provost to accomplish this? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***The Provost's office is working to obtain external evaluations for each program, which could emphasize program strengths and provide advice to programs on external sources of funding. Colleges/Schools can coordinate development activities with the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs to explore potential donor opportunities if they haven't already established these fellowships. Based on donor interest, the fellowships could be academic and merit-based, research-based or targeted.***

To recruit more Ph.D. students, we need more stability and certainty in the area of graduate assistantships. What is VCU central doing to address this concern? (School of Education)

***The Graduate School is looking into alternative funding mechanisms for out-of-state PhD to increase stability for students and create operational efficiencies. Additional information is forthcoming.***

Plans for strategic cluster hires for transdisciplinary research? What about bringing together researchers interested in or doing such work already? (Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs)

***Both the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation provide opportunities for faculty to develop relationships among peers that can result in collaboration in both research and scholarship. In fact, we have set up two joint funding sources that focus on interdisciplinary research projects: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Fund and the Transformative***

***Learning Fund: Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP). In addition to that, the iCubed program, which continues to support 77 scholars in eight different transdisciplinary cores, will continue the cluster hiring practices that built and sustain it. We plan to expand the iCubed model to advance cluster hires in areas aligned with the OneVCU strategic plan.***

What are the plans to build capacity for SOE to become innovative? (School of Education)

***This is a discussion that faculty should have with your dean.***

Is VCU considering partnering with any regional colleges that may face closure? (School of Education)

***I am not aware of any such discussions.***

What about context? Closing a program in Russian literature is different than closing a program to train special education teachers. Right? (School of Education)

***While the subject matter and intended outcomes may be important to us in a specific discipline, decisions to open, close or alter an academic program must be made using available data and considerations around areas such as student interest, market needs, future trends and cost effectiveness.***

In what ways can Focused Inquiry support the QEP (Scaling Undergraduate Research at VCU)? (University College)

***There is a natural connection between Focused Inquiry and undergraduate research. I encourage you to contact the QEP Planning and Implementation Committee to discuss specifics.***

SOE faculty continue to have disagreements b/c we lack shared understanding of shared governance. How is the uni handling issues of shared governance? (School of Education)

***VCU's [shared governance philosophy is available online.](#)***

How do you evaluate+reward research output in maintaining/contributing to VCU's R1 status when SoB scholarship has historically not been based on grant funding? (School of Business)

***Grant funding and outcomes are an important part of our R1 status. Discipline specific metrics for research and scholarship impact should be discussed and decided within the unit. Faculty annual reviews as well as P&T reviews should consider discipline specific criteria.***

What is the role of philanthropy in increasing revenue? It is only mentioned without any detail in Quest 2028. (School of Business)

**University fundraising is directed by the office of Development and Alumni Relations. Every year, colleges, schools and units set fundraising targets to support the goals of Quest 2028. Currently VCU is preparing to launch an ambitious philanthropy campaign to address our need for student scholarships, faculty support, the research enterprise, and programmatic operations.**

## BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

Grouped questions:

- Obstacles to innovation in the provost's office: IRB, curriculum approvals, IP, tuition rates, access to cloud and AI resources (e.g., AWS, ChatGPT). (School of Business)
- If research productivity and funding are priorities, how is VCU working to improve our research infrastructure including pre award, post award, and IRB? (School of Education)
- VCU wants us to engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work, yet the infrastructure at VCU makes this work extremely hard to do (i.e., IRB, OSP). (School of Education)
- We often have to work in systems that don't always work in synchrony and often have contradictory requirements. How can faculty be innovative with the system? (School of Education)
- The policy framework at VCU is weak and lacks coherence. Many policies need to be updated. What is the timeline for substantive updates long overdue?? (School of Education)
- How do we begin to develop attractive certs, professional degrees, etc when @ the same time SCHEV process is prohibitively onerous (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)

***During my visits to the colleges and schools throughout the spring semester, several barriers have been brought to my attention that are potentially stifling or delaying innovation - these processes and policies will be addressed by my office and I am thankful to those faculty who have brought their frustrations forward. I encourage you to either discuss this with your dean and/or send your concerns to me.***

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Grouped questions:

- There have been rumblings of a STEM-only College, which would merge CHS science/math and engineering units but separate the sciences and humanities. Yet, the



vision of higher ed that you share necessitates more integration, enhanced interdisciplinarity, and greater cooperation among units (which the current budget model already disincentivizes). Do you support (or are you considering) the creation of a STEM College? (College of Humanities & Sciences)

- Do you think these changes at VCU will likely lead to greater centralization, or greater decentralization? (Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs)
- Can you say more about how leaders envision reimagining org structures? (School of Education)
- Seems like the future of higher education is experiential learning. Our space & class size make this challenging. How do we change the structural model? (School of Business)

***The soon-to-be announced Academic Repositioning Task Force will be charged with repositioning VCU's academic structure. Using a student-centered approach, the task force should consider the number of, and structure of, VCU's academic units, offering recommendations designed to maximize operational efficiencies and collaboration between programs, facilitate more cross-unit engagement and transdisciplinary research opportunities for our faculty, and create new career pathways for preparing our students to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Trust and transparency are the guiding principles of this work.***

What are the specific targets to "generate more revenue and curb costs, as well as critically review how we currently use existing resources"? (School of Business)

***Every aspect of the university is being reviewed to curb costs. Every unit, both academic and non-academic, is preparing for budget cuts. The Academic Restructuring Task Force - while focusing on the academic structure of the university - will be an important step in determining how and where we can share services to the benefit of all areas - lowering costs and increasing efficiencies.***