



VCU College of Humanities and Sciences

Pathways for Transformation:

A Six-Year Strategic Plan for the College of Humanities and Sciences

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I. Introduction: A strategic plan for the College of Humanities and Sciences, the heart of VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is driven by a strategic roadmap, *Quest for Distinction*, aimed at distinguishing VCU as the nation's premier public, urban, research university. The College of Humanities and Sciences (H&S) is the liberal arts and sciences academic heart of VCU with vibrant educational and research programs. H&S enrolls nearly 60% of the undergraduates and nearly 50% of all students at VCU. As such, VCU's ability to reach its aspirations of quality, vibrancy, and performance relies heavily on the faculty and staff that make up the humanities and sciences. The following strategic plan is aimed at building the necessary foundation in H&S to support the aspirations of VCU in *Quest for Distinction*.

As the liberal arts and sciences intellectual lifeblood of the university, H&S not only attempts to prepare students for a job, but aspires to help them construct a foundation on which they will build a rich and deeply meaningful life and career. The core of that foundation is increasing the intellectual capacity of our students for critical and integrative thinking, quantitative reasoning, oral and written communication, digital fluency, cultural fluency, ethical and responsible citizenship necessary to participate effectively in a democracy, global awareness, a desire for lifelong learning, and a deep knowledge of a student's chosen discipline(s). The broad range of research, scholarship and creative activities conducted in H&S leads to both potential solutions to an array of pressing technological, health, and societal problems, as well to profound insights and reflections of what it means to be human and the connections we have with each other over generations through time and across geographical space.

H&S undertook a nine-month inclusive strategic planning process aimed at articulating both a candid assessment of the strengths and challenges in the liberal arts and sciences at VCU and an inspirational vision for the future for us as the core of VCU. The resulting plan is a blueprint outlining actions over the next six years that would facilitate H&S functioning as the intellectual heart of a premier, public, urban research university.

The planning process revealed two integrated passions that characterize the H&S community: a passion for transforming the lives of our students, and a passion for transforming the human condition, and the education of our students, through research, scholarship and creative arts. Our aim is to draw on these passions to provide an educational and research environment that provides for the steepest "slope of the line" in academe—the line representing the educational value added by VCU to students with respect to holistic integration of skills, disciplinary knowledge and personal growth gained over the course of an academic career, and to develop a research and scholarly portfolio consistent with a premier, public, urban research university.

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 H&S needs to raise its level of excellence by climbing two ladders simultaneously: building on areas with already strong foundations toward higher levels of national distinction, while, in other areas, correcting deficiencies to strengthen a foundation on which to build excellence. A key component of the plan is to commit to using data-driven processes (e.g., Delaware Study) to assess strengths and deficiencies, while also leveraging disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas identified in *Quest for Distinction* such as improving human health. The plan outlines

a set of relatively specific action items in each of the five main themes related to *Quest for Distinction*: Student success; attracting and retaining faculty and staff; advancing the discovery of new knowledge, creative expression, and innovation; contributing to the economic, cultural and civic vitality of the region and the world; and effectively stewarding our resources. We also propose a series of metrics to measure our progress and guide future strategic decisions.