



# VCU College of Humanities and Sciences

## Faculty/Staff feedback on the draft Strategic Plan:

Everett Worthington -- [eworth@vcu.edu](mailto:eworth@vcu.edu)

5/13

### Conceptual Comments on the CHS Strategic Plan

I read the CHS Strategic Plan with great interest. It is excellent. The beginning is especially strong. You lay out a strong case of how the undergrad education, especially undergrad courses and credit hours is largely falling on the back of CHS. I thought the point could have been made more strongly that the graduate programs are strong. Also, I did not think that our research productivity got as much attention as it deserved. I did not see a lot of the online and hybrid courses, which seem to be on the horizon as more central aspects of university education. In fact, some could argue that our credit hour and course offerings that are not hybrid or online will decrease in the future and thus the university should take a wait-and-see approach and let the emphasis on credit hours decrease as it likely will in the next ten years.

Still, the undergrad education is, I think, still our strongest point. It needs to be supplemented, though, with more emphasis on how to develop more online and hybrid courses and not just things like how to get more professors to teach core courses.

When you get to the last five tables, the tactics are good (though some seem more like just stating outcomes rather than stating tactics about how to reach outcomes). But having read the tables carefully, it seems to me that there are imbalances with the early parts of the strategic plan. For example, relatively little ink is expended on undergrads even though that is the crux or your early emphasis. Virtually no attention is given to graduate education. Graduate education is really the workhorse on which our research success is based. Yes, we need high quality faculty to produce research grants, but the grad students actually do most of the research, and yet there are only a couple of items in the entire tactics portion of the last five tables that mention grad students. We need higher tuition relief, relief from fees, more incentives for research productivity of graduate students, more awards, more support for non-thesis and non-dissertation-related research by graduate students, etc.

Term faculty are really, really important. They teach the courses that keep the graduate programs (and undergrad programs) functioning while professors do their research. Yet, all you can say about them is that you will "explore" possibilities for higher pay. Really, you need to get them higher pay as a priority! They have become an essential part of higher education. Make it a priority to get them better conditions. Turnover is expensive. It is worth the money to place them in better living conditions, so there will be less turnover.

I like the emphases on several things, which I will just list: seeking more support for philanthropic giving and endowed chairs, seeking more support for foundation funding for research, seeking to enhance

identified strengths (and to a lesser extent take care of weaknesses). Concentrating resources on potential strengths is key.

I'd probably end with a paragraph that is a visionary summary of the strategic plan. As it is, the report just seems to grind to a halt.

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.  
Professor of Psychology  
Director of Training in Counseling Psychology (APA-accredited)

**Brigette Pfister -- bspfister@vcu.edu**  
**5/15**

I just finished reading the latest version of the strategic plan, and it is a HUGE improvement over the last draft. I think the whole document can still be tightened up a little bit, and some of the graphs are too small to read in this version, but overall the flow and organization of the document is great. It makes sense, it's organized appropriately, and the passion that we all feel for what we're doing here really comes through in this version.

When you are ready for the wordsmithing/final editing, let me know if you want me to help. :-)

**Catherine Sutton -- csutton2@vcu.edu**  
**5/27**

The strategic plan looks great. I was struck by how well the strategic plan articulates the problem with the student-faculty ratio, as well as the planned tactics and the performance measures for improving that ratio. On page 9, the paragraph about time as a resource is well said, and it was heartening to see that included in the strategic plan. Here are two suggestions for the draft.

1. Page 11 of draft: For the strategy of "high quality online learning/distance education," the performance measure could be revised to better capture the desired outcome of high-quality online courses. Online courses have a history of low retention rates, and low retention rates cut against other goals in our strategic plan, so retention rates could help us measure our progress toward the goal of high-quality online courses. Student grades could also measure whether the online courses are contributing to student success.

Current performance measure: "Number of on-line courses and students in on-line courses."

Suggested performance measure: "Success of online courses, including retention rates and student grades comparable to traditional-course counterparts."

2. Page 14 of draft: The plan to raise salaries to be competitive with peer institutions is good, but in the case of part-time faculty, another metric would be suitable. Because our peer institutions do not pay part-time faculty fairly, a higher benchmark would be appropriate, such as the MLA guidelines for

adjunct pay. I realize that this might be a lofty goal, but since Quest is ambitious, it seems in line with the spirit of Quest. This suggestion applies only to part-time faculty; the metric of peer institutions is good for other faculty and staff salaries.

Overall, the strategic plan looks great. Thank you for allowing faculty and staff to give input into the strategic plan over the past year.

**Richard Fine -- rfine@vcu.edu**

**5/31**

Thoughts on H&S Strategic Plan:

I like the use of transformation—of students and of knowledge and understanding—as the twin pillars of the College’s identity and intentions for the future. There are the seeds of ideas worth pursuing in problematic areas (such as looking at “new tuition models” in graduate student support) embedded throughout this. It is straight-forward in the practical need to strengthen high performing departments as well as bolster those (especially core liberal arts and sciences fields) not doing as well.

I know innovation regarding teaching is featured language in Quest, but I wonder if the College really means to encourage “innovation” (for its own sake?) versus “excellence” or “best practices in the classroom.” (re Sec VII Action Items).

In section on talented and diverse student body – on the diversity side, is there anything College could do specifically to help students we could target coming in as “at risk” because of academic, language or cultural issues. Address the particular needs of these students in order to assure diversity of the student population. A number of schools are beginning to experiment with such programs.

Finally, in using number of scholarly “events” and encouragement of the same as way to increase of intellectual profile/presence—given how overworked the faculty is as so well documented in other parts of the report, I know there are already more of these each week than I could possibly attend, and feel guilty when I don’t. Is there an opportunity here to do something more focused but splashier, more attention-getting than a large number of smaller events?

Overall, this strikes me as a confident presentation of the College’s achievements and aspirations, a good document to have as new Provost (and others) arrive in the near future. Reading it carefully but not word by word, I’m not sure I have the clearest idea of where the College will put any new money—this is question of presentation and highlighting this early and often.

**Les Harrison -- hlharrison@vcu.edu**

**6/6**

Here is my copy of the draft H&S strategic plan with feedback left via MS Word document reviewing. My comments generally focus on the problematic nature of tying excellence in H&S to the push into online learning being pushed by the vice provost for Learning Innovation & Student Success. In my opinion, the

push into online education is all about doing even more with even less and is a solution to a problem that VCU does not have.

*Document Attached*

**Jeff South -- jcsouth@vcu.edu**

**6/14**

I have been really concerned at VCU, and in the College, in especially in my own academic unit, with rigor: how to ensure that students are challenged, that they learn useful things, that they emerge from a course or a semester or a degree program with a measurable amount of knowledge than they had going in.

The Strategic Plan does address this; on p. 11, it says faculty should be "rigorous in their evaluation" of students. But I think this concept could use some fleshing out -- especially as we expand online courses, service-learning opportunities and programs like ASPIRE. I have looked at some of the grade distribution data for such courses, and they skew high. I don't mean to pick on them; there are a lot of Mass Comm courses, and Mass Comm instructors, in the same boat (i.e., courses in which every student or almost every student gets an A). I hope that in the wording -- or at least in the implementation -- of the College's Strategic Plan, we can systematically look at grade distribution and other measurements of academic rigorousness.

**Kirk Warren Brown -- kwbrown@vcu.edu**

**6/16**

Kudos to all involved on a comprehensive, well-written report. I appreciate the high value placed on the AFS component and in particular, the emphasis on research infrastructure and funding, and the hiring and retention of top-quality researchers.

I also applaud the College's commitment to supporting Quest in its effort to be amongst the country's top 50 public universities.

**William W Newmann -- wnewmann@vcu.edu**

**6/17**

The strategic plan looks great. I've been here for 22 years no previous Dean has really gone into the details of how important the College is and how it is consistently ignored when it comes to resources.

I had only two comments/questions:

Pages 2-3: The statistics about the workload of the College compared to other units hits it right on the head. They are so important. is there any way to highlight this even more, maybe by making the charts larger?

Page 4: The emphasis on faculty and the impact of faculty is especially important. Is there any way to connect that to retention (one of the key concerns of the top levels of the University)? The paragraph

mentions success in a graduates career, but interaction with faculty is crucial to student retention as well. If there is any data on that, it might strengthen the argument. There certainly is anecdotal evidence; every Prof can tell you a bunch of stories of students on the edge who just needed some encouragement and advice. Just the ability to meet with a Prof kept them in school.

**Judyth Twigg -- [jtwigg@vcu.edu](mailto:jtwigg@vcu.edu)**

**6/17**

First of all, thanks for the incredible work on this unprecedented document, and most of all, thanks for the inclusiveness with which it was prepared. Nobody's ever really asked us what we think before -- and it feels good.

Just a few comments on the plan, which is extraordinary:

1. Two big, interrelated points: the plan calls for investments in hiring of lots of new faculty -- certainly the largest long-term proposed expense. While the notion of "targeted" hiring is made explicit, there's no sense of exactly how that targeting will take place. Without that level of specificity, or at least an explicit plan for how decisions on where to hire will be made, there's a risk that the planned hiring might be seen as too scattershot, not appropriately strategically invested. In the table outlining goals and metrics for Theme 3 (page 15), there an indication that the hiring will be targeted "to build a critical mass of strength around center themes." What themes? My guess is that readers of the plan will want a more well-defined answer to that question, or at least a road map for how it's going to be answered.

Which leads to the second point: the hiring could be said to take place around the two stated goals ("ladders") of building on our existing strengths (just a little more "push" could get us to targeted areas of national/international distinction), plus correcting deficiencies in some areas of weakness. Again, how will we weight investments up these two ladders? What exactly are these strengths and weaknesses? Will we focus more on the strengths or on the weaknesses? Are there weaknesses in areas of curriculum? Yes, but we'll never have the resources to correct them all -- so how will we choose which ones to target, and why? If I were handing out the dollars to implement this plan, I'd want more specific answers to those types of questions.

I realize that identifying these specific themes (for centers, new graduate programs, etc.) worthy of investment is likely to be a politically charged, challenging process. But in the best of all possible worlds, it's going to have to happen at some point, right?

2. The point on one-to-one faculty-to-student engagement is a critical one. Is there any research that can translate that effort into eventual incoming dollars? In other words, there's research demonstrating that eventual life success and satisfaction for students is driven by that kind of one-on-one attention from faculty. That's all well and good. But my guess is that, at the end of the day, somebody reading this document is going to ask whether that also translates into alumni engagement and contributions.

Are there any concrete data showing that this is the case -- and that there's therefore likely to be a direct dollar return on investment in new faculty with that kind of dedication to students?

3. Following on that point, page 10, bullet-point list: the point on students taking part in integrative opportunities focuses on barriers to STUDENTS doing this sort of thing. But there's a supply-side issue as well, as faculty aren't currently really incentivized to take the time to create these opportunities for students. How can we make sure that faculty are explicitly rewarded for supervising undergraduate research, steering students toward good internships, supervising study abroad programs, etc.? Right now all that stuff is essentially add-ons to the core faculty work profile, not highly incentivized or rewarded.

4. Further on those integrative experiences for students: the research I've seen recently seems to indicate that internships are an increasingly influential factor in student job-seeking success. Should "number of internships" be included as a metric?

5. Page 6 makes the claim that, due to resource deficiencies, our faculty are susceptible to recruitment to better-resources environments. Are there data to demonstrate that this is actually happening?

Hope there's something here that's useful. Thanks again for asking for our input, and for making such an insightful set of claims on behalf of the College.

**Daniel Bonchev – [dgbonchev@vcu.edu](mailto:dgbonchev@vcu.edu)**

**6/17**

I have read the Strategic Plan, and can only give a very high mark to it. The most important areas for improvement are well defined and the measures planned are adequate. Since my strength is in research, I may recommend a brief addition in Theme 3, page 15, row 3 "Effectively promote the research...":

Add in the second column "Tactics" a new sentence: "Increase the popularity of CHS researchers and departments through participation in the international website [researchgate.net](http://researchgate.net)"

Add respectively in "Performance Measures": "Research scores, Impact points, downloaded publications"

Motivation for the above: The centered in Berlin, Germany, website [researchgate.net](http://researchgate.net) offers free visits to researcher profiles, free downloads of researchers publications, calculates average popularity score, publications impact points every week for individual researchers, departments, schools and colleges, universities and research institutes in the world. In CHS high number of impact points have Chemistry – 1450 and Psychology - 1116, while Physics and Biology are around 650-660 (The highest at VCU are around 3000) The impact points of VCU are considerably lower than those of UVA, but are better than those of Virginia Tech. It is very stimulating for researchers to see visits to their profile and downloading of their papers.

**Thom Didato -- tndidato@vcu.edu**

**6/17**

At Jim's request I have taken one last look at the strategic plan and I must confess, it is brilliant. Seriously, I read it from start to finish with ease and it is quite a page turner (simply could not put it down!). I found it to be rather engaging, entertaining, conclusive and comprehensive.

Just two things might I suggest:

First, you drop the "Six-Year" time period from the documents title.

Secondly, within the document, perhaps under Section VII "Specific action items and measurements as they relate to Quest for Distinction" is some simple directive that states the following:

"This Strategic Plan shall henceforth not only replace all previous strategic plans, but also replace the need for any further strategic plans, reports and evaluations for the rest of the 21st century."

I think if you can make those slight changes, the document will read much better; moreover, it will prevent all parties involved from having to write and/or read any more of these utterly useless reports.

Many thanks for your consideration.

**Kimberly Brown -- knbrown@vcu.edu**

**6/18**

The document as it stands is very effective in communicating the College of Humanities and Sciences' aspirations, deficiencies, and corrective measures needed to address these deficiencies. Beyond the small comments I made in the ACM's meeting, I wish to address one minor concern. On page 8 of the document, under item V.1: "We share the value and principle that a liberal arts and sciences education provides a pathway for students to a deeply meaningful and successful life and career." I'm not very persuaded by this language. In the ACM meeting Deirdre Condit mentioned civic engagement and responsibility – which I see listed in the wordage underneath, but perhaps the bolded section can be changed to "a liberal arts and sciences education enhances the general quality of life and provides a pathway for students to become more productive global citizens and members of our society." I've have seen language such as this used to persuade those in the corporate arena about the value of a liberal arts education and think that such language also points to the trend towards an ever-increasing global economy.

So, I hope this helps a bit. Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to give feedback.

**Cliff Edwards -- cedwards@vcu.edu**

**6/19**

Hi- Just a few suggestions re. the strategic plan statement. They may be in the area of "wordsmithing," but the right words could be important.

1- I'd prefer in line one "VCU has created a strategic plan" to "VCU is driven by a strategic roadmap." Animals and cars are driven. We are the drivers not the driven. Perhaps roadmap is ok, but once it turns to "pathways" we seem to be retreating from road to path, and keeping "path" as the key metaphor may suggest the Latin word for a path: curriculum.

2- Paragraph 3 describes "a set of two passions." I'd drop "a set of." Passions don't come in sets, and "sets" is not needed.

3- A sentence later, I would not describe "our aim" as "to be recognized" but to actually "provide" etc. Recognition is a by-product" of what we will do and be.

4- Paragraph 4 describes "a roadmap for building pathways." Again, the simpler "a plan" is best in my view. Roadmaps are not blueprints or plans for building, and we don't want to regress from "roads" to "paths."

5- Also in Paragraph 4, I don't think we want to use the metaphor of "climbing two ladders." That doesn't work.

6. Jumping all the way to page 4, paragraph 2 describes "attracting and training...students." Throughout the document, I'd avoid "training" which suits dogs and the like to "educating" or some other term that is richer than "training."

The above has to do with the tone of the document. When it comes to much of the content, research, and directions described I have many positive views. But the tone does matter, and we could get tripped up or dumbed down by our metaphors. Some good English-prof writers will respond with suggestions, I hope.

**Terry Oggel -- [toggel@vcu.edu](mailto:toggel@vcu.edu)**

**6/19**

I have read the May 12 version of the St. Plan and also the report on alumni responses.

Regarding the alumni data--in a unit as large and diverse as CHS, it is natural for its alumni not to identify as much with the college as alumni of other schools identify with Business or Engineering. The departments within those schools are parts of the same whole--little disciplinary diversity among them; nothing like the diversity among the departments within the CHS. This phenomenon is true nationally. So comparisons along that line between CHS and Business or Engineering are not really valid. It seems to me that attempts to improve that, like finding the right name for the CHS, as though that's the problem, are not the best way to spend time and effort.

I'll try to help out with the "higher level" kind of response that you invited. As I understand it, the CHS has already persuaded the central administration that the CHS is central to the university. Therefore, my idea is this. The strategic plan's presentation does not need to re-prove that point. It can include

much of the info and data that are in the document now, but the approach would be nuanced differently. It would emphasize that as valuable as it already is,... the CHS would be even more valuable to the university as VCU seeks to rank higher nationally. Thus, I suggest that the strategic plan be more outward looking, not inward looking. Outward-looking at the university as a whole, outward-looking to the community and nation and even internationally. It could emphasize ways that enhanced funding would make the university stronger. As I read through the draft, that angle of vision can be seen, but it is not as consistent or as emphatic as it might be. So perhaps that could be emphasized at the beginning and repeated a number of times throughout. Make the university stronger, so it can be more highly recognized nationally and internationally. up where it deserves.

It might be going too far, I don't know, but maybe the plan could even go so far as to say that ONLY the CHS can do this--not any other unit within the university. The SofArts, for example, is already highly ranked. Still, VCU is ranked #167 nationally. Focusing on enhancing the Arts, therefore, will do nothing to VCU's ranking. Enhancing the Business school, or Social Work or Engineering will not help VCU. I went through the USNews national ranking. There are many many schools--probably 40+--that should not be higher-ranked than VCU. Only enhancing the CHS--the units within it--will do the job.

Maybe I missed it, but it seems to me that the document's perspective is more inward-looking. I'd say that most and perhaps all of what is said can justifiably be kept in the final document--the info is useful and impressive--but my point is that it might be re-cast to have a more outward-looking angle of vision. The college's "vision" is its role in VCU's improvement, not its own self-improvement.

Thus, the chief focus of the CHS's strategic plan is VCU's improvement, not its own.

This idea is not to suggest that the plan have fewer data, because data are necessary for any valid argument, but this idea is to suggest a different perspective.

If what I'm saying is not clear, I could give examples but I don't want to go on too long here.

As it stands now, by focusing on the CHS the reader must make the leap of faith--that a stronger CHS will lead to a stronger VCU. So Rao, Provost, Bd of Visitors, etc.) are asked to make that leap of logic. It might be more successful for us to very explicitly make that leap for them, not leaving it to them to make the leap in logic for us.

Finally, I don't see a reference anywhere to the previous (most recent) college Strategic Plan. I'm sure that there have been a number over the years. Perhaps one element in formulating the final version of this one would be to briefly refer but in some detail to the most recent one--what did it call for, what did it accomplish and fail to accomplish, what similarities and differences are there between it and the one we're doing now. In other words, what have we learned from it and how has it helped us strengthen our presentation this time. This one seems to be starting from scratch. That is probably true, but perhaps we can appear more formidable if this S. Plan is seen as being on a continuum of CHS self-studies that have led progressively to an enhanced VCU.

I hope I haven't been redundant and run on too long. This is what I think you meant by "higher level" comment.

**Maryanne M Collinson -- mmcollinson@vcu.edu**

**6/23**

Theme 3:

More seed funding to specifically support interdisciplinary research (a fully integrated project) between faculty members in different departments and between schools (i.e, H&S and engineering)

Performance measures: interdisciplinary publications would be hard to quantify. A publication in an interdisciplinary journal would not mean much; publication with corresponding authors from different departments/schools would be a better measure. I was not sure what you were referring to.

My experience is that finding funding opportunities is not the problem. It's the assistance with proposal development (specifically the lack of) that is the problem. While things are better than they were three years ago, there is still a long way to go. The bureaucracy is terrible here and the level of talented support is far below what it should be for a university this size. It should not be this painful to submit a proposal. I also believe this should be a university effort, not necessarily a college effort.

Encourage more undergraduates to participate in undergraduate research at an 'earlier age' - the end of their second semester rather than the beginning of the junior/senior year. The Honor's college does a good job with this. But what about those students who are not in the Honor's college? Many of them do not know what's available until their senior year, and then it's too late. If you want more student coauthors on publications, the students need to start research early.

Another performance measure: presentations by undergraduates at regional and national meetings. Again, the earlier the student starts, the more likely he/she will be able to present and publish.

UROP is great, but it's competitive and from my limited knowledge targets students farther along in their research who could write a more developed proposal rather than students who have just started. Why not expand the program and encourage proposals from rising sophomores who have not participated in research but want to.

Research performance would be enhanced if there was a mechanism for replacing obsolete and/or broken relatively low-dollar amount equipment (use to be HEETF, but not anymore) and support staff to help trouble shoot and repair equipment (could be someone skilled in electronics...perhaps shared between engineering and the sciences). This will free up faculty time so that they can spend their valuable time writing proposals, papers, and working with students to ensure they get the education they deserve.

Theme 1

Instead of relying on advisors to deter students from repeatedly taking classes they fail, there should be a university policy/procedure that prevents them from doing so.

Recruitment of top graduate students takes time and money, of which we have little of. New modern laboratory space will certainly help this endeavor. Working with international admissions is also a necessity to recruit top international students, which can provide need diversity.

Another performance measured: # publications and presentations by graduate students at regional and national meetings; awards applied for and received by graduate students

**Karen Rader -- karader@vcu.edu**

**6/24**

The plan as written is clear and impressive. It captures well the tensions of trying to do two (necessary) things at once: address deficiencies and build on excellence. But we need to do both so... the question is how. From the perspective of the faculty, morale will be improved by improving our teaching and research lives -- and I think that some of the ways that you propose will do this but there are additional ways to enhance these things, too.

For instance, with regard to teaching, better advising and registration 'gatekeeping' will prevent students from taking classes they can't handle (and us from having to manage that). Also -- I think (as best as I understand it from my own research into it) I love the idea of the e-portfolios. These will track student success in ways that will help faculty know better what they are doing right, help students see their progress across the curriculum, and help development find success stories on which you can build future fund-raising (although, as you mention, there is the issue of how and who will administer them). Also having full-time faculty teach tier two: we get a better sense of the student body and it's capabilities by teaching students at every level so this is important for shared ownership of the teaching mission. In sum -- this is ALL good.

Improving research resources will be more challenging -- but it is necessary to not only recruit and get excellent faculty but KEEP them here. (Like at many research universities, having mid-career faculty hired away is a problem for VCU. Having a culture where one has to apply out and/or get an external offer to be appreciated by the institution only incentivizes leaving) But making things such things sustainable (the focus on Theme 2) involves not so much the vagaries of 'professional development' (I found this language on p. 14 a bit odd for faculty) but something more challenging: creating a culture of rewards and grant-getting (especially in the humanities -- we have that to an extent but we need more) and building innovative collaborative research clusters. To do that, perhaps places like the Humanities Center (and its director) will help -- but also: Rob Tombes (Associate Dean of Research) and his crew need more resources to be able to mentor and steward individual faculty members through the process. (Someone like this at SLC was instrumental to my being able to apply and reapply for the CAREER grant) I think you need one more administrator -- perhaps a HUMANITIES version of Rob, who would focus on building the culture of grant-getting in the Humanities in ways that are organic to these fields (different agencies, different ways of structuring projects, etc.) rather than applying the scientific model across the

board. Adding this as a concrete performance measure would be useful and based on the College's actions -- that would go a long way toward addressing the problem.

Finally (of course) I love the focus on new space and interdisciplinary programming in the narrative of Theme 3 -- but wonder whether interdisciplinary PROGRAMMING and not just publications should be listed as a performance measure. Such things help the students and create a scholarly culture for the faculty -- as much, if not more so, than interdisciplinary publications (which are fraught with some risk, especially for junior faculty, because of their inherently smaller impact factor than the major disciplinary journals.

**David Golumbia -- dgolumbia@gmail.com**

**6/24**

I am writing with feedback on the draft strategic plan. I don't have a lot to say, as I have very much appreciated the extremely inclusive and open process that has led to this draft. I feel it strongly and clearly advocates for a strong future for the College and I very much hope the upper administration of VCU accepts it and works to make it a reality.

I have only two minor comments on the text of the draft plan.

1) At many places in the draft, the word "innovation" is used, usually (but not always) to point to the use of instructional technology in the classroom. I very much want to resist the notions that a) technology is inherently innovative, and that b) innovation inherently includes technology. Recent research continues to show that the more "engaged" students are with digital devices during class and even outside of class, the less they are actually engaged with the course material and the less they learn. I realize this cuts against many initiatives in higher education as it currently operates, but I would be happier if there were a couple of nods somewhere in the draft toward the idea that innovation does not require technology, and that the incorporation of technology for its own sake may not be a welcome "innovation," or really an innovation at all, if it does not lead to more engaged students.

Had I been given a similar chance to have input to the "Four Pillars" document that we have been given to the CHS strategic plan, I would have vigorously opposed the idea of "digital engagement" as it is included there, as I believe that the research we have so far tends to indicate that "digital engagement" is in too many ways contrary to the educational mission (this is not to prevent or dissuade individual faculty members from using digital tools in whatever way they find productive, but to worry about the advisability of a school-wide initiative whose relationship to the educational mission is at best very unclear, and at worst demonstrably counterproductive, and expensive to boot, in an environment strapped for resources of every sort).

2) on page 12, in the discussion of mechanisms to holistically address student success, I certainly do not object to pilot programs of any sort. However, having had some experience with ePortfolios at both the undergraduate and graduate level (including in the MATX PhD program here at VCU), my opinion is that they do not accomplish very much. Further, they are a tremendous drain on both student and (especially) faculty time--they become busy work for students, and a formality and a chore for faculty to

deal with. Their position as "capstone" activities means that there is a lot of pressure to pass or grade them highly, and feedback is not likely to mean much since they come at the end of the school experience. Given the way the plan highlights faculty resource issues throughout, I am very hesitant even to propose a mechanism that could possibly add a significant burden to already-overworked faculty, and for which the payoff is minimal.

**Bernardo Piciche -- bpiciche@vcu.edu**

**6/24**

I am impressed by the amount of work put in drafting this document.

If we were able to achieve just the 30% of what we intend, it would be a great success. I think it is particularly challenging when we declare that we want to provide "a deep knowledge of a student's chosen discipline(s)." If our students remain full-time worker, or even part-time, we must be resigned to a shallow level of competence. (But there is nothing we can do about it: it is the costly educational system of America that need to be revised in my opinion, and this is not up to us to resolve...)

I would suggest to reconsider the Foreign Languages chapter. I would add "Literature and Culture". Why? To indicate that we will not treat languages as a practical thing, a service department, but as part of a true liberal art system, in which literatures and cultures are penetrated by using their own languages. The emphasis should be on the literature and culture part, rather than on the applied linguistic.

Thus, when you mention the School of World Studies, it should look like this:

"School of World Studies (Anthropology, Foreign Languages, LITERATURE, AND CULTURE Religious Studies, International Studies"

I love these two passages:

"we not only attempt to prepare our students for a job, but we aspire to help them construct a foundation on which they will build a rich and deeply meaningful life and career."

"ethical and responsible citizenship necessary to participate effectively in a democracy, global awareness, a desire for lifelong learning,".

I find that this is the essence of college (in the impossibility to provide also a vast and learned set of notions): meaningful life, citizenship, lifelong learning, and now global awareness.

Finally, I think that the College would turn into a path-breaking institution in America, if we dared to introduce oral exams, at least for the humanities. This is the only way to let people learn their stuff: to read a book three times, close it, and repeat what was written in it. After doing this, to go to an exam and respond to oral questions from the teacher. Our students do not develop memory skills, and read too much in haste, this would force them to read more carefully. Of course, the problem is to examine hundreds of students of GEN ED. It would take days and days...so probably, the oral examination should be reserved to 400 level classes...

I thank you for this opportunity, and wish you a nice summer.

**Jennifer Elswick -- jlelswick@vcu.edu**

**6/25**

This is my feedback for the strategic plan...I'd like to see more said about the establishment of a CHS staff council and what its exact role would be in the governance of the College. The hope is that the College would use the University Council model to create a College model wherein both faculty and staff bodies have a vote in operational matters. Marquita has asked staff to volunteer for this new council, but I think it should be formalized into the College's by-laws to ensure staff involvement over time.

Thanks for the opportunity to weigh in. Please let me know if you need any clarification!

**Mita Basu -- basum@vcu.edu**

**6/25**

This is Madhumita Basu(Mita Basu) an instructor from Department Of Statistical Sciences and Operations research. I have read the draft and feel that in order to make VCU a premier , public, urban research university, VCU should hire top class researchers and motivate them to do top class research by giving them incentives. These incentives could be in the form of both extrinsic (financial) or intrinsic (maybe more like greater working on independent projects).

Also, I feel that the teaching faculty should be rewarded and adequately motivated to further drive the VCU brand as a premier educational and research institute. Good teachers should be retained and rewarded by providing them competitive salaries and bonuses.

**Andrea Moreau -- moreauaj@vcu.edu**

**6/26**

1. would like to see some clarification as to what "develop algorithms for appropriate staff and advising support" mean pg. 10

2. What is the 'unit specific Great Place Initiative" program that is suppose to reduce staff turnover pg. 10

3. VIII. Specific action ideas, Theme 1 talks about using faculty as a key role in mentoring students. When you are discussing faculty does is also include advising faculty? From first hand experience most faculty do not who any initiative in wanting to mentor undergraduate students. I also find that despite our department's advising training many faculty are misinformation about the college's graduation requirements that could lead to the student's delayed graduation. Frankly many of our research faculty are not even around enough to provide mentoring support to undergraduate students. Obviously graduate students have a different experience.

I believe that student success can be directly tied to their exposure to major specific advising. We need to come up with a specific advisor to student ratio in the college that does not include those advisors in

the U.C. Every department should have a full time 12 month academic advisor who is not research faculty for our undergraduates. Many of the students we come across are not fully equip to deal with the challenges that face them in college. I think having at the very least one go to person in each academic unit would be critical to student success.

"Self-advising" is what often gets students into trouble, they are not aware of the graduation requirements or policies at the university. These issues directly tie into the problems associated with our graduation rates. In an idealistic world every H&S undergraduate student would have mandatory advising every semester before registration.

In summary, I think we need to have a liaison between the students and faculty; i.e advisors. Many undergraduate students are very intimidated by faculty and do not want to talk to them. On the flip side our faculty are completely overloaded with the level of course work they teach and many do not have the time to act as mentors for undergraduate students.

**Jeff Green** -- jdgreen@vcu.edu

**6/25**

Below are some comments on the very thoughtful strategic plan.

I love how data-driven it is in many ways. I love the stats showing the College's productivity even while getting a relatively small share of the resource pie. I also like the data-driven approach to the future.

I love the approach toward the faculty, particularly trying to hire new faculty, reduce the student-faculty ratio, increase retention through increased salaries and other means.

As a director of a very successful psychology PhD program (social psychology) that has had losses of faculty without being able to replace them, I particularly agree with the phrase "Excellent research programs require a critical mass of strong researchers." I couldn't agree more.

I also like the focus on innovation in the classroom and increasing online offerings. I think that's an important approach. I also agree that new, interdisciplinary teaching will enhance student experience. My previous post was at a private liberal arts university that emphasized this so much that the majority of the classes we taught were interdisciplinary and typically team-taught.

On the flip side, I think the document sometimes overemphasizes interdisciplinary research. While I agree that there is much to be discovered in these spaces in between fields, I also think that these fields have evolved as such for many good reasons. My field of psychology has incredibly sophisticated methods (and statistics), and it meshes very well with some other fields, but poorly with others. We need to still emphasize and value unidisciplinary research.

I also think that the document could better emphasize the importance of basic research. VCU is so applied in orientation, and that is understandable given its focus on Richmond and urban environments. At the same time, neglecting basic research, even for the highest quality applied research that attracts much external funding, will result in VCU being irrelevant in knowledge centers, in the most prestigious

academic journals and other publications, and absent in departmental rankings. My department of psychology is virtually all applied. Thus, it has a wonderful reputation in many circles. But for those psychology departments that value basic research, it is as if we do not exist. Note that in some ways (but not always, of course), this is inconsistent with the goal of attracting more external funding. In the current climate, applied work gets more attention and more money. But many of the biggest grants that focus on applied work will not shake their fields intellectually. That's what we must aspire to do as well.

That brings me to the great goal of an "ever-increasing environment of intellectual vibrancy." In my opinion, our intellectual climate is dismal, so I strongly support this approach. My own department acts like loosely affiliated business divisions. There is no common core, no interest in talks by world leaders in psychology, etc. I've gone to college or campus-wide talks and am amazed every time at the lack of attendance. I don't know how to solve that problem, and I think the plan here in the strategic plan is weak. I wish I could make recommendations here, but I do think it links very closely to an emphasis on basic research.

I imagine that is more than you wanted to hear. In short, most of my comments are enthusiastic agreement with many, many of the points. But if we could emphasize a few of these elements a bit more (e.g., the importance of basic research) as well as how to get there, I think our strategic plan will be improved, and we will be in a better position to be an international force in education! Thanks to Dean Coleman and many others for their vision and for their hard work on this. Please tell the faculty how we can support it, and how we can get the provost and president to support this, especially financially.

**Patricia L Michelsen-King** -- pmichelsenki@vcu.edu

**6/26**

I think it's great.

**Don Young** -- dyoung@vcu.edu

**6/27**

I've read the Strategic Plan several times. It's really good and I'm still wrapping my head around the fact that this is the first strategic plan for CHS in the 30 yrs I've been here! Specific comments:

I think the data for budgetary oversight for over three decades is compelling without being whiny. Comparisons to our Quest peers and the aspirational schools, as well as VCU academic units, is very effective.

Thought about moving the plan ahead of the deficiencies but I don't think that works after playing with it.

Don't know if an executive summary is planned but that would be a way to give a quick tease/overview for those planning a cursory read.

As always, the plans don't work without resources, but it still provides direction and gives everyone an understanding of the big picture for CHS.

Thanks very much for your inclusiveness in this process as well as your synthesis and vision.

**Katherine Saunders Nash -- ksnash@vcu.edu**

**6/27**

As a wordsmith I don't find much to tinker with in this plan. It is admirably crafted. A copy editor will find the tiny mistakes so I won't mention those here.

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The second sentence in section 2 would be more rhetorically effective, I think, if the information were reversed.

**current wording:** H&S serves that role because we provide a quality education to approximately 14,000 students every year (just under 60% of VCU's undergraduates and just under 50% of the total students), and teaching approximately 400,000 credit hours annually to students from majors across the university - this means that there are more undergraduates enrolled in Humanities and Sciences majors, or in Humanities and Sciences classes, than all of the 11 other academic units at VCU combined (see Figures 1a and 1b).

**suggested change:** H&S serves that role because we have more undergraduates enrolled in Humanities and Sciences majors, and[?] in Humanities and Sciences classes than all of the 11 other academic units at VCU combined (see Figures 1a and 1b). We provide a quality education to approximately 14,000 students every year (just under 60% of VCU's undergraduates and just under 50% of the total students) and we teach approximately 400,000 credit hours annually to students from majors across the university.

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page 7:

**current wording:** weaved into a strategic plan

**suggested change:** woven into a strategic plan

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page 8:

for what it's worth, I don't understand this statement's rhetorical emphasis.

**Transformational impacts cannot be achieved without a full commitment to excellence, but H&S will have to build excellence by climbing two ladders simultaneously: building areas of national distinction in some programs while correcting deficiencies in others**

Part of the problem is that I can't tell whose "full commitment to excellence" is being named, and part of the problem is two different uses of the word "build" in the same sentence.

**Suggested change:** Transformational impacts require our full commitment to excellence, but the future excellence of H&S depends upon our climbing two ladders simultaneously: building areas....

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One last question: especially toward the end of the document, a new building to serve as an "intellectual home" for H&S is mentioned frequently. Perhaps it's a good idea to insert mention of the new Humanities Research Center, which (although not yet in a new building) is a brand-new center of excellence that exists in physical space and will become more conspicuous--and, we hope, intellectually transformational-- in part because of that space.

Whether it's connected with the building of a new "intellectual home" or not, I believe the Humanities Research Center would be a good subject to mention in this strategic plan. I was not able to find mention of it after reading carefully. The HRC is tangible and inspiring evidence of VCU's implementation of Quest themes I, II, and IV.

Thanks for the opportunity to offer my two cents.

**Chris Burdette -- clburdett@vcu.edu**

**6/30/14**

I write to offer a few reactions to the draft Strategic Plan, per Dean Coleman's general request. On the whole, the document corresponds closely with items covered by Dean Coleman during the roundtable discussion. I believe it is a promising and important step forward for the College, and I am hopeful it will muster support for the changes described within.

This being said, I thought to shine a light on a few items for further consideration. Below I first note the relevant passage and follow immediately with my comments.

1) "The following H&S strategic plan articulates a roadmap for building pathways that transform our students, fields of study, and our communities. To accomplish this we will need to raise our level of excellence by climbing two ladders simultaneously: building areas of national distinction in some programs while correcting deficiencies in others" (1).

Clearly, "climbing two ladders simultaneously" is a significant, overarching theme in the text. I understand the intended meaning, but, as written, it could also imply that certain programs will be put forward as the shining stars, while others will remain red-headed stepchildren. The Plan calls for excellence in the College, and I believe it is within the spirit of the document to stress that this excellence should be uniform. This requires identifying your stallions and cultivating them, while also identifying areas that are deficient and raising them up to the same level. "Correcting deficiencies" does not, on its face, resonate with this objective, and that it is presented as a separate 'ladder' only reinforces the aforementioned image of the red-headed

stepchild who may climb but at a slower pace and always a few rungs behind. In order for the entire H&S community to share in the Plan's optimism, there should not be a hint of what is effectively classism, intended or not.

2) "The College of Humanities and Sciences is organized into two schools, 16 departments, and three additional non-departmental undergraduate programs (Table Ia). In addition to the extensive role H&S plays in undergraduate education, Humanities and Sciences houses a range of attractive graduate programs (Table Ib). In fact the largest and most competitive doctoral programs at VCU are housed in one of the H&S units, the Department of Psychology. Our competitive doctoral programs are in demand, receiving approximately 43% of VCU's total doctoral graduate applications in 2013-2014" (2).

It might be worthwhile to also mention that H&S Departments are capable of doing more with appropriate resources. This is not, in other words, the ceiling. There are faculty with areas of expertise which could lend to new graduate programs and undergraduate majors, but because of course offering/teaching needs, they are forced to offer core/gen-ed courses instead of new classes that would increase the impact of their specialized knowledge. Some of these programs would be cutting edge, and would only further enhance the prestige of H&S and draw students to the College.

3) "Despite these challenges, the staff and faculty of Humanities and Sciences have exemplified the grit and determination that characterizes VCU and it is this grit and determination that has been central to the rapid rise of the institution's reputation over the last several years. We evolved in a resource-limited situation that forced us toward a collective attitude as being the 'engine that could,' or perhaps just 'the engine that had to'" (6-7).

There may be an opportunity here to stress the urgency of putting the Plan into action. Being the 'engine that had to' is not without dangers, especially among faculty who have remained within their Departments despite dwindling resources. Overwork any engine and eventually a breaking point will be reached. So, we should not simply admire the intestinal fortitude of the H&S faculty without likewise acknowledging that continuing to rely upon it indefinitely is risky if not unrealistic.

4) "A dynamic and inclusive learning and working environment in which individuals of differing cultural and intellectual perspectives, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds are welcomed, valued and supported is critically important" (8).

I realize that the Dean asked that we forgo wordsmithing, but I do need to ask if the distinction between 'differing cultural perspectives' and 'differing cultural backgrounds' is significant enough to include both in the same sentence. It strikes me as redundant.

It would also be wise (and representative of VCU's current student body) if the language folded in socio-economic backgrounds - perhaps substituting this for 'cultural backgrounds'. VCU's student body is not wealthy, and many can probably be classified as working poor. This is not simply a cultural trait, and it creates a distinct set of constraints which VCU's students must

navigate in order to achieve their education, while also limiting what VCU can do to raise revenue from the students themselves. And, this is not simply an economic consideration. The quality of public school education across the Commonwealth is uneven, and this unfortunately hinders the competitiveness of students from poorer areas even as they may be capable of achieving more under different conditions. VCU's mandate provides these students with an opportunity to better themselves. I daresay this is a critical moral mission of the University, and something I personally have taken a great deal of pride in while I have taught at VCU. Though I digress, it is likewise important to appreciate how VCU serves a vital role in bettering the prospects of students who might not otherwise have a chance. This is not a question of culture, and I do not see it acknowledged within the Plan.

5) "Develop new net revenue generating programs that meet student demand" (Column 2, 12).

There is a relationship between enhancing curricular opportunities and faculty numbers. Where departments remain limited in terms of personnel, new courses are nearly impossible to introduce because existing faculty must teach courses that satisfy majors and gen-ed requirements. (See point #2.) Though this observation does not fit within the objective of the Table, it would make sense to mention the point in the preceding narrative.

6) "Implement and monitor a plan with strategic enrollment to improve the standardized test scores, GPA of students in H&S and to recruit a larger number of students from out of state and internationally so that we maximize the ability of our student body to take full advantage of VCU" (Column 2, 13).

I don't see how one necessarily leads to another, which prompts one to inquire about the real objective of enhancing the incoming student body. I would perhaps say 'create an intellectually stimulating environment that enhances the VCU experience for every student, regardless of background'.

And, while I appreciate the aim, it would appear (as written) to marginalize VCU's mission for the Commonwealth as an institution with arms open wider than other universities so as to provide opportunities for those who might not otherwise have them. Are they not worth the resources, too? Pushing too hard to improve GPAs, etc., could crowd out those who need VCU the most. There is a real moral value in the service VCU provides for Virginia (as I discuss under point #4).

Thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback, and I submit my observations humbly. Of course, if I am unclear or if elaboration is required, please reach out and I will gladly oblige.

Deirdre Condit -- dcondit@vcu.edu

6/28

Well, I've now read and re-read the draft of the Strategic Plan and, as I've already indicated to you, I think it is the bravest, most honest, and clearest document of its kind I've ever seen at VCU. And I'm sure you've gotten lots of suggestions concerning word-smithing, so I won't trouble you with that. And while

I thought Judy sent some terrific suggestions, I don't agree that you have to indicate how the College will prioritize which programs will be targeted for "excellence" and which will be targeted for "deficiency amelioration" as I seem to recall her noting. Indeed, I think excellence in programs may well emerge from some surprising quarters once deficiencies are ameliorated in otherwise less notable units. And while I do think there will be epic battles for any new resources that are made available, I trust you, in particular, to make wise and cogent decisions about how those resources will be meted out and I suspect you will be as effective at communicating your rationale as you have been about everything else thus far.

Which brings me to my only real substantive suggestion/question/observation. In the section on the slope of the line, which I've come to think ought to be the rhetorical title and theme for the whole document rather than "Pathways to Transformation" (Perhaps something even sexier like "Pitching Upward! The Slope of the Line to CHS Transformation" or whatever), the beginning sentence says "**The core of the H&S strategic aims are derived from the integration of the two passions clearly identified in the strategic planning process - transforming student lives and transforming human knowledge and understanding**" (note lack of a period at the end of the sentence in the draft, FYI). To me, the key word here is "integration," but the notion of integration gets lost throughout the next two paragraphs. In a resource starved unit (not to bang that drum again but needing to in order to make my point), both attending to the slope of our students' lines AND contributing to new human knowledge are deeply entwined but often have to function as though they were antithetical. That is, when you only have a handful of full-time faculty, and it is so steeply divided between tenured and term, as a unit you have to make a choice about which of those two elements you are going to commit to. Real quality research takes serious faculty time, energy, clarity of thought, focused presence, and resources. Making meaningful contact (intellectually and as a mentor, etc.) with students (particularly when there are lots and lots of students) also takes an enormous amount of time, energy, attentiveness, being present in the moment with them, and resources. And we just can't do both simultaneously and do either really well. In POLI we have necessarily had to pick our students to commit to because they are right there, in our face, by the multiple hundreds. We simply can't ignore them and blithely turn our backs on them to do our research. Though some units perhaps do just that -- I really don't know. But my point is, we have to pick; we can't do both. For example, currently, I have only six tenured faculty, one of whom is unable to contribute in any meaningful way currently, one of whom can contribute in a more limited way than the others, and one of whom is me -- who is pretty seriously occupied by this administrative gig at the moment. In addition, I have only one tenure-eligible faculty member waiting in the wings. Thus, I really only have **four research** faculty. To be quite honest, I continue to be astounded that this tiny band of people is as intellectually productive as they/we are, because they are also our anchor teachers, the ones steepening the slope of the line for our students. We are fortunate to have some great teaching term faculty, whose sole focus in life is also to steepen that slope, but the truth is, without the rich intellectual nourishment that comes from ongoing research, that slope is necessarily attenuated for them. I have deep respect for our teaching term faculty; they work miracles daily. But

they are not leading their students with the same kind of lush, new, exploratory, vanguard inquiry that inevitably comes from doing research.

I know you know all this. My long-winded point here is that I would very much hope that the two paragraphs that follow the introductory sentence recognizing that these are integrated endeavors would more fully demonstrate their inter-dependency. It becomes a zero sum game without sufficient resources and that means that our students' slope can never really pitch up OR our contributions to human knowledge can never really be as robust and groundbreaking as they ought to be.

This is another way to think about the two sides of the ladder -- excellence and deficiency. Without addressing the most raw deficiencies, it's hard to really have excellence in either teaching or research. Perhaps the language could be more strongly inserted with a sentence or two acknowledging that the slope of the line comes from both the X (teaching/faculty contact/experiential/mentoring) and Y (extraordinary research) axes.

Hope this is helpful, clear, and not redundant.

Otherwise, I think the Strategic Plan is spiffy!

**John Hutton – huttonjt@vcu.edu**

**6/30**

Overall I'm impressed by the plan. I think what's presented hits the nail on the head to move the college forward while aligning with Quest.

Several mentions in the plan's tactics and performance measures discuss analysis of metrics, or 'measuring the slope of the line', tracking students success, monitor enrollment, etc. I'm unsure who is/will be performing the data/information gathering and analysis. Perhaps a new position of 'Statistical Analyst' to track enrollment trends, student success, and metrics development.

I know that one of the deficiency areas is one that I'm part of... graduate student/program management. Alison and I have been working to develop streamlined processes to reduce the deficiencies. More needs to be done. Particularly to free the program directors and department chairs from paperwork associated with this area. Perhaps the 'service center' concept can be applied to graduate affairs, at least in year one, to provide resources to perform an audit of our graduate student records, and develop a mechanism to track graduate students from admissions to post-graduation.

Overall again, well written, I'm sure colleagues have made/suggested changes already. I worked with the School of Business, Senior Assoc. Dean during the School's accreditation process in the mid-90s. This brings back memories of hard work and noticeable successes. I'm excited to be a part of this planning process, and look forward to working on it's implementation.

**G Antonio Espinoza Ruiz -- gaespinoza@vcu.edu**

**6/30**

I hope you are doing very well. I have read the CHS Strategic Plan carefully and I think it is a very valuable document that could be extremely useful for VCU. I would like to suggest emphasizing the need to increase the diversity of the college's faculty and staff. I see this as a necessary step to better provide students with cultural fluency and global awareness.

In a parallel manner, many students would like to see their diversity better represented and acknowledged with the faculty and staff. Obviously, the historical inequalities that African-Americans in Virginia and the US as a whole have experienced -- including under-representation in higher education -- need to be addressed. In fact, it is alarming that the History Department at VCU does not have a tenured- or tenure-track professor of African-American history, and there is no search currently scheduled for this position. This, within a city that is more than 50% African-American, and a student body that is at least 16% African-American.

However, considering the growing presence of other minorities in the US and in colleges around the country, VCU and CHS need to look beyond the traditional white/African American divide and address the under-representation that other minorities experience as well. Otherwise, VCU and CHS will continue to trail behind in terms of equity and representation.

At the same time, I also think both VCU and CHS need to better train those in high administrative positions to cater to the expectations and needs of a more diverse faculty and staff. It is not just a matter of hiring more diverse employees, but also being sensitive toward their different backgrounds and how these affect their living- and working-experiences. This would contribute to real inclusiveness -- and retention.

I hope these brief suggestions are helpful.

**James P McCullough -- jmccull@vcu.edu**

**6/30**

The document overall is an excellent statement. One of the most critical sections is found on pages 4-7 where you lay out the Deficiencies in All Three Areas **which ought to be bolded in font**. You just sort of slip into these statements and points and these three areas are where the "rubber meets the road" - it is easy to miss just reading through these pages. Without these three areas being seriously addressed by the University, the wheels come off this document. I am writing this aware of the \$60,000 raise our President accepted from the Board while his Faculty in H & S languishes in the trenches (your three points). How he could accept this knowing the state of his Faculty suggests to me we've got an individual who's out for himself and his wallet. I know you don't like pissing and moaning and in the long run it doesn't do any good and your document hopefully, is the right way to go. I mention Rao's behavior because his behavior trickles down to the troops and has had a significant negative effect on the morale of his faculty and anything that stands in the way of these three issues you raise, raises my ire.

In Section IV, you discuss the resonant values and planning principles. I can achieve these goals in my graduate classes. I cannot do this in my undergraduate classes with 100 students. I'm afraid my class is more the "modal" situation in our College rather than the exception. I've taken to walking around the room and making my class environment as interactive as I can make it. My students learn early that I will not punish their questions and comments. Instead, I get in some significant questions and dialogue about their concerns. One thing I've learned is that many of them are very pessimistic about making any difference in our world today which includes Richmond, Virginia and areas outside of the state. This includes the professional arenas which many find distasteful and self-serving. We seem to have lost our professional heroes and heroines that students feel they can emulate in the various professional arenas.

Section VI: My current strategy now, and maybe it has to do with my age, is to see how many lives I can transform in my class interactions and by imparting the incredible knowledge we have accumulated in my profession of psychology.

So much of your report is so well written and what's there is so elegant - it will take a man with vision to see what's being said in your Report. Rao can talk about "excellence" but I hope you have good luck with his talk. What you have done that is very real to me is to keep putting the Excellence and Needs of the College OUT THERE and you have brought us so far up until now. I'm sorry you lost your Provost. Too bad she couldn't be the President of VCU. It would become a Presidency with Substance.

This Document is excellent and again, pages 4-7 to me are the core. The rest is elegant verbalization of goals and visions.

**Bob Gowdy – rgowdy@vcu.edu**  
**6/13**

In general the Strategic Plan looks good and I have only a few comments:

Under Theme 1: Cutting down on multiple repeats of classes is a very good idea and should be done as soon as possible.

I would add that we should implement a system of "Co-requisite Warnings" to indicate when a student does not have the required co-requisite courses. Ideally, the warning should pop up whenever a student is registering for classes on eservices. Right now co-requisites are not checked at all, which contributed to the recent problem of a student who failed to register for the lab part of our PHYS207 course.

Under the "Recruit a Talented and Diverse Student Body" we could improve the coordination of advising with the community colleges so that transfer students arrive here with the courses that they need to make progress.

Under Theme 2:

I will just note that Physics is on both of your ladders with world-class research that can easily be built upon as well as gaping holes in our curriculum.

Planning for retirements is becoming critical for us: Puru Jena is, I suspect, two years from retirement.

We need to be preparing for the likely retirement of our fiscal tech, Evelyn Perham within the next few years. Also, I am old enough that my willingness to continue as department chair could be overtaken by events at any time.

Under Theme 3:

I have complaints from several faculty members that the NanoCenter is becoming less useful than it was. Shared services and centers tend to become the victims of their own success as more conflicting demands are made on them. You might add "Increase support for centers in proportion to the demands being made on them."

Under "Develop new modern research space" I would add "Plan new space so that allied departments can be physically close to one another." Ideally all of the sciences should be close to each other in a single "science campus." Right now Physics and Psychology are separated from Chemistry, Math, and the Life Sciences.

Under Theme 4: I am glad to see support for entrepreneurial scholarships. Physics majors are particularly prone to start new businesses. Usually they do it after they leave us. Providing support to let them get started while they are here would be helpful.

That is all I have for now.

**Aashir Nasim – anasim@vcu.edu**

**1-10-15**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this final draft of the strategic plan. Overall, I think the strategic plan is solid. I really like the concepts 'pathways for transformation' and 'steepest slope of the line'. The concepts are ideas I think the college faculty and staff can envision and collectively enact. I only have a few minor comments.

First (Section 4), implicit in transformation is the idea that we are moving (e.g., students) from x to y to z. I think the plan does a good job of showing how we plan to move (e.g., students) from y to z, but not from x to y. For instance, I see the x as, who these students are before they come to our college (e.g., ethnic/racial and gender diversity)? Their background (e.g., first generation)? I see the y as what we do with students while they are here (i.e., the "intervention" so-to-speak)? And, I see z as what they can become because of their experiences in the college? As it relates to other forms of transformation mentioned (e.g., transforming the human condition), again, the plan does a good job (not as good as with the student paragraph) articulating y to z. But, there is no x. Perhaps, your executive team doesn't think the x is important? I do.

Second (Section 1, Paragraph 5), I am unsure if we need to "first correct our deficiencies in other areas to strengthen a foundation [upon which] to build excellence." As stated later in the document, our primary deficiency is lack of funding to recruit and retain faculty and, secondarily, a lack of infrastructure/space. But surely we can accomplish some things before these deficiencies are corrected. How might this be articulated?

Third (Section 5), it appears the numbering is off a bit. In terms of the principles, I still am somewhat confused on how "time is a finite and valuable resource" functions as a principle. Also, the one sentence about valuing diversity in all of its forms really isn't that meaningful. How exactly do we value diversity "in all of its forms"? Although it's included as a principle, it seems separate from what we (the college) are doing on both fundamental and functional levels. How is diversity within the college helping us to transform the lives of students and the overall human condition? Personally, I think the diversity of the college is our strongest asset. How are we capitalizing upon this?

Fourth (Section 6), there is repeated use of the term "unanimity". Try agreement or consensus.