Preamble:

The vision for this strategic direction is to be internationally recognized for improving the world and transforming lives through a world-class faculty. Attaining this vision requires development of a world-class faculty and subsequently local, national and international public recognition.

The vision was developed by asking a series of questions beginning with “Why develop and sustain a world-class faculty?” The method led the committee to drill down to the core value of a world-class faculty. The committee also questioned whether we were to address entire faculty, including the administrative faculty, or whether our purview was the teaching and research faculty. The proposed vision applies to the entire faculty; however, the majority of the work completed by the committee thus far has been focused on the teaching and research faculty.

The committee attempted to define what is meant by world-class. The term world-class faculty can be confusing depending on the context of the associated university. The initial definition developed was “a world-class faculty can compete for positions with the best institutions in the world – faculty who set the standards for other faculty.” When this definition is placed in the context of the mission of Virginia Commonwealth University, it may be interpreted that by developing and sustaining a world-class faculty, VCU may not remain true to its urban mission of being “Virginia’s university.” The committee considered changing the strategic direction to “outstanding” rather than “world-class” faculty. A solution to the apparent incongruence was found by placing the context of a world-class faculty at VCU to mean world-class among the universities in the world with missions similar to VCU’s. The revised definition of world-class faculty became “a world-class faculty can compete for positions with the best urban peer institutions in the world that have a similar mission of service to the community – faculty who set the standards for other faculty.”

One of the compelling reasons for VCU to want to have a world-class faculty is VCU’s focus on a learning-centered research institution. It is not only the students who learn at a learning-centered institution. Faculty – whether they are conducting research, teaching our students, serving the university or the larger community, or caring for patients – also are learners who transform the lives of others and improve the world.

Half of Virginia Commonwealth University’s faculty are over the age of 50, and a third of its faculty are over the age of 60. While these demographics provide VCU with the loss of expertise in many disciplines, it also provides an unprecedented opportunity to hire the faculty of 2020. As the university hires large numbers of young faculty to replace those with many years of experience, the university will change in ways as yet unknown.
If the demographics of Ph.D. recipients are indicators of the demographics of future faculty, VCU will increase the proportion of female faculty, for females now represent approximately 50% of all doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., D.D.S, Pharm.D.) recipients. Since female students outnumber male students, the faculty will become more like the student body. The proportion of minority Ph.D. recipients, however, has not grown as rapidly as the proportion of female Ph.D. recipients, and VCU will need to work diligently to increase the proportion of minority faculty.

Finally the committee made four observations. First, that there was no home for discussion of staff or of staff development in the strategic planning process. This working group is committed to the welfare and development of all of VCU’s employees and recognizes the criticality of the roles of classified/support staff.

Secondly, that VCU’s current set of peer institutions are not widely perceived as appropriate, particular to where VCU intends to be in 2020.

The third observation was that VCU will need to increase the visibility of faculty accomplishments to truly achieve the goal of a recognized world-class faculty.

The final observation is a recommendation that as the draft strategic plan is written, an assessment of what the environment in 2020 will look like be taken into account.

A series of proposed initiatives are in the next section along with the current state, which in some instances are the barriers to reaching the goal. Strategies toward reaching the intended outcomes, constraints toward reaching them, and accountability factors are included for each outcome. Additional detail on several initiatives is found in an attached appendix.

**Strategic Initiatives:**

1. **Improve the infrastructure to support the work of the faculty**

   **Intended outcome.** The intended outcome for this initiative is for VCU to have outstanding infrastructure to support faculty work and to improve work efficiency so faculty may produce more research and scholarship. Improving the infrastructure for faculty work will lead to improved academic culture and collegiality across the university and to increased faculty engagement in interdisciplinary research and teaching. Another intended outcome is to dispel the incongruence perceived by some faculty members between the espoused value of the faculty and the actions taken by VCU to support the faculty. Infrastructure issues include five general areas: libraries, technology, research space, staff, facilities, and graduate students and post docs. A fuller discussion of the rationale and other strategies to support this outcome are included in the appendix.
Libraries. VCU should:
• Create a top-100 library system that is a member of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL): This action should be completed in the near term, within the first five years of the Plan; and
• Upgrade and expand library space: In the first five years of the Plan, VCU should fund and schedule for construction the Master Site Plan addition proposal for James Branch Cabell Library.

Technology. VCU should:
• Make available Academic Technology that provides outstanding support for research, the increasing number of faculty who use technology in the classroom, course management software (Blackboard), high bandwidth, and high-performance computing resources that faculty need for their work. Particularly important over the long range of VCU2020 is flexibility to adopt new technologies into the network quickly, not as pioneers but as reasonably early adopters;
• Make available Administrative Information Technology that provides consistent, reliable technology to support the university’s needs, including an unobtrusive network transportation and application environment comparable to that of major research universities in the U.S.;
• Equip classrooms, laboratories, patient-care areas and studios with state-of-the-art technology and other learning aids; and
• Develop a mechanism for the university to track its partially and fully distant courses and to encourage the development of others. Currently the university does not even have a record of how many courses (or sections) are taught by distance education.

Research space. VCU should:
• Plan and create laboratory space commensurate with a Carnegie Research-1 institution by accomplishing a space profile similar to that at peer institutions; and
• Create clear, consistent, and enforced policies and procedures for identifying and allocating all research space, and for reassigning research space. Research space is best controlled by the Provost and Vice President for Health Sciences in collaboration with the deans.

Staff support. VCU should:
• Provide sufficient quantity staff to support faculty and students in their pursuit of knowledge.
• A specialized area of staff support that should be improved is in grant writing, IRB applications, sponsored programs processing, fund raising and alumni affairs, marketing and public relations; and
• Staff development should be emphasized to support the teaching and research of the faculty. The role of well educated and highly skilled classified staff cannot be overemphasized.
Facilities. VCU should:
- Provide state-of-the-art classrooms with a variety of sizes and design that allow maximum flexibility and effectiveness of different formats of instruction;
- Teaching space management system and software should be implemented to improve the utilization of classrooms, teaching laboratories and conference facilities; and
- Improve housekeeping and facilities maintenance. In particular, anecdotes abound regarding the use of contract staff to carry out facilities repair. VCU should consider expanding internal facilities staff to deal adequately with the particulars of the many older, non-standard buildings that house VCU faculty and research operations. VCU also needs to improve its responsiveness in holding contractors responsible for contracted performance standards.

Graduate students and post docs. VCU should:
- Improve and expand recruitment of top graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level;
- Create competitive graduate student stipends to enhance the quality and numbers of graduate students, especially doctoral students;
- Provide increased tuition support for graduate students, especially tuition funding for out-of-state graduate students to minimize impact upon faculty research grants;
- Provide support programs for academic career preparation, including institutionalizing and expanding the Preparing Future Faculty program, expanding CTE initiatives for graduate students, funding Graduate School mentorship training programs;
- Enhance benefits and services (such as health insurance and improved office space) for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows;
- Increase recognition of the relationship between graduate students and faculty mentors by gestures such as having mentors hood their students at commencement;
- Create university-wide oversight for hiring and supervising post-docs, and develop consistency in compensation and benefits packages; and
- Facilitate the use of graduate students to teach undergraduate courses to provide more time for faculty to spend in research and scholarship work.

Constraints to reaching the intended outcome. Even though VCU has constructed new classroom and laboratory buildings and has renovated others, including animal laboratories, our current research, teaching, and space is very limited, and few spaces exist in which to teach large groups of students. Construction and renovation of facilities is dependent upon adequate state funding (or private fund-raising), and that funding often is limited. As VCU recruits, retains, and develops a world-class faculty focused on its urban mission, this faculty will interact with AIT, AT, Library staff, facilities staff, housekeeping staff, etc.; it is imperative that VCU recruit, develop, and retain the best staff possible and to establish a system of support within and between these groups with the goal to support teaching, research, patient care, and service.
Accountability/assessment measures.

- Increased square feet of research, classroom, laboratory, and office space;
- Membership in ARL;
- Increased number of large classrooms and classrooms with state-of-the-art technology for teaching;
- Seamless integration of administrative technology systems including classroom and facilities management systems;
- Increased percentage of staff with bachelors and masters degrees;
- Increased hours of staff development participation;
- Increased number of additional graduate teaching/research assistantships and increased stipend levels to bring VCU in line with peer institutions;
- Increased number of students who are prepared through the Preparing Future Faculty program (including those prepared via the Preparing Future Faculty in the Professions);
- Increased number of enrolled doctoral graduate students;
- Increased number of doctoral students who complete their programs;
- Decreased number of years to degree, especially for doctoral students;
- Decreased cost to faculty to support graduate students, especially out-of-state students;
- Increase in competitive stipend levels and competitive benefits, such as health insurance;
- Increased teaching by graduate students; and
- Increased research and scholarship by the faculty;

2. Strengthen faculty development opportunities and participation

**Intended outcome.** The intended outcome in this area is a well-prepared faculty who has encouragement for, multiple opportunities for, and rewards for improved teaching, research/scholarship, and service. In the area of teaching, VCU particularly needs to enhance the faculty’s ability to fully engage students in the process of learning. Recruitment and retention of junior faculty members should be a high priority for VCU to remain on the cutting edge. Lastly, international recognition of the faculty results from individual faculty members receiving major awards.

VCU already has a number of enablers to reach this outcome, for instance the Center for Teaching Excellence, New Faculty Mentoring Program, Academic Technology programs, Grace Harris Leadership Institute, AD Williams Research grants on the MCV Campus, College of Humanities and Sciences new chair orientation, and individual school and department programs.
VCU should:

- Expand support for the Center for Teaching Excellence to undertake new activities such as an integrated mentoring program for new faculty, faculty learning communities, service learning, distance education, use of technology, and promotion and tenure workshops to prepare new faculty for P/T expectations/requirements;
- Create a university wide-development program in teaching, research, and professional development to address the needs of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and new, mid-career, and senior faculty; managed centrally/implemented collaboratively to assist all schools with faculty development that are discipline specific;
- Implement development programs for new and continuing department chairs to improve their effectiveness in mentoring and evaluating faculty. It important for chairs to stay current on faculty policies and communicate this information to their faculty. VCU needs to develop not only internal programs for department chairs and other mid-level leaders, it also needs to provide funds for these leaders to participate in development conferences and programs offered on a national level;
- Educate, build teams, and mentor outreach scholars in “best practices” via a range of professional development activities with national experts;
- Implement research training, design and data analyses for faculty (perhaps something along lines of what has been done for teaching, i.e., a Center for Research Excellence) and increase seed money support and grant writing assistance to increase the number of proposals for external funding;
- Increase training in gender and diversity issues to promote effective recruitment, selection, and retention of female and minority faculty and staff;
- Create specific programs that target the career development and engagement of junior faculty
- Improve dissemination of information on the Study-Research Leave Policy and other opportunities for faculty development;
- Provide travel funding for professional development opportunities, especially for new faculty to present papers, make national contacts, and showcase their research;
- Fully fund and staff the Preparing Future Faculty program; and
- Institute a special program to assist faculty to compete successfully for major national and international awards.

Constraints to reaching the intended outcomes. VCU’s support of centralized faculty development programs is fairly new, with the CTE beginning in 2001, and limited training programs for research beginning shortly thereafter. Funding has limited the staff and resources for new and expanded initiatives. Insufficient release time for new and continuing faculty to attend training and for senior faculty to serve as mentors limits faculty development.
Accountability/assessment measures
- Increased faculty participation in development offerings;
- Increased percentage of new faculty with mentors;
- Improved teaching evaluations of faculty;
- Increased funded grants among new faculty;
- Increased community service among faculty;
- Increased interdisciplinary collaboration;
- Increased visibility of faculty and their research;
- Number of external faculty recognition awards;
- Increased numbers and proportions of minority faculty; and
- Increased number of graduate and professional students entering academic careers.

3. Develop creative faculty compensation programs

**Intended outcome.** The intended outcome for this goal is to develop and implement faculty compensation packages competitive with those of outstanding peer institutions VCU aspires to meet or surpass. Salaries that attract and retain faculty members not only from other universities but from industry or private practice healthcare are critical to the university mission. Currently, the School of Medicine has a model for variable compensation that the other schools may consider adopting.

**To reach this outcome, VCU should:**
- Reward competitively all forms of faculty work – teaching, research, service, and patient care – so that all faculty have the opportunity to engage in academic pursuits;
- Develop compensation plans that have a base salary plus a flexible component that is at risk but can increase to reward performance in teaching, research, or service;
- Seek public/private partnership agreements that place faculty members on campus who are recruited to work for the university and industry;
- Provide domestic partners benefits;
- Develop a spouse recruitment policy and program;
- Provide investment advisors who are experts in the retirement options available at VCU and are independent of the mutual fund companies; and
- Explore fund sources and mechanisms that may provide non-monetary compensation such as parking, recreational memberships, tuition benefits, academic regalia.

**Constraints to reaching the intended outcome**
- Creating competitive salaries is limited primarily by available budget for salaries;
• Even if flexible salary plans are developed, implementation is dependent on funding sources such as research grants, service contracts, and clinical income;
• Industry supported faculty could create potential conflicts of interest and industry could decide to discontinue supporting the faculty creating the need to terminate the positions held by faculty members;
• Family dependent tuition plans and domestic partner benefits currently are not be allowed by state law;
• Investment advisors could be offered for a fee, however to be provided as a benefit that other state employees do not receive may not be allowed; and
• Providing non-monetary benefits present difficulties in funding sources and state laws and regulations.

Accountability/assessment measures
• Comparison of salaries with peer benchmarks and regional and national averages;
• Number of faculty on flexible salary plans;
• Number of industry supported faculty members; and
• Fringe benefit packages.

4. Promote VCU’s urban mission through specialized recruitment and retention efforts and community partnering

Intended outcome. The intended outcome for this goal is to recruit, retain, and develop a world-class faculty with an urban mission and interest and expertise in working with VCU’s community.

To reach this outcome, VCU should:
• Develop a cluster-hire approach to faculty hiring, recruitment and retention as a strategy for recruiting a world-class faculty with an urban mission. These cluster hires are related to emerging areas of knowledge; are based on quality, are relevant to the mission and vision of VCU, have the potential for success; and have the potential for enhancing faculty diversity;
• Develop a Visiting Scholars Program to recruit scholars from selected countries and universities to conduct research lecture or pursue combined lecturing and research at Virginia Commonwealth University;
• Support the development of mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships between faculty, extension educators, staff (State Government, City of Richmond, Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, Office of Diversity, VCU Community Solutions), students and external partners with a special emphasis on outreach scholarship and engagement;
• Enhance opportunities for faculty and external partners to successfully submit funded research and education grants to federal agencies and foundations
• Serve as a model for the development of mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships;
• Identify faculty who show promise in outreach scholarship and who will “champion” diversity, Community Solutions, and outreach scholarship; and

Constraints to reaching the intended outcome
• VCU’s decentralized operations hinder interdepartmental cooperation between schools, departments, and programs.

Accountability/assessment measures
• New grants and research productivity from visiting scholars;
• Scholars deciding that VCU is a university that they would like to join on a permanent basis.
• Cluster-hires resulting in high tenure and retention rates for faculty participating in them as well as very productive senior faculty and faculty teams.
Appendix

Details about library improvement

By funding the VCU Libraries so that it ranks among the top 100 research library systems in the U.S., VCU will establish one of the most important infrastructure elements for recruiting and retaining a world-class faculty.

At the beginning of 2005, VCU’s library system ranked last in its peer list and last among Carnegie Research-1 institutions (for which data are available, 79 of the total 88 Research-1 institutions) in total expenditures. It ranked 4th in Virginia, behind UVA, Virginia Tech, and George Mason. A world-class faculty will require access to the scholarly record provided by libraries that is comparable to that of other major research institutions. Funding commensurate with VCU’s standing as a major research university will expand library hours for students, improve security, and secure access to the scholarly record for planned and envisioned academic programs at VCU.

VCU last added library space to its campus in 1975, over 30 years ago. Since that time the university enrollment has grown by over 70%, while library space for students has declined by 20% due to non-library tenants. Furthermore, VCU is very unusual among research universities in providing no dedicated space in its library buildings for faculty or for graduate students.

Faculty development and outreach

The more faculty are intellectually engaged with students in the process of learning, the more engaged the students will be and the more VCU can become a learning-centered research institution. In the areas of research and scholarship, VCU needs to enhance its support for projects under development to the point where they are competitive for funding from outside sources. As VCU does that, it increases the ability of its faculty to successfully compete for these funds and to increase its national and international reputation.

This area should not be construed, however, to be limited to externally funded research and publications emanating from them. Scholarship comes in many forms, and VCU should seek opportunities for its faculty to become nationally and internationally known for the visual and performing arts, its teaching programs, patient-care and education, and many other areas. VCU already has strong relationships with the community in which it lives; the university is part of the community and the community is part of the university. VCU should continue to build on this to enhance its reputation as a model of university-community partnerships.