



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)

VI. Strategic Aims: The steepest slope of the line

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

H&S faculty are committed to the *Quest* goal of attracting an increasingly talented and diverse student body who take maximum advantage of their time at VCU. The strategic planning process revealed unanimity among our faculty and staff in believing that the key aspect of student success is not simply graduating, or even just getting a job after graduation, but in leaving VCU as a graduate with an excited and engaged vision for the next step in one's life journey, empowered with the liberal education skills needed for success over a lifetime, and the disciplinary knowledge needed to make that first step. The value that a university adds to its students can be defined as the difference between the skills, knowledge base, determination, and vision for the future that students have when they enter a university and those attributes when they leave as a graduate. H&S is proud of its impact on students and on research, scholarship and creative activities and that we will continue to have even as the talent and diversity increases among our student body. Given this unanimity of purpose, the vision of our strategic plan is to aim to prioritize our actions and investments in resources in our education mission such that H&S is recognized as providing the highest value-added to our students—we believe that the degree of positive transformation that happens at VCU can be as high or higher than any other university. We aim to be recognized as a destination place for talented and diverse students willing to be transformed by a high quality educational experience in a vibrant, urban, research-based and demographically diverse environment that will prepare them to embark on profound lives and careers after graduation. We aim to provide the steepest slope of the line—the line representing a holistic integration of skills, disciplinary knowledge and personal growth that are gained over the course of an academic career.

Similarly, contributing new understanding to human knowledge and transforming the human condition, and integrating such creation, discovery and scholarship into undergraduate and graduate education, is key to the Humanities and Sciences contribution to *Quest for Distinction*. Our strategic plan recognizes the need to enhance the diverse intellectual environment in Humanities and Sciences through research, scholarship and creative activities, and to focus our new investments on research areas where we have strength and where we have opportunities to make a difference to people's lives or to advance our fields and garner national recognition for our intellectual efforts. There is not a ranking of liberal arts and sciences units with respect to their research performance. But, our vision is to see significant increases in sponsored research, the quality and recognition/ranking of our graduate programs, and increasing recognition of faculty through national and international awards. Excellent research programs require a critical mass of strong researchers, so targeting our investment, and leveraging that investment in areas where critical mass can be attained through partnerships through other units, will be a focus.

VII. Action Items and metrics that define the plan

The H&S strategic plan creates a six-year roadmap for climbing two ladders simultaneously: reducing deficiencies and building excellence by focusing on a set of relatively specific action items in each of five

main themes related to the VCU Strategic Plan *Quest for Distinction*. A key underlying foundation of this plan is a commitment to data-driven processes to assess our areas of excellence; our most pressing deficiencies, and to measuring our progress.

The list below represents a summary of 10 key items in the *Pathways for Transformation* plan. More detail of these actions, other actions, and the metrics to assess them are in the attached tables in the appendix organized by *Quest for Distinction* themes.

- Hire 15 new faculty members per year and achieve peer-competitive salary levels, moving our student to full time teaching/research faculty to 30:1, which would be significant progress towards a long-term stable goal of no greater than 25:1. We should raise at least \$10M in the upcoming development campaign for endowed chairs and professorships to support hiring and retention of excellent faculty.
- Diversify H&S faculty to more accurately reflect our student body.
- Build a new H&S physical home to serve as the intellectual center for H&S, raising at least \$10M in philanthropic funds, and identify and renovate additional space to support excellence in research.
- Increase annual sponsored research by \$15M and creatively support research centers.
- Provide resources and incentives to encourage pedagogical improvement and adoption/creation of best practices the classroom.
- Develop and implement the use of tools, such as student portfolios, to assess the holistic growth in skills, disciplinary knowledge, and personal development of students
- Double the number of our students taking advantage of integrative opportunities such as undergraduate research, internships, entrepreneurship, international experiences, and service learning and raise \$10M to provide financial support to remove barriers that students face in pursuing these integrative opportunities. Also, incorporate faculty participation in mentoring students in these activities into the performance evaluation and reward system,
- Develop algorithms for appropriate staff and advising support for our programs, and make significant progress to meeting those goals
- Improve quantitative rankings and qualitative recognition of our existing graduate programs which will require strategies for to attract the best students into graduate programs
- Implement a unit specific Great Place Initiative program to improve the climate for faculty and staff resulting in reduced staff turnover and increasingly positive scores in campus climate surveys.