**D R A F T**

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, December 2, 2021**

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

A meeting of the University Council was held on Thursday, December 2, 2021 at 3 p.m. via Zoom.

The following members and alternates were present:

**Officers:** Michael Rao, Fotis Sotiropoulos, and Meredith Weiss

**Administration:** Cathleen Burke, Andrew Daire, Jay Davenport, Irene Herold, Grant Heston, Art Kellerman, Charles Klink, Tomikia LeGrande, Pam Lepley, Mary Pettiette, and Constance Relihan

**Faculty:** Sompop Bencharit,Brian Brown, Paul Bukaveckas, Beth Bukoski, Everett Carpenter, Mariah Crilley, Carla-Mae Crookendale, Rodney Dyer, Sarah Faris, James Ferri, Josh Galligan, Catherine Ingrassia, Aniket Jadhav, Peter Kirkpatrick, Edward Millner, Lathika Mohanraj, Nicole Omecene, Maria Rivera, Valerie Robholt, Scott Street, Katharine Tibbetts, Christy Tyndall, StaceyWahl,Yi Wen Wei, Marjolein de Wit, and Christine Wynd

**Postdoctoral Scholar:** Chelsea Sawyers

**Classified staff**: Chris McDonald, Elizabeth Quammie, Saher Randhawa, Amanda Simmons, Hannah Steighner, Chris Straus, Jennifer Tennison, Katina Velentzas, and Wren Wyatt

**Students**: Kamal Alhassan, Natalie Barr, Sydney Biondi, Chidera Ntiwunka-Ifeanyi, Fatima Malik, Reena Pidaparti, and Singth Nawagamuwage Perera

**Ex-Officio and Guests**: David Allen, Delores Armstrong, Jason Block, Gypsy Denzine, Dan Han, Karen Helderman, Alex Henson, Irene Herold, Susan Kornstein, Jessica Mittler, Aashir Nasim, Susan Parrish, Susan Robb, Veronica Shuford, and Deborah Noble-Triplett

1. **President’s Report**

President Rao welcomed Council members to the last UC meeting of the semester.

Dr. Rao noted that he is grateful to all of you as faculty, staff and students for your contributions to making this a successful semester. He commented that: 1) You continue to show great resilience, dedication and hard work, and most importantly, great attitudes; and 2) Working together, all of you have paved the way for a spring semester where we will be together even more with in-person classes and other events. Dr. Rao especially appreciates your continued participation in the Quest recalibration process and the work we are doing together to lift VCU to the next level and to truly transform the institution in innovative ways that distinguish VCU as a model for higher education.

Dr. Rao noted that VCU is looking forward to our first in-person commencement ceremony in two years on December 11. VCU will be celebrating our summer and fall 2021 graduates and our Spring and Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 graduates who didn’t have an opportunity to attend an in-person university commencement ceremony. The commencement speaker is Miss America 2020 Camille Schrier, a VCU Pharmacy student. We will be honoring Anna Lou and Robert Schaberg with the Edward A Wayne Medal, in honor of their outstanding contributions to VCU. Overall, about 3,000 students will receive their degrees this fall, contributing to VCU’s rising graduation rates.

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the November 4, 2021 were approved.

1. **Committee Reports**

The Academic Affairs and University Policy Committee presented the following programmatic changes, and new and revised policy proposals**:**

Proposal to establish a School of Public Health—Dr. Art Kellerman, Senior Vice President for Health Sciences and Chief Executive Officer of the VCU Health System, discussed the proposal and responded to questions. With 93% “yes” votes and 7 abstentions, a motion was made and seconded to accept and move the proposal forward for review and approval by the VCU Board of Visitors.

A Revised Identity Theft Prevention Standard Policy—Mr. Dan Han, Chief Information Security Officer, discussed the revised policy and responded to questions. With 96% “yes” votes and 4 abstentions, a motion was made and seconded to accept and move the revised policy forward for review and approval by the VCU Board of Visitors.

1. **Staff Affairs Committee**

Saher Randhawa discussed concerns and potential solutions. They to include:

1. Broad scale issue: discrepancy between staff benefits and experiences.

Staff wellness programs and other staff-focused or benefits-focused events typically occur during normal working hours. Staff members who are not working remotely or do not have a flexible schedule (ex: research staff) are unable to attend these events (either virtually or in-person) and benefit from such programs. One solution would be to record these sessions and post them, or have these sessions after regular working hours. Additionally, these “types” of staff members are also not able to benefit from the hybrid schedule model offered to full-time staff members. These staff members (who cannot work from home and have limited scheduling flexibility) have an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure or transmission, and may experience scheduling difficulties as they have less flexibility than WFH colleagues. One solution could be to offer additional PTO or leave (SEPARATE from PHL) to members who have not applied for the hybrid schedule via their manager.

1. Broad scale issue: urban heat islands on VCU property.

The 2017 urban heat map of Richmond published by the Science Museum showed areas of significantly elevated surface temperatures all over the greater Richmond area, specifically including areas where VCU owns “groups” of properties (such as the Monroe Park and MCV campuses). Urban heat islands are a significant public health hazard and are predicted to worsen with climate change – this is not an issue for the city of Richmond alone to respond to. Solutions will require a multifaceted approach, which the College of Engineering or the Center for Environmental Studies could contribute to. Mitigation techniques include the installation of “green” or “cool” roofs, white-topping existing pavement, and adding or increasing vegetation cover and landscaping in high-heat areas (particularly on open lot areas such as parking lots, where runoff is also a significant issue).

1. Increase staff wages to market value and create a work culture to retain and

recruit staff.

No information is publicly available on the number or frequency of promotions given to staff or the salaries/rates of compensation of current working staff members. From the information that is anecdotally or personally available, raises and promotions are seemingly scarce for staff members, and no major cost-of-living raises have been announced for staff in the recent years (outside of VCUHealth). With the recent unionization push from adjunct faculty and some staff members, it has been made clear that many employees and staff feel the university does not pay a living wage, nor does VCU pay market value. MIT estimated the living wage in RVA to be around $60,380 for workers supporting a child (2020), while the average full-time staff member at VCU makes only $53,000 (as reported by Payscale in 2020, as VCU does not report on staff compensation). The wages offered by VCU are also well below the market average, even for the area; a May 2020 report by the Bureau of Labor estimates the annual mean wage for a biological laboratory technician to be $50,530 for Virginia or $42,070 for Richmond, while VCU currently lists the base market range midpoint to be at $38,500 (though anecdotally, this number is quite high compared to actual pay). Additionally, VCU does not offer cost-of-living adjustments or annual compensation increases despite the fact that consumer inflation has hit 6.2% in October 2021 and cost of living has increased significantly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A general discussion followed.

1. **Constituent Reports**

Chidera Ntiwunka-ifeanyi provided an SGA Report. She discussed SGA highlights and a general discussion followed.

Valerie Robnholt provided a Faculty Senate Report. She discussed faculty senate highlights and a general discussion followed.

Saher Randhawa provided a Staff Senate Report. She discussed staff senate highlights and a general discussion followed.

1. **Cabinet Report**

Grant Heston, Vice President of University Relations, provided a presentation on “VCU Brand: Sharing Our Story”. A general discussion followed and Mr. Heston responded to questions.

1. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.