



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF VISITORS
ACADEMIC AND HEALTH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

April 11, 2024

VCU College of Health Professions
900 East Leigh Street
Richmond, VA 23219

DRAFT

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Tonya Parris-Wilkins, *Chair*

Ms. Rooz Dadabhoy, *virtual pursuant to Code Section 2.2-3708.3(B)(4) personal matter where the member was unable to attend the meeting due to previous commitment – Richmond, VA*

Ambassador Carmen Lomellin, *virtual pursuant to Code Section 2.2-3708.3(B)(3) where the member's principal residence is over 60 miles from the meeting location – Arlington, VA*

Mr. Keith Parker, *virtual pursuant to Code Section 2.2-3708.3(B)(3) where the member's principal residence is over 60 miles from the meeting location – Atlanta, GA*

Dr. Clifton Peay, *virtual pursuant to Code Section 2.2-3708.3(B)(4) personal matter where the member was unable to attend the meeting due to previous commitment – Richmond, VA*

Mr. Todd Haymore, *Rector*

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Anthony Bedell

Mr. H. Benson Dendy III

Ms. Ellen Fitzsimmons, *virtual pursuant to Code Section 2.2-3708.3(B)(4) personal matter where the member was unable to attend the meeting due to previous commitment – Dubai*

Hon. Peter Farrell

Mr. Edward McCoy

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Steven DeLuca

Dr. Dale Jones

Mr. P2 Sandhu

OTHERS PRESENT

Dr. Michael Rao, *President*

Ms. Chelsea Gray, *Executive Director of Board and Executive Operations*

Ms. Stephanie Hamlett, *University Counsel*

Mr. David Litton, *Interim Executive Director for Audit and Compliance Services*

Dr. Fotis Sotiropoulos, *Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs*

Members of President's Cabinet

Staff and students from VCU and VCUHS

Members of the media

Dr. Tonya Parris-Wilkins, Chair, Academic and Health Affairs Committee, called the meeting to order at 12:34 p.m. in the first floor multipurpose room of the VCU College of Health Professions, located at 900 East Leigh Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219. The public was able to view the meeting via livestream at <https://mssvideo.vcu.edu/BOV>.

Dr. Parris-Wilkins began the meeting with a follow-up item from the March Board of Visitors meeting where the board heard from faculty and students about changes to Focused Inquiry. At that time, the board asked Provost Sotiropoulos to provide additional information at the next Academic and Health Affairs Committee meeting. She then turned to Provost Sotiropoulos.

Provost Sotiropoulos began by expressing VCU's commitment to the success of the students. Focused Inquiry is one of the two departments of VCU's University College. A commitment to student success means being able to offer courses of the appropriate size, courses that are taught by highly qualified faculty members and also being able to be financially sustainable.

Last year because of some significant budget challenges VCU faced, VCU had to take a 5% budget cut and that had to happen across all the units of the university. It became increasingly clear that the financial situation of University College was not sustainable. At the time, he charged all academic teams including University College to look at taking steps to make units financially sustainable. At the time in order to balance the department budget, the only possible way was to eliminate positions and somewhat increase the size of the classes, which the Dean agreed. As a result, as a recommendation from the Dean, 14 of the 74 members of University College faculty were informed that their contracts would not be renewed. He recognized the devastating consequences that this could cause, but the decision now placed the university college and focused inquiry on a clear path to sustainability. He emphasized that no one was fired, no contracts were terminated and the university fully intends to honor and is honoring the terms of all existing contracts and that every affected individual deserves professional empathy to the highest degree.

Due to enrollment growth since this decision the college, the Dean extended the contracts of two of these faculty members. In addition to the non-renewals 8 more focused inquiry faculty members resigned on their own from the position which created some difficulties with the ability to potentially offer the courses for students for subsequent years. VCU posted job openings for postdocs to teach focused inquiry classes which he believes to be prudent planning for the university's best interest of students. First, hiring postdocs would allow the university to balance the need for a potentially large incoming class of first year students with unexpected resignation from within the focused inquiry department. Secondly, by nature, postdoc positions are temporary. These are pathways for individuals to get into faculty careers, and they typically do not last more than a couple of years. Finally, and equally as important, these postdoc positions would create steppingstone opportunities for individuals holding newly PhD degrees and the desire to begin their teaching career. And last but not least given "Every Ram is a Researcher" there is a focus on increasing the number of faculty with terminal degrees and firsthand research experience could teach students.

He concluded by reiterating that VCU wants to find ways to expand Focused Inquiry, augmented impact, and make it financially sustainable.

One board member shared that the board agreed to transforming the university and making these sorts of difficult decisions and the Provost has done this. It is difficult and controversial, but he has gone through the appropriate process. One board member shared concerns about required/mandated general education courses and expressed that students should have the opportunity to pick their general education courses. The Provost and others explained accreditation requirements.

There being no further business, the Dr. Parris-Wilkins, adjourned the committee at 1:00 p.m.