

VCU State of Academic Affairs

Prototyping the Future of Higher Education

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VCU

As an R1 institution we are not only in the business of disseminating knowledge but also producing new knowledge through research, scholarship and art making and translating this knowledge to improve the lives of all humans.



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A “*perfect storm*” for higher education



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A New Higher Education Landscape

Drivers of the Enrollment Challenge



Declining
birthrates



Financial
concerns



Questions about the
value of college

The pool of likely students is expected
to become much smaller and more
racially diverse.



- Some colleges will have to make difficult choices about their enrollment practices, academic offerings, and makeup of their student body.

- The most-selective private colleges and public flagships are expected to fare the best.

- Colleges cannot control demographics but can improve retention and graduation rates.



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Workforce for the AI-driven Economy

THE SECOND MACHINE AGE

WORK, PROGRESS, AND PROSPERITY
IN A TIME OF
BRILLIANT TECHNOLOGIES

ERIK BRYNJOLFSSON
ANDREW McAFEE

Digital technologies are doing for **human brainpower** what the **steam engine** and related technologies did for **human muscle** power during the Industrial Revolution....

...It's a very big deal. But how exactly it will play out is **uncertain**

Andrew McAfee



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Top 10 skills of 2025



Analytical thinking and innovation



Active learning and learning strategies



Complex problem-solving



Critical thinking and analysis



Creativity, originality and initiative



Leadership and social influence



Technology use, monitoring and control



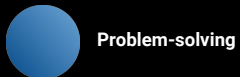
Technology design and programming



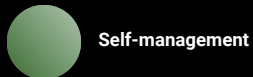
Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility



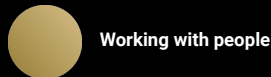
Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation



Problem-solving



Self-management



Working with people



Technology use and development

How do we prepare for a future that we can't predict?

Invent the future by
innovating, taking
risks and learning
from failure



Ensuring fiscal sustainability in the face of great uncertainty

- **Institute a culture of accountability and performance excellence**
 - Discipline-appropriate workload guidelines for all
 - Meaningful performance reviews
- **Improve efficiencies and streamline our operations**
 - Strategic resource sharing across units
 - Data-driven reallocation of resources from low-performing programs to support growth areas
- **Re-imagine current organizational structures**
 - Strategically realign to focus on areas supporting emerging student and research needs
 - Break silos and create an environment where cross-disciplinary innovation can thrive
- **Become entrepreneurial to generate the revenue we need to thrive**
 - Student mix: out-of-state, international, non-traditional learners
 - Grow masters and professional degrees
 - Flexible offerings through skill-building certificates and stackable credentials
 - Online education
 - Reward and incentivize creative revenue generation

**Augmenting the value of the VCU
educational experience and
setting ourselves apart**

- **Advance educational paradigms that prepare our students for the future of work**
 - **Curricular innovation**: Introduce foundational literacies in our GenEd
 - **A new humanities/arts/social sciences trained student**: Proficient in the basics of computational and entrepreneurial thinking but also possessing the higher-level cognitive skills intelligent machines will not be able to replicate in the future
 - **Scale the da Vinci Center paradigm** across the entire academic enterprise via transdisciplinary vertically integrated projects to train life-long learners, creative problem solvers & entrepreneurs
- **Culture of care for student success**: Collectively commit to work harder, more strategically and deliberately to ensure our students graduate on time and with meaningful degrees
 - **Six year graduation rate** goal for 2028: 78%
 - Address key bottleneck courses with **high DFW** rates to improve student learning through instructional redesign of courses and the use of technology
 - **Student advice and guidance** as the key building block for our culture of care
 - **Faculty-student engagement** in and outside of the classroom critical component of our culture of care.
- **Retention – Retention – Retention!**

**Elevating faculty excellence and
career success through a culture
of care**

- **Diversity driving excellence**
 - Strategies to **recruit, mentor and proactively retain** URM and all our faculty
 - A collective effort involving ALL of us
- **Strengthen the excellence bar and support faculty throughout their careers**
 - Transparent discipline-specific workload guidelines and meaningful annual reviews
 - Modernize promotion and tenure process to strengthen excellence and recognize faculty contributions to educational innovation, entrepreneurship and community engagement
 - Post-tenure review process to ensure long and fulfilling careers for all our faculty
- **Create an environment where transdisciplinary collaborations thrive**
 - Strategic cluster hires of faculty to support transdisciplinary innovation
 - Re-imagine organizational structures within and across units
 - Incentivize through seed grants big ideas and large-scale research projects
 - Support non-STEM disciplines in the arts, humanities and social sciences
 - Engage undergraduate students in transdisciplinary research
 - Strengthen the quality of our PhD programs
- **Ongoing strategic planning in all units provides a unique opportunity to re-imagine the future of VCU**

VCU is being recognized by our peers for our excellence and achievements

Top 30

**MOST INNOVATIVE
PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

U.S. NEWS

Top 20%

**GLOBAL UNIVERSITY FOR
RESEARCH IMPACT
AND SCHOLARLY
PRODUCTIVITY**

U.S. NEWS GLOBAL RANKINGS

#3

**GLOBAL UNIVERSITY
IN VIRGINIA**

U.S. NEWS GLOBAL RANKINGS

Top 50

**PUBLIC NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
FOR RESEARCH**

NSF HERD