



VCU

College of Humanities and Sciences

Pathways for Transformation:

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

(original version, May 12, 2014 – newest version January 4, 2015)

II. The current state of the College of Humanities and Sciences

H&S serves as the academic heart of VCU and the foundation for VCU’s aspirations to become the Nation’s premier, public, urban, research university as articulated in *Quest for Distinction*. H&S serves that role because we have more undergraduates enrolled in Humanities and Sciences majors, and teach more credit hours, 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 380,000 credit hours annually to students from majors across the university. Apart from the research writing requirement, H&S currently teaches approximately 92% of the second tier of the VCU core curriculum. This is indicative of H&S’s large responsibility as the liberal arts and sciences unit at VCU to impart undergraduate students with the core skills of critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, scientific literacy, information fluency, digital fluency, cultural fluency, oral and written communication skills, ethical and responsible citizenship necessary to live in a democracy, global awareness, and a commitment to life-long learning. These core skills are in addition to the faculty’s role in facilitating deeper knowledge in disciplinary areas. H&S not only teaches a large number of students, but also provides the academic majors for many of VCU’s highest performing students as well. For example, 18 of the 23 students recognized for winning major awards by President Rao in his 2012-2013 annual report to the Board of Visitors were enrolled in or graduated from H&S programs. H&S faculty also produce a substantial body of research, scholarly, and creative work: On the Monroe Park Campus, H&S has the largest amount of externally sponsored projects with a research focus (sponsored projects can be for research, training or service) and a large number of award winning researchers, scholars, and literary artists.

Figure 1a. Fall 2013 VCU Total Student Enrollment

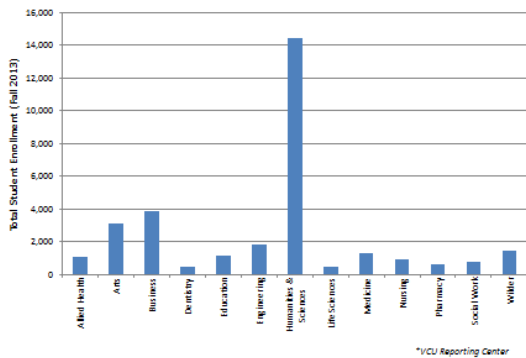
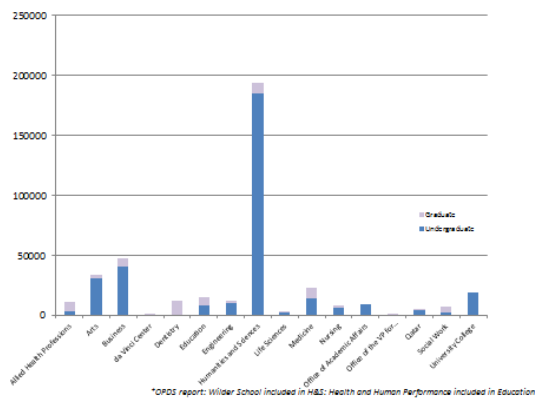


Figure 1b. Fall 2013 Credit Hours Delivered by VCU Academic Units*



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, H&S 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 full range competitive doctoral programs are in demand, receiving approximately 43% of VCU’s total doctoral graduate applications in 2013-2014 (**Figure 2**),

Table Ia: Humanities and Sciences Schools, Departments and Undergraduate Programs

Schools: School of World Studies (Anthropology, Foreign Languages, Religious Studies, International Studies); Robertson School of Media and Culture (Journalism, Public Relations and Advertising).

Departments: African American Studies; Biology; Chemistry; English; Forensic Science; Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies; Kinesiology and Health Sciences; History; Mathematics and Applied Mathematics; Military Science; Philosophy; Physics; Political Science; Psychology; Sociology; Statistical Sciences and Operations Research.

Programs: Liberal Studies for Early and Elementary Education; Interdisciplinary Science; Science Technology and Society.

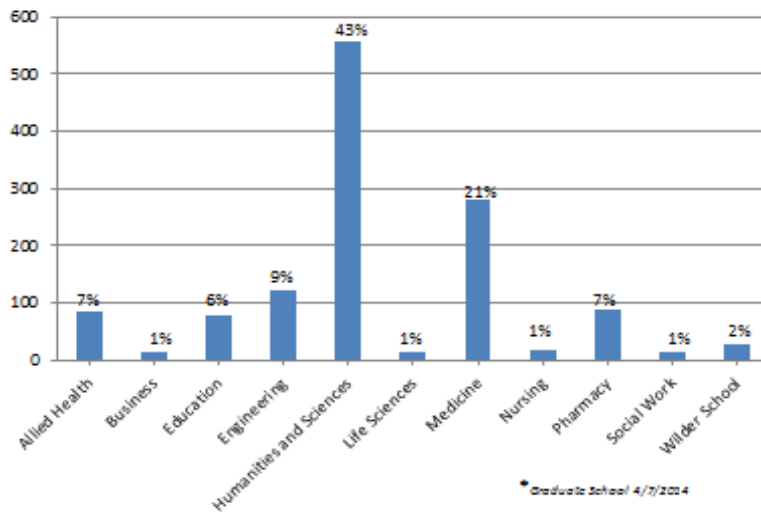
Table Ib: Humanities and Sciences Graduate Programs

Masters: Biology; Chemistry; Creative Writing (MFA); English; Forensic Science; Health and Movement Science; History; Mass Communications; Mathematical Sciences; Physics and Applied Physics; Sociology.

Doctoral: Chemistry; Chemical Biology; Clinical Psychology; Counseling Psychology; Health Psychology; Media, Art and Text; Nanoscience and Nanotechnology; Psychology; Rehabilitation and Movement Science; Systems Modeling and Analysis.

Post-Baccalaureate: Applied Social Research; Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies.

Figure 2: Number of Doctoral Applications received at VCU in 2013-2014*



Academic excellence in any liberal arts and sciences unit cannot be attained without excellent faculty. H&S has over 400 full-time (230 tenured, tenure-track faculty; 147 non-tenure track, full time, Term faculty; 41 administrative and professional faculty) and over 200 part-time faculty, supported by approximately 80 staff. This faculty core has developed a growing and vibrant research enterprise that receives significant external support (over \$16.0M in FY 2014) and significant national and international recognition through major national and international scholarly awards. Current and retired H&S faculty have received a Nobel Prize, a Pulitzer Prize, Guggenheim Fellowships, multiple Fulbright Fellowships, SCHEV Outstanding faculty awards, election into international academy of sciences, major recognition as Fellows of their professional societies and significant awards for their work. Many of our full and part-time faculty have also excelled in professional work outside of academe and bring such real world professional experience into the classroom.

H&S contributes deeply to advancing knowledge a broad range of disciplines. Faculty conduct pathbreaking research into the nature and connections of biological, physical and social systems. Such research programs are leading to potential solutions to a wide range of pressing technological, health, and societal problems such as controlling cancer, determining the health risks of novel tobacco products, creating substitutes for rare earth metals, and preventing violence in schools. H&S humanities scholars and literary artists encourage us to constantly and profoundly rethink, deepen, and reflect upon our understanding of our place in the world and our connections with each other over generations through time and across geographical space. H&S demonstrates a commitment to the power of the interdisciplinary connections across the liberal arts and sciences, and across other VCU units, with five interdisciplinary doctoral programs and a culture that encourages students to take on more than one major or to use minors in order to reach across disciplinary boundaries.

H&S is at the heart of a vibrant urban university that is the only research university in the Richmond region. VCU has an extraordinarily diverse student body, resides in an economically diverse and multi-cultural locale, and is built on an unusual mix of rich academic resources derived from the region, and from its own institutional evolution arising from the integration of Richmond Professional Institute's professional schools with the Medical College of Virginia. The city of Richmond occupies a profound and difficult place in U.S. history where it was the focal point of pivotal moments in the United States' evolution in government, politics, and race relations, making it a particularly fascinating location for healthy and vibrant humanistic, cultural and social debate. There is a deep and broad community in Richmond supporting creativity and the work of visual, performing and literary artists. Additionally, Richmond, largely through MCV, developed a world-class infrastructure supporting life and health science research. Both VCU and H&S built upon these community attributes by attracting faculty and students who care deeply about the community. In many cases, faculty, staff and students choose to come to VCU because of the institution's productive record of investing institutional energy into improving the physical, mental and economic health, education and well-being of the Richmond region's residents. Our alumni confirmed in a recent survey that that the urban vibrancy, intellectual rigor, community engagement, and diversity of the campus was critical to their post-graduation success. Together these attributes represent a powerful foundation on which to build a strategic plan for the liberal arts and sciences.

The success of any academic unit in attracting and training talented and diverse students and producing research that changes and enriches the world, can be boiled down to optimizing three major factors:

1. **The number and quality of faculty.** The alumni survey indicated that students rank the quality of faculty as *the* most important attribute to their academic experience and success after VCU. Additionally, a recent Gallup-Purdue Survey report (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/168848/life-college-matters-life-college.aspx>) indicated that students who said they had interacted with a faculty member who mentored them, engaged with them, and cared about them as a person were more than two times more likely to express a sense of well-being and engagement at work than students who did not form these relationships. Undoubtedly, such engaged faculty-student

interactions increase student retention and overall student success. And, the intellectual curiosity and intellectual drive of faculty members is the engine that drives university research.

2. **The quality of the physical infrastructure.** Research, teaching, office and interactive spaces equipped for high quality work are critical ingredients to a successful academic enterprise.
3. **The quality and effectiveness of supporting infrastructure.** Quality education and research require that faculty and students be supported by an appropriate number of high quality staff and efficient and effective administrative processes.

H&S has deficiencies in all three areas and these deficiencies create significant challenges to realizing the vision and aspirations of *Quest for Distinction*. For example, despite growing the size of the teaching/research faculty by over 50 new full-time faculty members over the last five years, the student-to-faculty (full time teaching/research faculty) ratio in H&S is approximately 38:1. Approximately two thirds of the full time faculty growth has been in non-tenure eligible faculty. The student-to-faculty ratio is more than 33% higher than relatively similar units in most of VCU's Quest peer institutions and approximately double that of some truly aspirational institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh and the University of South Carolina (**Table II**). Reaching a student-to-faculty ratio of 25:1 (in the mid-range of Quest Peers, but still far higher than U. Pitt and U. South Carolina) would require an increase of approximately 200 full time teaching/research faculty given current enrollments.

The 14,000 students and more than 600 full- and part-time faculty in H&S are supported in administration, finance and information technology by only approximately 80 staff members, causing challenges in the effectiveness of how we support the research and teaching mission, communicate with students, donors and alumni, in addition to simply meeting the administrative demands placed on us by the University, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and external sponsors of our research efforts.

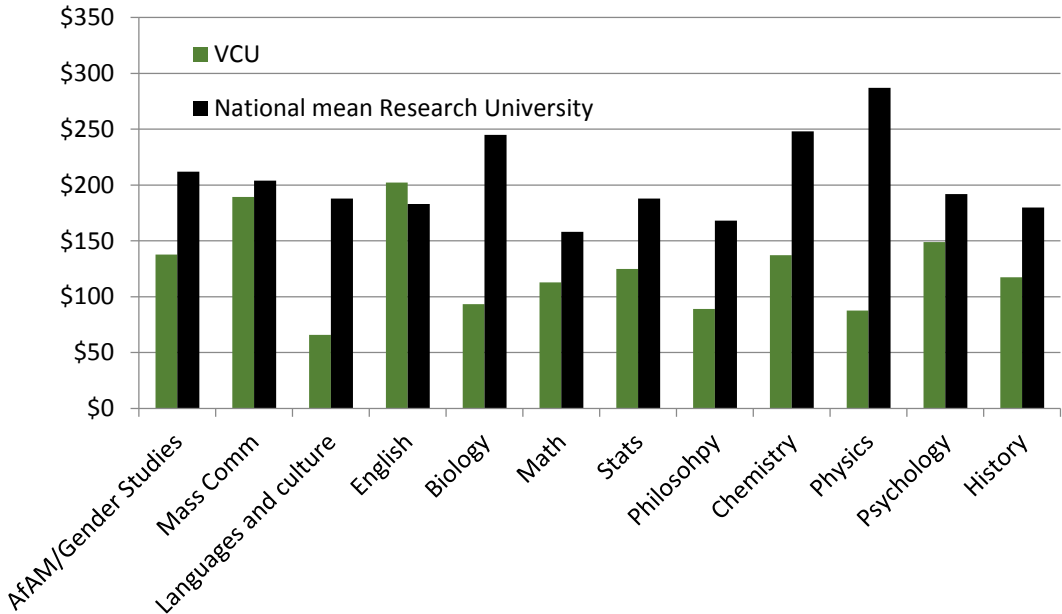
Table II. Comparisons from FY 2012-2013 data between VCU College of Humanities and Sciences with peer institutions. Data not obtained from a standard data set but from researching institutional websites.

Institution	#Under-grad	#Grad	% of Univ. enrollment	# FT T&R faculty	S:F ratio	Research expenditures (or awards) (\$M)	Research expenditures /faculty	#PhD+ MFA programs
VCU- College of H&S (<i>note taken during FY12/FY13: Brandcenter and Wilder School were part of H&S; Kinesiology & Health Sciences was not- current S:F is 38:1</i>)	13,500	1,100	47%	359	41:1	\$15M	\$42,000	11
University of Alabama-Birmingham College of Arts and Sciences (Quest peer)	6,600	630	40%	275	28:1	\$15M	\$56,000	9
University of Louisville - Arts and Sciences (Quest peer)	7,870	800	42%	375	24:1	\$6.5M	\$17,000	12
University of Cincinnati-McKibben College of Arts and Sciences (Quest peer)	6,820	940	20%	421	20:1	\$11M	\$25,000	15

Wayne State University- College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	11,000	1,500	41%	415	30:1	\$20M	\$48,000	17
University of South Carolina, College of Arts and Sciences (Quest peer)	7,416	673	34%	536	15:1	\$50M	\$93,000	22
University of Pittsburgh, Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences	10,683	1,501	46%	746	16:1	\$54M	\$72,000	34

To manage these financial challenges, H&S has evolved to become extraordinarily efficient at delivering instruction relative to *Quest* peer institutions—our initial analysis using data from the Delaware Study (**Figure 3**; 2011 data) suggests that we deliver a credit hour of instruction at as much as one quarter the cost of similar programs at some of our peer institutions, while still obtaining external research funding at similar, and in some case, much higher rates per faculty member (**Table II**). Although we can be proud of our efficiency, it is the result of supporting the work of our faculty with fewer resources than peer and aspirational peer institutions. This lack of support has consequences. For example, deficiencies in support reduces the amount of time that faculty can spend mentoring students or conducting research. Our average class size is high, and we teach many classes that are too large to enable effective engagement of students with professors. Discussions with faculty members that have pursued offers at other research institutions clearly suggest that the resource deficiencies we experience make our best faculty more susceptible to recruitment to more resource rich academic environments. And, the high efficiency of our faculty and our staff in their existing efforts comes at a cost of limiting the time they have to develop new initiatives, new systems or improved processes that facilitate engagement and tracking of our students.

Figure 3: 2011 Delaware Study data on instructional expenditures per credit hour by discipline comparing VCU H&S programs to the average for national research universities.



In addition, H&S would need significant investments in new academic space and support to more effectively deliver our educational programs and to grow highly competitive research programs. H&S occupies over 300,000 square feet, with some departments spread across several buildings. Our space is in

variable states of condition, with much of the space in historic buildings that are not optimally designed for academic purposes or interdisciplinary interactions. Moreover, some of the more modern spaces are many cases not designed to support a growing research enterprise (e.g., challenges with chemistry research in Oliver Hall). Most importantly, our existing space is fully utilized. Additionally, the Dean's Office for Humanities and Sciences is spread out across the Monroe Park Campus with offices in four buildings, making it difficult for students to navigate the VCU infrastructure. Students in every other division of VCU have a "home" building where they can access student services and connect with other students- yet the majority of undergraduates have no such place, as VCU has never invested in such an infrastructure for H&S. New academic space that can facilitate our vision for transformational student success and research is a key to our strategic plan.

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. H&S evolved in a resource-limited situation that forced it toward a collective attitude as being the "engine that could," or perhaps just "the engine that had to."

This strategic plan draws on the profound sense of purpose and tentative optimism that characterizes the "the engine" in our faculty, staff, students and alumni, and it is that same sense of purpose of this icon of grit and determination that infiltrates every corner of the H&S community, making this a truly special unit. Our planning process revealed that we share a bond together in a common mission of transforming lives, fields of study and communities. The strategic plan outlined below tries to capture and build upon that shared mission, while also recognizing that the optimism and grit are in danger of being unsustainable if we do not better align resources with our responsibility for providing undergraduate and graduate education and the goals and expectations of the University.