



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)

III. The planning process

H&S embarked on a nine-month strategic planning process in August, 2013. A foundation of the H&S process was the belief that strategic plans need to derive from the collective wisdom of the broad academic community. During Fall, 2013, we engaged approximately 2,000 alumni in a survey (see appendix) that provided detailed information on their sense of the strengths of VCU and H&S and the challenges they faced as alums. Also, during the Fall 2013 semester the entire H&S faculty and staff community was asked to participate in a process called Concept Mapping aimed at identifying a quantitative and collective sense of the highest priority action items that can form the foundation for a strategic plan—over half of our faculty and staff (approximately 350 people) participated in this intensive activity. The Concept Mapping exercise identified 125 priorities (or action items) that were then rated by individual participants on their relative importance and impact in helping H&S meet the goals of Quest for Distinction. Most of the "priorities" that emerged from this process represented actions that individuals would like to see taken by the College or the University that would improve the VCU work environment and/or faculty and staff productivity (e.g., increase salaries; lower teaching loads to foster research; increase faculty numbers) and also identified actions that the community felt would have the largest impact on student success, research and community engagement. A summary of the Concept Mapping results is included in the appendix.

Upon completing the Concept Mapping Analysis, small groups (8-12) of faculty and staff, including Faculty Council (the H&S faculty governance body), met with the Dean to discuss how the resulting priorities identified in Concept Mapping could be tied to specific and measurable goals and woven into a strategic plan. Approximately 120 faculty and staff participated in more than a dozen small group meetings. In addition the Dean met with H&S student leaders, and a new H&S advisory board.

The resulting document was first drafted by the Dean in which he used the results of the Concept Mapping and his incorporation of key points and consensus ideas in the small group discussions. The first draft was then distributed to the H&S community, comments received, and the plan completed.

IV. Pathways for Transformation

We titled our strategic plan, *Pathways for Transformation*, as it captures the core ideas that emerged from our strategic planning process. The title derives from three perspectives. First, H&S faculty and staff share a distinctive passion for the transformational role they play in facilitating the development of deeply meaningful lives and careers of VCU's diverse student body and for transforming the human condition through research, scholarship and creative arts. The integration of these two passions—transforming undergraduate and graduate student lives and transforming human knowledge and understanding—was clearly articulated as a defining and shared characteristic of H&S.

Second, the College of Humanities and Sciences, itself, is undergoing a major transformation as we continue our evolution from our RPI roots toward being the core undergraduate and graduate liberal arts and sciences unit of a premier, public, urban, research university.

Third, the academic career of liberal arts and science students most often follows a non-linear, interconnected and sometimes stochastic pathway that evolves during the course of their academic and career development. Many of our alumni expressed that these non-linear pathways have led them to successful and deeply meaningful lives and careers. And, for so many faculty, their best research, scholarship and

creative activities follows non-linear pathways, as new information and insights evolve during the course of their work.

Pathways for Transformation aptly draws upon and captures our heart and our future: H&S is committed to transforming lives and fields of study, while at the same, is itself undergoing a significant transformation. Our strategic plan is about creating pathways to facilitate the transformation.