



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)

V. Emergence of some resonant values and principles in the planning process

Quest for Distinction builds its plan on the foundation of a set of core VCU values that are shared by Humanities and Sciences faculty: Accountability, Achievement, Collaboration, Freedom, Innovation, Service, Diversity and Integrity (<http://www.quest.vcu.edu/about/mission/>). Yet, during the H&S discussions, there was the emergence of four core principles, built upon these values, but integrated with core ideas related to a liberal arts and sciences education. These principles deeply resonated with participants in the strategic planning discussion and can be thought of as “tests” or “filters” to which we will place any action or priority that H&S might choose to undertake.

- 1. We share the value and principle that 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. Such an education is a pathway for students to a deeply meaningful and successful life and career:** We want our graduates to have strong disciplinary and professional knowledge enveloped within a foundation of critical thinking skills and quantitative reasoning, oral and written communication fluency, abilities to frame data-based arguments and to develop intellectually sound conclusions from often incomplete information, a strong sense of ethical and civic responsibility, cultural fluency, digital fluency, and an evolving sense of the multiple connections and complexities that exist among disciplines. These skills and disciplinary knowledge need to be developed with real world experiences that can prepare students for life after they graduate, such as internships and undergraduate research. And, they should instill a commitment to life-long learning.
- 2. Transformational impacts require our full commitment to excellence, but the future excellence of H&S depends upon our climbing two ladders simultaneously: building on existing strengths toward national distinction in some programs, while building excellence in other programs by first creating a strong foundation by correcting existing deficiencies.** H&S has evolved over time into a situation where there are some programmatic areas that with sufficient and strategic investment can quickly move to very high levels of national distinction. Yet, in other programmatic areas serious deficiencies in the number of faculty, staff support, graduate student support, or space prohibit our ability to offer excellent value-added education in areas of high student demand, or to optimize our scholarly productivity. Thus, to attain excellence we need to invest new or reallocated resources to ensure that our programs have at least a minimal level of resources that enables them to effectively deliver programs with the quality one would expect in a premier, urban, research university, while at the same time, we need to continue a process of identifying areas of opportunity where developing and investing in a critical mass of scholars can lead to national distinction.
- 3. 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.** Such embracing of diversity in all of

its forms is a foundation of a strong liberal education and prepares students to be successful in a continually diversifying society.

- 4. Time is a finite and extraordinarily valuable resource.** Transforming the lives of students with education and transforming knowledge with research requires immense focus and efforts of faculty and staff. Actions that we take must be placed in the context of the question of whether such actions optimize the use of the finite resource of faculty and staff time toward meeting our objectives in student success and excellence in research, scholarship and creative activities. If not, we need to examine what additional support is needed, or what activities should be stopped or lessened, to ensure that appropriate time is available for teaching and research.