**MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 4, 2021**

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

A meeting of the University Council was held on Thursday, March 4 at 3 p.m. via Zoom.

The following members and alternates were present:

**Officers:** President Michael Rao, Meredith Weiss and Holly Alford

**Administration:** Peter Buckley, Cathleen Burke, Andrew Daire, Jay Davenport, Jean Giddens, Karol Kain Gray, Arthur Kellerman, Charles Klink, Tomikia LeGrande, Pam Lepley, and Constance Relihan

**Faculty:** Deidra Arrington,Sompop Bencharit,Michael Broda,Brian Brown,Paul Bukaveckas,Jason Callahan, Everett Carpenter,Ross Collin, Mariah Crilley, Rodney Dyer, James Ferri, Josh Galligan, Catherine Ingrassia, Aniket Jadhav, Melissa Jamerson, Susan Kornstein, Kim Curry-Lourenco, Jacqueline Smith-Mason, Tom McNulty, Edward Millner, Jonathan Moore, Lauren Pamulapati, Valerie Robnolt, Scott Street, Dong Sun, Katharine Tibbetts, Melissa Tyler,Christy Tyndall,StaceyWahl, David Webber, Christine Wynd, Wenli Yan

**Postdoctoral Scholar:** Sean Koebley

**Classified staff**: Delores Armstrong, Valerie Carter, Holly Dean, Michelle Hawkins, Pamela Mason, Brian McNeill, Karen Mullins, Saher Randhawa

**Students**: Sydney Biondi, Alex Chong, Jordan James, Udhanth Mallasani, Fatima Malik, Taylor Maloney, and William Markle

**Ex-Officio and Guests**: Alex Henson, Teresa Knott, Aashir Nasim, Reuban Rodriguez, and Deborah Noble-Triplett, Angie Flack, Karen Helderman, Pam Lepley, and Susan Robb, Dan Han

1. **President’s Report**

President Rao welcomed everyone. He began the meeting on a somber note to honor the memory of our student, Adam Oakes, who died this past weekend at a party with fraternity friends. We are all heartsick about this tragedy. Adam came to VCU to launch his life, not to end it. The pain his family is suffering is unfathomable and we hold Adam and his family and friends in our hearts. Adam’s family and all of us want to know what happened. VCU fully supports the investigation led by the Richmond Police Department and assisted by VCU Police. We need to allow time for police to conduct a thorough investigation. As the investigation continues, Dr. Rao have charged Student Affairs to conduct an independent, full-scale review of Greek Life at the university. This will include all aspects of Greek Life -- including: university oversight; accountability of members and chapters; policies and practices related to recruitment and membership behavior; member experience and activities; issues related to hazing, alcohol, drug abuse and sexual violence; general practices related to inclusion, safety and well-being; connections and commitment to VCU and the Richmond community. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list -- there will be more involved. The goal is to build a national model that promotes health and safety and creates a climate of respect and inclusion that is conducive to academic success. We will keep everyone updated on this review. Dr. Rao met with student fraternity and sorority leadership and other student leaders a few days ago. They welcome participation in the independent review. The student leaders also expressed that they -- all of us -- must be the example of promoting the safety and well-being of everyone in the community. We will best honor Adam’s life by truly caring for, including and valuing each other.

He provided a brief report that included the following highlights:

* Safety and Well-being Advisory Committee (SWAC) Update-this tragedy, the pandemic, and the social justice events of the summer point to the critical need to show our respect and deep care for each other. To address inequities and disparities in how we do the business of the university, A large, cross-campus group that forms the Safety and Well-being Advisory Committee -- SWAC -- was charged several months ago by me to define and institute a new transformational model for public safety and wellness. SWAC consists of more than 50 members from across VCU and VCU Health, representing faculty, staff, team members, students, alumni and community members. Their objective is to review VCU’s safety well-being activities and inform operational and strategic decisions regarding: fair and impartial policing; community relations; and transformational model development. SWAC is led by School of Education Dean Andrew Daire and Sheryl Garland, Chief of Health Impact for VCU Health System. The committee has conducted background research on VCU Police and safety and well-being resources -- including looking at university models nationwide. It is formalizing recommendations, with a final report to the administration expected in early April. President Rao thanked Andrew Daire and Sheryl Garland for their leadership and the committee members for their dedication and diligence to complete this important work.
* Return to campus-in his recent State of the University address, Dr. Rao said that VCU is emerging stronger together. We’ve learned a lot over these many months, and it’s certain that some things will never be the same. In the short-term, today we resumed our original spring semester plan for limited on-campus classes. Our return was based on a recommendation by our public health experts who note that the COVID trends on our campuses and the Richmond area are improving. The Governor last week eased COVID restrictions. Our return also was based on the success of the fall semester -- which a credit to all students, faculty and staff.

We also are quite concerned about the mental health of our students. Provost Gail Hackett and Meredith Weiss, VP for Administration, who heads our COVID response, met with the faculty/staff COVID advisory group last week. PHRT co-chairs also attended and addressed questions and concerns and received helpful feedback. This advisory group will meet in advance of major decisions moving forward.

* Fall semester-All of this sets the stage for a fuller return to campus in the fall
  + Vaccinations will help make that possible
  + Nearly 70 percent of health system team members have been vaccinated
  + We’ve started to vaccinate eligible faculty, staff and students under the state’s phased plan
  + We are looking at improvement in vaccine supplies over the next month, and if this continues, we anticipated that our community can be vaccinated by the start of the fall semester
  + A vaccination coordination team and a vaccine corps have been established to be ready to administer vaccinations to eligible staff, faculty and students as soon as supplies are available – and we hope that is soon
* GA Session/Budget Conference Report-Our budget situation remains stable for

the current fiscal year and is looking favorable for FY 22, based on the budget reached by the state House and Senate and sent to the governor for his consideration. Lawmakers continue to acknowledge VCU’s unique role in service to our students and patients. The budget bill before the governor includes: increases in student financial aid; funds to support our COVID response; support of the purchase of the ABC property for our Athletics Village; funding support for the Wilder School RISE program, Virginia Center on Aging at VCU, and high-performance computing tools for the development of the Commonwealth Center for Cloud Computing. Very importantly, the bill includes the state’s share of a 5% salary merit increase. Under our split-fund arrangement with the state, the university must pay for the remainder of the total cost of the salary increase. The governor’s recommendations on the proposed budget will be considered during the reconvened GA session in April, when we can expect final passage of the bill by the legislature.

* Provost update-Dr. Rao noted that the committee is interviewing candidates. The goal is to announce Dr. Hackett’s successor by April. VCU is grateful for Dr. Hackett’s leadership during a year of challenge.
* President Rao thanked the faculty, staff and students for continuing to show amazing resilience. He also thanked them for their hard work and commitment during an exceedingly difficult time.

1. **Minutes**

Minutes from the University Council meeting on February 4, 2021 were accepted.

1. **Constituent Reports**

Taylor Maloney and Alex Chong provided a Student Government Association Report. They discussed highlights and a general discussion followed.

Valerie Robnolt 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. **For Information**

Dr. Aashir Nasim, Vice President of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness and Success and Vice Provost for Engagement and Equity, provided an update. A general discussion followed and Dr. Nasim responded to questions.

1. **Adjournment**

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