Learning that Matters:
Building a culture of generalizable education

Virginia Commonwealth University
Quality Enhancement Plan

SACSCOC on-site visit
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A. Executive summary

Virginia Commonwealth University’s Quality Enhancement Plan aspires to provide our students with pathways to *learning that matters* by means of a cultural commitment to generalizable education, that is, education that has substantial and lasting impact beyond any particular course, major or degree. A truly *generalizable education* crosses domains and expands the boundaries of what the learner considers possible. Like ripples in a pool, generalizable education spreads its influence in ever-widening circles. To build this culture, our QEP focuses on four specific elements. Two are critical areas connected with student learning: general education and digital engagement. Two are vital parts of the learning environment: advising and career planning and professional development. Together, these four elements constitute what we call “pillars,” a metaphor that emphasizes their structural importance in the culture we aspire to build. Yet our four areas of concern are also overlapping Venn diagrams, nodes in a network, threads in a tapestry, a musical quartet — indeed, no one metaphor alone can adequately convey the relationship among these areas. We view that fact as a sign of the complexity of that relationship, complexity we will return to again and again in the plan that follows. We do not want one bolted-on initiative whose influence will quickly fade and be forgotten. Our 2004 QEP aimed high, identified systemic concerns and brought lasting, positive change to VCU. We aspire just as highly now. We understand that this is an ambitious and complex plan, but we believe that the goal of *learning that matters* emerging from a culture of generalizable education must be addressed holistically. In other words, our QEP attempts to embody the kind of thinking and commitment it aspires to build and support at VCU.
We have chosen these four areas, or pillars, because of the urgency, opportunity and potential impact they represent for our university. These four areas align well with Quest for Distinction, our university’s current strategic plan, which seeks to maintain a learner-centered curriculum within the aspirations of a major research university. The development of our second QEP provides VCU the unique opportunity to directly align the components of this QEP with the strategic priorities outlined in the institution’s strategic plan.

The first pillar of our QEP strengthens the general education program in two ways: by emphasizing second- and third-year student learning within and among the disciplines, and by completing a truly “core” general education curriculum that spans all of VCU’s schools and the College of Humanities and Sciences. An enhancement and expansion of digital engagement, including online learning and the open educational resources movement (Weller, 2013), is the second pillar. Clay Shirky has noted that “we are in the middle of the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race.” VCU is committed to providing distinctive, high-engagement opportunities for students at all levels to participate in this e-learning revolution, including a significant increase in online courses and graduate programs and opportunities for reduced time-to-degree attainment. The third pillar presents a comprehensive academic advising system to empower students to navigate current educational systems as well as to invent new learning pathways to individualized majors and graduate programs. Enhanced advising is a necessary part of a learning environment that seeks to multiply opportunities for learning that matters. The fourth and final pillar is the implementation of effective career planning and professional development, not to reduce higher education solely into extended workforce preparation, but to stimulate our students’ most creative and purposeful thinking about vocation in a time of unprecedented change and unpredictable opportunity. Students will also be challenged and supported to define their personal goals and aspirations beyond VCU, extending the idea of “generalizable education” from course work and degree completion into a world of fulfilling and meaningful work.

We are in the middle of the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race.
– Clay Shirky
B. Process used to develop the QEP

Building on our experience with the 2004 Quality Enhancement Plan, we involved many constituencies within the institution from the onset of the planning. We were determined not to approach the current QEP as a problem to be solved and forgotten, but as an opportunity to improve student learning across a wide spectrum of curricula, programs and support systems.

Our last QEP was directed at improving undergraduate student engagement, particularly in the first year, and resulted in wide changes to both the infrastructure of the university and the entire first-year learning experience. The primary outcomes of that process were higher first-year retention as well as higher levels of student academic performance in the first year. Another primary accomplishment of the 2004 QEP was the development and implementation of a three-tiered core curriculum within the university’s general education requirements. The first tier (Focused Inquiry) incorporates a yearlong course, taught in small seminar-style classes, that emphasizes seven skill areas (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, the ability to collaborate, information fluency, quantitative literacy and an understanding of ethical and civic responsibilities). The second tier includes courses in three content areas (the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities) that re-emphasize three of the core seven skill areas. The culmination of the core, Tier III, is a capstone experience in each major.
The first tier of the core has been fully implemented with the formation of the University College, which opened its doors in the fall of 2006. The UC houses universitywide programs and resources that help to enhance students’ undergraduate experiences, especially during the critical first year. Through academic advising, tutoring, writing assistance, group study sessions, orientation programs and courses introducing students to the demands of a university education, the UC provides opportunities for VCU students to achieve greater levels of academic success. After instituting this intensive first-year experience, VCU’s first-year retention rate rose from 83 percent to 87 percent over a five-year period; however, that progress was not matched in second- and third-year retention rates, which stand currently at 74.6 percent and 69.6 percent, respectively. There is considerable concern over the lagging second- and third-year retention rates, particularly a third-year rate that is below 70 percent. These lower retention rates indicated that the transformation realized in essential components of the first-year experience, particularly in the cohort-based Focused Inquiry classes, did not extend into the next stages of undergraduates’ academic careers. It was evident that we should look again at the core curriculum, particularly the second tier of general education, in which students transition into work within various disciplines and their forms of inquiry. At the same time, we recognized that the systems approach to the first-year experience taken in the 2004 QEP indicated that a similarly inclusive approach should be pursued in this QEP, with attention to the graduate- and first-professional levels as well.

This information was presented at a senior leadership retreat (VCU’s vice presidents, deans and
The process used to develop the QEP

B. Process used to develop the QEP

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vice provosts) in the summer of 2012. (See Appendix I for a summary of the presentation). The intent of that presentation was to elicit suggestions from university leaders regarding how we might frame our QEP both from an institutional perspective (retention and graduation rates) as well as from the perspective of individual learners and their learning goals. The group, which included 40 participants, convened in smaller discussion groups charged to develop suggestions for defining student success broadly as well as recommending specific student success metrics. This group of university leaders endorsed a focus on student success in the next QEP and emphasized that student success was vital to all levels of students, including first-professional and graduate students.

The format at this retreat was repeated throughout the fall with other groups that gave us feedback on what student success meant to them as well as how student success might be improved throughout the university. These groups included the Faculty Senate as well as the University Council and the student government associations for VCU’s Monroe Park and MCV campuses. (See Appendix II for the list of stakeholders and dates of meetings.)

In the fall of 2012, the provost convened a meeting of vice provosts and their direct reports to discuss university needs and proposed ideas for a QEP topic. Additionally, VCU’s QEP director at that time, Joseph Marolla, Ph.D., the vice provost for instruction and student success at VCU, made a similar presentation to the Council of Deans and again opened the discussion of how we might improve student success. In both meetings, the larger groups broke into smaller groups and worked on defining student success and proposing platforms for student success, as well as new and creative ways to encourage student success. (See Appendix III for a summary of notes from each work group session.)

After distilling all the reports from the above groups, the QEP director presented data on identified challenges to improving retention and graduation rates to the Alumni Council in early February 2013 and to the two student government associations at one meeting in late February. (See Appendix IV for the student meeting notes.)

On Feb. 28, 2013, the director convened the first meeting of the QEP Steering Committee. This group included faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni and retired faculty, as well as community representatives. The charge for this group was to consider what constituted student success from both an institutional and student-learning perspective and to recommend how we should develop a full QEP proposal. The group met four times throughout March 2013 and eventually adopted a working definition of student success as well as four pillars that could support a student success initiative. (See Appendix V for the minutes and other notes from the Steering Committee meetings.) During this time, the provost appointed Associate Professor Jeff South to serve as a co-director for the QEP.

Throughout April and May, the Steering Committee was divided into pillar work groups to advance proposed strategies and actions in each of the four pillars: general education with a focus on tiers II and III in the core curriculum, online learning, academic advising and career planning. The work groups were challenged to develop action plans that included both processes and learning outcomes for each area. More than 40 faculty members, staff and students were involved in these work groups. On May 10, the QEP co-directors presented a progress report to the VCU Board of Visitors. The board approved the topic of improving student success as the focus of the next QEP.

During the summer of 2013, the QEP co-directors at that time, Marolla and South, integrated the suggestions that had been made by the four work groups into a single draft document. In August 2013, VCU appointed a new vice provost for learning innovation and student success, Gardner Campbell, Ph.D., as Marolla announced his retirement effective Nov. 1, 2013. Since the implementation
of the next QEP will be co-directed by the new vice provost for learning innovation and student success, the provost worked with new members of the academic affairs administrative team to provide opportunities for incorporating new perspectives on student success, resulting in a further revision and refinement of the draft QEP document.

This draft document was circulated among members of the QEP Steering Committee and the work groups in fall 2013. Additionally, open hearings were conducted to give faculty, students and other members of the VCU community the opportunity to react to the various components in the proposed QEP. Feedback was obtained from several entities, including the Faculty Senate and the student government associations. Stakeholders were also given the opportunity to respond anonymously via an online survey.

Changes were made in response to this feedback: The pillars were renamed to reflect concepts and actions more vigorously; elements in the pillars as well as supporting programs were introduced or modified; connections among the pillars were strengthened. Two of the most important pieces of feedback were that the pillars ran the risk of becoming silos and that the theme of student success ran the risk of being too much about institutional metrics and not enough about learning outcomes. Accordingly, the QEP moved to its current focus on learning that matters within a culture of generalizable education, with “generalizable education” defined as “an education that has substantial and lasting impact beyond any particular course, major or degree.” The VCU focus aims to empower students, faculty and staff to discover and create connections among seemingly disparate or unrelated aspects of their learning, and thus to bring the entire university into a stronger, more dynamic and more influential conversation about its mission and future direction. In that respect, as in others, this QEP is very strongly aligned with the university’s strategic plan, Quest for Distinction, as well as many of the identified university-level initiatives that specify bold commitments to academic excellence and intellectual leadership for all members of this community. The QEP draft was presented to the president’s cabinet and was approved for placement of the draft QEP on our SACS Reaffirmation institutional website (sacs.vcu.edu). The final document was edited and revised during the remainder of the fall 2013 semester and submitted to SACSCOC in mid-January 2014.

Learning that matters within a culture of generalizable education is an education that has substantial and lasting impact beyond any particular course, major or degree.
C. Identification of the topic

The consensus of the university is that refinement of the institution’s commitment to student engagement and success, including a definition of student success across all degree levels, will be vital to VCU’s realization of its mission and vision outlined in Quest for Distinction. Recognizing the complexities inherent in the concept, we define student success as “the merger of demonstrated achievement and degree completion, and the result of a high-quality education which implements systemic high-impact practices.” This definition acknowledges that degree completion must be central to student success. Yet the other elements in this definition warrant no less attention. What constitutes meaningful student achievement? What characteristics of a high-quality education do we wish to promote in this QEP? Which high-impact practices have enough urgency, locally and within the larger historical moment we inhabit, to warrant the significant commitment of time and money this QEP will need to succeed?

Most students, undergraduate and graduate alike, enroll with the goal of graduating with a degree that will be a crucial step toward a satisfying career. Undergraduate degree completion has received special attention across the nation. In his 2009 State of the Union speech, President Obama set a goal for the United States to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. College completion is a key priority of the president’s
Middle Class Task Force. Additionally, at the Building a Grad Nation Summit in 2011, Vice President Joseph Biden issued a call to action to boost college graduation rates across the country. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has released a scorecard of college graduation rates by state and a college completion “tool kit” with strategies states could use to improve their rates. In August 2013, President Obama announced plans to create a rating system for public institutions of higher education, with graduation rates a key factor in determining the school’s value and the student’s return on investment.

The focus on degree completion is no surprise to institutions of higher education; completion has traditionally been an institutional goal. So clearly, given the public policy and political realities as well as students’ own expectations, degree completion must be at the heart of student success. Success also means leveraging that degree into postgraduate successful employment or graduate school/professional school enrollment, a process that must begin well before the student receives the diploma. But as what follows will make clear, for the degree and the employment to represent learning that matters, it must include opportunities for specific curricular experiences and academic guidance that transcend a checklist of requirements and an increase in measures of institutional success. Only a generalizable education can help students integrate their learning while they are pursuing their degrees, and then extend that learning through a lifetime of personal growth as well as rapid cultural and technological change.

We have identified several areas of particular urgency at VCU in which targeted interventions can lead to the comprehensive student success empowered by a generalizable education.

**Strategies for comprehensive student success**

**Improving success in course work, both from demonstrated achievement in seven competency areas that are required across the curriculum and contribute to lifelong learning,**
and from the deeper learning that results from high-engagement experiences centered on disciplinary structures (forms of inquiry) that facilitate intellectual growth

We aim not only at skills, nor only at content knowledge, but at a blend of the two that leads to understanding and deeper learning, defined as “the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations. The product of deeper learning is transferable knowledge, including content knowledge in a domain and knowledge of how, why, and when to apply this knowledge to answer questions and solve problems. We refer to this blend of both knowledge and skills as ‘21st century competencies’” (Pelligrino & Hilton, 2012). It is this blend we seek to foreground in our revision of Tier II of our general education (core) curriculum.

Using networked, digitally mediated learning environments and experiences to provide alternative learning pathways through the curriculum as well as opportunities for meaningful, productive engagement with an increasingly computer-based world

These alternatives can help ensure access to courses, especially “bottleneck” courses that can set students back an entire semester. They can also free students to create their own educational pathways, either by combining disciplines or by inventing a curriculum representing their most passionately pursued forms of inquiry. We also recognize that new media literacies and Internet-based participatory cultures are increasingly important as avenues for creative, integrative learning at all levels. Graduate and first-professional students also need opportunities to explore and use emerging forms of Web-based scholarly and professional communication.

Providing the advising students need to navigate the curriculum and other institutional systems

Advising in a university the size of VCU is always a challenge, particularly in majors and degree programs that have complex curricula and/or attract large numbers of students. In addition, advising takes on many varied forms, ranging from class scheduling, to clinical training, to faculty-intensive activities such as dissertation advising. Advising will assume greater import as students seek to translate and interpret learning that matters into a clearly defined personal pathway for success. Utilizing a guided discovery methodology, advisers will become critical co-navigators to ensure students understand the curricular/career options facing them and make informed choices for their best personal success. We will identify the strategic role of faculty versus professional advisers in providing our students with the appropriate mix of content expertise and responsiveness.

Empowering students to identify and pursue appropriate career paths and goals given their aspirations and talent

We will develop and implement a suite of exploration and professional prognosis opportunities aimed at students during key transition/readiness points of their academic careers at VCU. Identified transition/readiness points include undeclared change of major to declared, sophomores, entering graduate- or first-professional-school students (during second or third semester), transfer students, students participating in experiential learning and students preparing to graduate. Regular advising check points will be implemented at 30, 60, 90 and 120 hours of credit completion at the undergraduate level and at critical decision points in graduate and first-professional programs. Additionally, we are fully committed to career planning and professional development for graduate and first-professional students as well as undergraduates, recognizing that career path advising requires a different approach compared to undergraduate advising. Nontraditional career path identification becomes more important for students who do not wish to or cannot follow traditional trajectories.
The four pillars

These identified strategies form the four pillars with which our QEP proposes to build a culture of generalizable education empowering learning that matters. While we call them pillars, recognizing their crucial role as support structures, we also recognize they are interdependent, with many points of connection. Our QEP includes many programs in which those connections will be emphasized and explored. The four pillars follow below.

Pillar I
Discovering Connections:
Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum

Within our first pillar, we recognize that learning that matters must move beyond typical “inch-deep and mile-wide” distribution-requirement-based general education paradigm toward a model of integrative learning that can usefully be generalized or transferred from one area into another. Our 2004 QEP moved solidly in this direction, but there is work to be done to attain the goal of a core curriculum that is truly universitywide. There are currently seven competency areas included in a common 21 credit hours, Tier I and Tier II of the core curriculum, that make up a substantial portion of general education. The path to graduation and the foundation for a successful career in almost all disciplines can be traced to these competencies: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, the ability to collaborate, information fluency, quantitative literacy and an understanding of ethical and civic responsibilities. We currently have a curriculum that emphasizes these areas in the first year (termed Tier I course work). In this proposed QEP, we seek to bring the entire university into a renewed conversation around general education through two means: a revitalized approach to these competency areas, as well as additional pathways to discovery structured around forms of inquiry that address intellectual histories and grand challenges unique to specific disciplines. In this redesign, the Tier II course work will guide students in their second year toward an integration of learning and exploration that also points toward the selection/affirmation of majors and postgraduate aspirations.

We wish to convene our faculty colleagues in a conversation around building a culture of generalizable education that focuses on that which unites us within a community of inquiry and creativity. This conversation, supported by rich opportunities for reflection for students, faculty and staff across both campuses, aims to broaden the very notion of competencies to include the blend of knowledge and skills that the National Research Council terms “21st Century Competencies” promoting what the NRC calls “deeper learning.” We will remove obstacles to student success by completing our initial plans for a true core curriculum/general education program that can fulfill requirements for all undergraduate students and majors, relieving the need for students to retake school- or college-specific general education courses when they change majors. At the same time, however, we will catalyze a universitywide discussion of how general education can lead to a major while also encouraging creative inter- and transdisciplinary connections. Our goal is to re-envision the content of Tier II core courses and the pedagogical practices faculty members employ to ensure a focus on 21st-century competencies that empower more meaningful connections between the student learning in Tier I Focused Inquiry courses and subsequent course work moving toward a selected major and course work culminating in a meaningful capstone course.

As the scope and reach of human knowledge expand, such connections are more important than ever. In his book “What the Best College Students Do” (2012), Ken Bain gives students this urgent advice:

Across higher education in recent years, those who teach in all departments are thinking about what it means to think within that discipline and how that kind of thinking — scientific, historical, sociological, managerial,
creative, and so on — might integrate with other forms of thinking to create fresh ways of understanding, appreciating, creating, theorizing, and solving. Professors are exploring new ways to help students think about their own thinking. You should engage in that conversation with them. Seek out those institutions, departments, and professors involved in this enterprise. Demand it of those who are not.

Our work on the pillar of a core curriculum answers Bain’s imperative with a dynamic, creative response: a core curriculum that can enfranchise both faculty and students by reinventing itself within a culture of generalizable education.

**Pillar II**

*Contributing to a Networked World: Digital Engagement*

Our second pillar recognizes our rapidly changing, globally connected world and seeks to prepare our students for full and effective participation in digitally mediated environments. As with our other pillars, we plan a holistic approach. We will establish more numerous and varied online learning opportunities, such as increased online delivery of existing courses; develop distinctive learning experiences such as creative MOOCs (massive open online courses) and other “open education” innovations; establish strategic partnerships; and enhance transfer credit alternatives. We seek thereby to increase routes to degree completion by providing greater and more varied access to undergraduate courses, especially bottleneck courses where demand exceeds supply. To accomplish this, we would assist departments and schools with the development of comprehensive online offerings in high-demand areas, support the development of a comprehensive set of online courses to be delivered during the summer term to support VCU students as well as students from other institutions and create an improved path of entry for students from community colleges. We also would enhance advising and support services for students in ways that promote student success in online courses and programs. Additionally, we seek to increase opportunities for graduate degrees, to grow our capacity for individualized major programs and to increase VCU’s participation in, and learning from, the global digital telecommunications revolution in learning.

In addition to this major new commitment to fully online learning, we seek to infuse more of our traditional, face-to-face learning with rich opportunities for students to produce vital, creative, responsible online work. Our students must be not just Web users but also Web makers — “systems administrators” of their own increasingly complex digital lives. Full, creative discovery and use of personal learning networks, indeed personal cyberinfrastructures (Campbell, 2009), will equip our students for effective citizenship in a networked world. For graduate and first-professional students, such opportunities will include engagement with new and emerging forms of scholarly and professional communication, from open-access journals to a wide range of formal and informal communications on personal-publication
and socially mediated platforms. Digital affordances such as blogs, eportfolios and related curatorial spaces for learning and reflection, personal cyberinfrastructures, and “a domain of one’s own” can provide vital integrative opportunities for students throughout the university (see Yancey, McElroy, & Powers, 2013; Campbell, 2009; Groom et al., 2013) as well as enrich our thinking about assessment. We believe these opportunities are essential for a truly generalizable education to emerge, with substantial and lasting impact beyond any course, major or degree.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Instruction and Student Success has recently been renamed the Office of the Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success, formally recognizing three important strategic aims: the shift from teacher-centered education to learner-centered education, the need within our networked world to explore innovative opportunities and modes of learning and the need to learn from the rapid pace of contemporary innovation itself. This QEP reflects those aims, and the Digital Engagement pillar is a vital element of VCU’s commitment to student success at all levels as the academy continues to be both challenged and transformed by the digital telecommunications revolution.

**Pillar III**

*Mapping Your Learning Journey: Academic Advising*

The third pillar of this QEP seeks to enhance and refine the roles and responsibilities of advisers, including professional advisers as well as faculty. We will add resources in this area and continue to develop a more systematic approach to academic advising throughout the undergraduate experience as well as in graduate and first-professional degree programs. Undergraduate advising at VCU will combine professional advisers in unit-specific student services centers and faculty advisers in departments who will engage students in tutoring, mentoring and exploration of postgraduate options. The professional advisers will be available in extended advising hours to accommodate student needs and schedules and will assist students in matriculation through academic programs. A new position of associate vice provost dedicated to leading and assessing advising effectiveness will be established to coordinate academic advising across the university and to focus on measures to enhance second- and third-year retention. We intend to build on the success of the intensive advising practices focused on first-year students and extend that advising attention to second- and third-year students.

For undergraduate advising, we plan to expand professional development opportunities for advisers to enhance their skill sets and improve their accuracy and consistency; assist academic units to develop, implement and assess their own academic advising plans; improve online systems (DegreeWorks and customized advising modules) to assist students, faculty and advisers with monitoring student progress toward degree completion; create “degree maps” which will help students develop educational plans that can be completed within four years; expand early intervention systems that identify and assist students who are struggling in a course; and expand transition advising services for change-of-major and transfer students.
At the graduate level, we plan to strengthen communication among graduate program directors and expand professional development opportunities for graduate advisers to acquaint them with the range of high-quality online resources; to improve their accuracy and consistency; improve coordination among undergraduate and graduate advisers to recruit undergraduate VCU students for our graduate programs; increase participation in the Graduate School mentorship programs; expand the online degree audit system (DegreeWorks) to include all graduate programs as a means of monitoring students’ progress toward graduation; and include information about potential VCU graduate programs within the degree maps developed for undergraduate students.

At the first-professional level, our QEP’s focus on building a culture of generalizable education leading to learning that matters will provide enhanced support for our pre-health students in the health sciences pipeline. The first-professional programs will develop new procedures, and expand existing procedures, to identify students who may be at risk of failing to progress or suffer attrition for other reasons. Advisers will monitor progress and proactively address obstacles to progression, especially in the medical school with its new curriculum and larger cohort of students. Where appropriate, faculty will serve as mentors and help students who wish to select a specialty area and/or possible future educational opportunities.

We recognize that much of what we consider academic advising shifts in focus and emphasis for graduate and first-professional programs. New guidelines from the National Institutes of Health as well as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Walker, Gold, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008) emphasize career planning, “soft skill” development and a reconsideration of the nature and purpose of doctoral-level work, including the kind of digital engagement discussed above. In “The Formation of Scholars,” Walker et al. sum up this shift as moving from doctoral training to a paradigm of formation:

Formation … points not only to the development of intellectual expertise but to the growth of “the personality, character, habits of heart and mind” and “the role that the given discipline is capable of and meant to play in academe and society at large” (Elkana, 2006, pp. 66, 80). What is formed, in short, is the scholar’s professional identity in all its dimensions.

Raising awareness of these changes and increasing opportunities for graduate and first-professional students to explore and engage with them connect directly and powerfully with the idea of learning that matters; they are important parts of our holistic vision of building a culture of generalizable education, that is, education that has lasting and substantial impact beyond any single course, major or degree.

Additionally, the Office of the Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success in collaboration with the senior vice president for health sciences and the provost will create a universitywide task force to determine how advising of pre-health students can become more efficient and effective. The focus will be on better communication among the first-professional programs and the pre-health advisers in an effort to continually assess the knowledge base and nonacademic attributes necessary for entry into, and successful completion of, first-professional programs.

Pillar IV
Finding Your Vocation: Career Planning and Professional Development

The fourth and final pillar is effective career planning to assist students in making and implementing career choices. Efforts to acquaint faculty and professional advising staff with the unique activities of career development and planning will be enhanced. Students will be challenged and encouraged to articulate their goals and aspirations through intentional career exploration activities, experiential learning and deeply engaged consideration (via individual and group-based career counseling) of
how their academic pursuits can form a foundation for post-graduation success. Many of our graduates have the talent and drive to be successful but have difficulties in career implementation (Jome & Phillips, 2013). In short, they “stumble in how they conduct their job searches or are inadequately prepared to present what they know and what they can do as a result of their college experiences” (Humphreys, 2013). Clearly, a culture of generalizable education centered on learning that matters must help our students cross the threshold of graduation and continue to learn and thrive within a world of fulfilling and meaningful work.

Career planning and development have not been a large enough point of emphasis for VCU. Given the current labor market, we believe that students need career advising from matriculation through graduation, no matter what the degree program, no matter whether the learning is residential, hybrid or fully online. An emphasis on industry advising and preparation is also necessary and relevant to prepare career-ready students to enter an ever-changing and evolving employment marketplace. An effort to coordinate these efforts across VCU is important as it will support VCU’s mission and strategic plan, Quest for Distinction, as well as ensure consistent service to all students across the institution.

We will coordinate and manage key elements of the career planning process in order to enhance the vocational development and learning of undergraduate, graduate and first-professional students at VCU. We will develop and implement a coordinated program of exploration and professional prognosis interventions aimed at key transition points of students’ academic careers to assess and support progress toward career readiness and career choice (e.g., Whiston & James, 2013). Identified transition points include incoming first-year, graduate and first-professional students; change of major (one major to another, or undeclared to declared); first-year to sophomore students; incoming transfer students; and students enrolling in and/or completing experiential learning activities. Targeted efforts will also focus on the students pursuing health sciences and STEM-H career paths. These interventions would be coordinated by the University Career Center with the development of content through a collaborative effort between the UCC, University College, academic advising and various academic units to account for variability. The interventions will use three specific delivery methods:

1. **Focused Inquiry integration:** Develop and incorporate early opportunities within Tier I general education to explore career planning within the academic experience.

2. **Career exploration and professional prognosis courses:** Revise the curriculum of UNIV 101 (Introduction to the University) and UNIV 103 (Education and Career Planning) for undergraduates to enhance the career planning and development elements with revamped learning objectives connected to exploration and career readiness skill development. Evaluate and replicate efforts such as Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training and Leaders and Entrepreneurs Academy for Professional Development career seminars and professional development courses for the graduate and first-professional programs. Develop new career
C. Identification of the topic

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courses targeted at health science career planning and experiential learning. Market courses to students at key transition points.

3. **Self-directed online modules:** Create online modules to guide and encourage self-directed exploration, sources of and uses for online occupational information, career decision-making, and implementation of career choices. These resources will be especially useful for incoming transfer students as well as graduate and first-professional students.

We plan to develop interventions in which students explore career options and develop branding and application materials such as resumes, curricula vitae, portfolios and other materials critical for vocational success. We will also create institutionwide standards and a portal for high-impact learning experiences as defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities for students to discover opportunities and explore the connectivity to academic pursuits. High-impact learning experiences would include structured versions of internships, practica and shadowing opportunities, service-learning, externships and student-alumni/student-employer interactions for all student groups. Through collaborative efforts led by the University Career Center, we will track and evaluate the opportunities offered and the student learning occurring in these experiences. Once established, the definition and types of opportunities that would be considered high-impact learning experiences can be expanded. For example, research has shown that many students favor career assistance scenarios involving direct interaction with employed individuals, including internships, the opportunity to interview successful individuals at their worksites, and participate in structured career programs (Shivy & Koehly, 2002).

Resources allocated in this area will aid individual units to develop components not only specific to their curricula but also grounded in established university standards. Seminars will be developed to orient students for various experiential learning opportunities, and to maximize career readiness skill development and meet identified learning objectives. Implementing standards will accommodate associated improvements in tracking and evaluation of experiential learning, an increasingly influential measurement of student success and engagement, as well as progression toward postgraduate outcomes and preparation. Resources will also be used to recognize faculty for effective leadership, mentorship and supervisory skills in the area of experiential learning, thereby supporting its value to faculty, academic units and the institution, working together to support student learning.

Lastly, a concerted effort to collect career outcomes and first-destination data for all graduates will help to measure the impact of these programs and initiatives. Career outcomes and first-destination data in today’s higher education environment are integral to defining and supporting institutional goals, metrics and student success. There are several external factors of note influencing Virginia public education policies and data collection: Gov. Bob McDonnell’s executive orders No. 1 (2010) and No. 9 (2010), the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia’s publication of graduate employment rates on its website (Virginia House Bill 639, 2012), President Obama’s College Scorecard (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008) and frequent discussions on the financial benefits of higher education and marketability of degrees.

**Graduate and first-professional students**

The following programs are either currently being offered or are in development at VCU. These programs will form the foundation for graduate and professional student development in terms of preparing for future faculty roles, developing soft skills to enhance leadership and entrepreneurship capacity and broadening experiences in scientific training. These programs will be developed and/or continued by VCU to provide our graduate and professional students the knowledge, skills and planning needed to be successful after graduation.
Preparing Future Faculty Program

Expansion of the Preparing Future Faculty Program, sponsored and supported by VCU’s Graduate School, will improve the experience of doctoral students by providing valuable information and experience in preparation for careers in the professoriate. The Graduate School staff will collaborate with the Center for Teaching Excellence and VCU graduate faculty to promote and encourage a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. Through a series of short courses, the PFF Program introduces graduate students to faculty roles and responsibilities, addresses teaching and learning issues in the college classroom and provides supervised internship experiences for graduate students interested in careers in academe.

In addition to the core seminar courses, the PFF Program offers an internship/externship experience for students who successfully complete the four core seminar courses.

Leaders and Entrepreneurs Academy for Professional Development

The Leaders and Entrepreneurs Academy for Professional Development is a new initiative sponsored by the VCU Graduate School and supported by the University Career Center. A companion to the PFF Program, LEAPD will offer a series of short courses and experiences to assist graduate students seeking careers in industry, nonprofit organizations, health care, public service and government. Areas of study will include:

- Guidelines for starting a business
- Career search and networking skill-building
- Inquiring what it means (and takes) to be a leader
- Enhancing communication skills, resume writing, negotiation skills and opportunities for discovering alternative career paths for the chosen program of study

Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training

The NIH-inspired VCU BEST program is currently under development. BEST will educate and advise doctoral students on alternative career paths outside of the academy and traditional research areas. The program serves as a training platform that broadens student awareness of potential careers in biosciences, provides opportunities for students to experience those career paths and provides guidance that enables students to select the career path(s) that best suit their interests and personalities. The program uses career, faculty and peer mentors, service-learning, shadowing and team projects to achieve these goals. BEST will share a course with LEAPD, which will allow graduate and professional students to develop the leadership, communications and soft skills necessary to be successful in their chosen career paths, also encouraging students to share their experiences, thereby broadening opportunities for learning and participation within and potentially beyond the VCU community.

Career and professional development

To assist graduate students in achieving their career and professional goals, we plan to increase participation in the annual graduate student research symposium. Each spring, the Graduate Student Association sponsors a research symposium to present graduate research work to the VCU and local Richmond communities. The event is an excellent opportunity for graduate students to present their original research and creative projects in a professional but relaxed environment. As this is the only opportunity for many graduate students to showcase their work at VCU, participation in this event has nearly doubled every year and attracts not only VCU students and faculty, but also local media, legislators and respected members of the Richmond business community. The University Career Center will coordinate the expansion and will co-host this event with the Graduate Student Association.
D. Desired student learning outcomes

Pillar I

Discovering Connections: 
Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum

Our QEP — and, in particular, the strategies and tactics related to the core curriculum and the Tier II courses that are the heart of VCU’s general education offerings — will have a direct impact on the learning outcomes that students achieve beyond the first year. We believe that improvement in these learning outcomes will, in turn, boost our retention and graduation rates, as well as other key metrics for VCU’s QEP.

Over the past 10 years, we, like many other universities, have dedicated ourselves to improving the foundational experience of all our first-year students. University College and the core curriculum were created to support first-year students and build a strong base from which to navigate advanced courses and eventually a selected major. We have persuasive evidence from an institutional perspective that this project has been successful: Both first-year retention and graduation rates have increased substantially. Yet this success remains incomplete, as the first-year foundational experience has apparently not persisted as a foundation for greater success at the upper levels of undergraduate study, where retention and graduation rates have improved much more slowly and incrementally. A welcoming environment and an esprit de corps have developed among faculty teaching the first level of the curriculum. Our QEP addresses the question of how to extend that sense of community and shared purpose into the necessarily more diverse curricular and student support structures of the various schools and the College of Humanities and Sciences.
There are currently 36 courses in Tier II that fulfill the science/social science/humanities part of the core curriculum design. These courses were intended to reinforce the seven competency areas and were purposely kept at a small number so that they could be monitored for accomplishment of core competencies. The courses were conceptualized as end courses rather than survey courses, in that most of the students taking a single course in any particular topic would probably never take another course in that area. With this conceptual framework, Tier II courses should not be prerequisites for another advanced course but rather be taught as the last course (in any particular area) that the student would take. Given our commitment to the competency areas, each Tier II course would identify three of the seven competencies as goals for specific learning outcomes. While we continue to believe these competencies are important, we want to use this QEP to re-examine our conceptual frameworks for these Tier II general education courses. Typical challenges have emerged: turnover in instructional faculty (particularly at the adjunct level); little connection to shared goals and spotty commitment to the curricular design; departments lapsing into first-course-of-a-major’s-sequence paradigm; and students taking courses merely to fulfill distribution requirements rather than building toward higher levels of learning.

There is also recognition that an overly narrow framework for the way we consider “introductions to the discipline” has been an obstacle for departments that would like to support Tier II goals but do not necessarily want their general education courses to be limited to non-majors, a strong implication of our original Tier II design. We hope this QEP will stimulate more conversation about how a course can be uniquely general education yet also be a vital part of a major curriculum — and an opportunity for innovative inter- and transdisciplinary courses bringing multiple disciplines together to address a grand challenge or wicked problem.

Our plan for this part of the QEP is quite extensive but, we believe, within our grasp. We want to develop a university acknowledgment of the core curriculum as both an opportunity to sharpen our focus on the competency areas that we all agreed were critical to student success as well as an opportunity to think more deeply about the nature, history and future of the forms of inquiry that shape each discipline. In the actions section of this document, we will describe plans to bring faculty members who design and teach general education courses into a pervasive ongoing conversation about the curriculum and opportunities for cross-curricular integration in student work and university programs. Although we understand that the QEP must include specific learning outcomes for our students, we also believe improving and acknowledging the value of faculty working in this area will lead to furthering student success in their complete academic career and beyond — and thus support our QEP’s goal of building a culture of generalizable education. Faculty need to understand and experience a larger intellectual purpose to the general education curriculum that complements, rather than blocks, their most creative, leading-edge thinking about the disciplines they inhabit and practice. We believe Pillar I can support greater undergraduate student success while catalyzing a rich conversation about the nature of a modern university itself, one in which the tensions implicit in the very name “university” become part of what we study and reflect upon in this community of learners.
First, we must address how to strengthen the seven competencies. As noted above, currently each Tier II general education course must integrate into the learning outcomes three of the seven competency areas. The faculty can integrate the proposed learning outcomes with the content of their specific course. The specific outcomes were generated by groups of faculty who worked on the original curriculum design. Faculty members are not required to adopt all the learning outcomes under each competency, but they are required to address a substantial number. In addition, faculty may develop other learning outcomes as long as they conform to the general competency goal. The specific competencies and proposed learning outcomes are:

Oral communication: Courses in this area provide students with opportunities to express and develop their oral capabilities. In oral communications courses, student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Present ideas orally to a classroom audience
- Work individually or in groups on a formal oral presentation
- Construct a logical argument and defend it to the class
- Adjust the presentation to one’s audience, purpose and situation

Digital opportunities might include webcasts, podcasts, short films, etc.

Writing proficiency: Courses with this emphasis provide students with substantive and sustained writing experiences to develop their writing and thinking competencies. In writing proficiency courses, student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Generate informal and formal writing on a variety of topics
- Adjust writing to audience, purpose and situation
- Elaborate on and revise writing for depth of information and analysis
- Write coherent and thoughtful paragraphs, developing and organizing main claims and sub-claims
- Construct written arguments or positions based on informed sources
- Write reflective papers related to personal significance of course material

Additionally, where possible and appropriate, students should experience opportunities for Web-based and “born digital” composition including rich media (still images, audio, video, etc.).

Critical thinking: Courses with this focus encourage critical self-awareness, helping students apply critical thinking strategies to foster more disciplined approaches to learning. In critical thinking courses, student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Identify the purpose of the material
- Distinguish relevant from irrelevant information
- Interpret information from different points of view
- Assess the cogency of arguments
- Construct one’s own argument
In addition, critical thinking competencies may include specific strategies for metacognitive and reflective learning practices that can also benefit other competencies (indeed, these seven competencies can and often should be interrelated). Ellen Langer (1997) advocates what she terms “mindful learning” for student success. Her definition enriches the idea of critical thinking to include these elements: “the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective.”

**Collaborative work:** Courses with this emphasis will give students experience working in teams, setting goals, sharing responsibilities and solving problems together. In collaborative work courses, students work in learning-centered classrooms and the outcomes include the ability to:

- Share ideas and contribute to, as well as lead, discussions
- Listen to others, assist them in their efforts and facilitate group work
- Set deadlines, manage their time and complete tasks on time
- Synthesize information provided by multiple group members
- Appreciate diversity

This competency will also be broadened, at all levels, to include unique digital affordances for collaboration. Goals, methodologies, tool kits and issues of proper acknowledgment of others’ work will be considered.

**Information fluency:** Courses with this emphasis help students navigate library-related services (online and on-site) as well as evaluate the legitimacy of sources of information. In information fluency courses, student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Identify information needs and resources
- Collect information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate collected information critically
- Present information effectively and efficiently
- Use information ethically and legally

In this QEP, we will connect information fluency to the larger concept of digital engagement by including opportunities to consider aspects of digitally mediated information fluency, including effective participation in online cultures and new media literacies (Jenkins, 2009) as well as aspects of computational thinking, i.e., approaches to problem-solving using methods characteristically adopted by programmers (Wing, 2008).

**Quantitative literacy:** In courses that incorporate quantitative literacy, students understand and use numbers and data analyses in everyday life and in the workplace. Student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Interpret mathematical formulas, graphs, tables and schematics and draw inferences
- Use arithmetical, algebraic and geometric methods to solve problems
- Describe a sample or population’s general qualities quantitatively by accurately calculating indicators of central tendency and variability
- Calculate the likelihood of a given event
from information about the probability of all possible outcomes in that situation
- Understand the role of algorithms and machine instruction in an information society (programming and computational thinking, echoed in the information fluency competency above)
- Differentiate between samples and populations
- Calculate proportions and percentages

Specific consideration and use of digital and networked technologies will be included as noted above.

**Ethical and social responsibility:** In courses that incorporate ethical and social responsibility, students reflect on their culturally inherited values, thinking critically about the relationship between these values and their place in the global context. Student learning outcomes include the ability to:

- Recognize the relationship between human rights and individual responsibilities
- Identify the relationships between power and ideology
- Identify theories of democracy, democratic values and beliefs
- Critically review actions in response to global/local issues

In a world increasingly mediated by computer networks and information technologies, issues of privacy, online civility and data stewardship also provide rich opportunities for addressing this competency.

As we continue to re-examine the general education paradigms and assumptions embedded in our Tier II conceptual framework, we also intend to engage disciplines in a conversation about general education courses that could introduce more students — majors and non-majors alike — to a robust consideration of the forms of inquiry that characterize each discipline. Building on our first-year Focused Inquiry classes, these second- and third-year Forms of Inquiry courses will achieve multiple curricular aims and work as an integrative layer for all students enrolled in them, whether or not those students choose to take more courses in that discipline.
Pillar II

Contributing to a Networked World: Digital Engagement

Residential learning communities, interacting formally and informally both inside and outside the classroom, remain very powerful avenues to student success. At the same time, human beings have over the years continued to invent technologies that transcend barriers of time and space. The phonetic alphabet, the book and, eventually, the printed book are such technologies. Each of these technologies expanded access to expertise and communities of learning. Now the growth of digitally mediated learning over the expanding Internet, particularly that layer of the Internet called the World Wide Web, brings with it a global explosion in the reach, variety and extent of learning opportunities. VCU has long participated in digitally mediated education, but the time has come to engage with these learning opportunities in a more mindful, intensive and strategic way. For example, our undergraduates continue to gravitate to fully online courses when they are offered. There are various reasons for this, including sequenced courses being offered only once a year; bottleneck courses with limited seat availability; students who want or need to have part-time jobs that conflict with daytime classes; students who need to go home for the summer rather than attend summer session on campus; and, sometimes, students who simply thrive in the digital environment. At the graduate level, VCU is committed to creating programs to empower citizens of the commonwealth, the nation and potentially the world to increase their vocational opportunities and enhance their expertise in a framework of lifelong learning. We have experienced significant growth in our online courses, but the demand has far exceeded the supply.

Our intention (described in detail in the implementation section) is to grow our online program strategically to enhance student success while at the same time building a culture of generalizable education focused on learning that matters, an education that has lasting and substantial impact beyond any single course, major or degree. Online courses would fulfill and reinforce several of the learning outcomes described above, including writing proficiency, critical thinking and information fluency. In addition, as noted by Sussman and Dutter (2010), online learning brings additional opportunities for vital student learning outcomes, including competencies in participatory culture and new media literacies as described above. For example, they will learn to:

- Recognize what computer applications are most appropriate for specific tasks
- Better manage their time and apply personal discipline and task organization to online work
- Employ stronger online communication skills via discussion boards, social media and other platforms such as YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Reddit, etc.
- Work effectively in digitally mediated collaborative environments such as wikis, blogs, walkthrough and fan fiction sites, etc. to build collective knowledge
- Increase self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation by considering learning as production, not simply as consumption

In addition, as outlined above, we will broaden and deepen opportunities for our students to engage in vital, creative, meaningful work as digital creators, not just digital consumers. For graduate and first-professional students, these opportunities will include exploring new and emerging forms of scholarly and professional communication on the Web, from open-access journals such as PLOS ONE to informal avenues such as blogs and other social media. New and emerging learning outcomes will thus be iteratively developed and strengthened for students at all levels.
Pillar III

Mapping Your Learning Journey: Academic Advising

Over the past 10 years, we have discovered the tremendous value of an intensive and proactive academic advising system for our first-year students. High-quality advising has played a major role in increasing both our retention rates and student performance through scheduled meetings and through utilizing the advisers to connect students with necessary resources throughout the university. Our goal over the next 10 years is to improve student success by giving students better tools to make decisions regarding their course selections and tie those decisions to both degree completion and career goals. The following list of learning outcomes is a component of the recommendations made by the National Academic Advising Association (see Nutt, 2004). While the emphasis here is on undergraduate students, we set the same outcomes for graduate and first-professional students. Therefore, students will:

• Develop an educational plan of study for successfully completing their degree goal, which is informed by their educational and career goals.

• Be able to interpret and implement a degree audit in their educational planning and use that information to adjust their plan of study as they progress through their chosen educational program.

• Identify their educational and career goals and demonstrate the ability to make course decisions on that basis. These goals will be included in the student’s educational plan of study and have appropriate career planning activities that support these goals.

To facilitate these outcomes, investments will be made in adviser training and professional development for all academic advisers, improved online systems to assist students and to provide easy access to information, tools and data to assist in formulating the educational plan of study, expanded intensive advising to proactively assist students who are struggling, and expanded advising services for transitional students (transfers, change-in-major students and graduate students at the research/thesis/dissertation/project stages of their curricula).
Pillar IV

Finding Your Vocation: Career Planning and Professional Development

In “The American Freshmen: National Norms Fall 2011” (Pryor, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, Hurtado, & Tran, 2011), an annual survey conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA, results indicated that “most of today’s entering students are deciding to go to college to get a better job, with 85.9% reporting that ‘to be able to get a better job’ is ‘very important’ in their decision-making process.” Our plan is to integrate particular aspects of career planning with our advising program. As will be clear in our implementation section, we will infuse current first-year courses with career planning information and experiences while also creating a number of new course offerings that assist students in discovering a career, and planning and implementing their choice of curriculum once they have settled on a particular direction. This will be a relatively new area for us, but based on our findings, we feel compelled to better connect our students’ academic world with their career aspirations. The following is a list of learning outcomes within our reach during the next five years.

As a result of utilizing career advising services and engaging in career planning course work and/or programming, students will be able to:

- Delineate curricular paths to specific career goals/options
- Select an appropriate major based on utilization of the advising process, assessment tools, career resources and/or online sources
- Identify career options and follow through with career decisions based on utilization of the advising process, assessment tools, books, resources and other online sources
- Identify graduate school opportunities and follow through with decisions regarding the application process: personal statements, letters of recommendation, a CV and admission tests
- Develop an integrated career plan, including nontraditional career options, and have the ability to revise throughout their academic career and beyond
- Identify and utilize job search and identification resources, including HireVCURams, career fairs, on-campus recruiting, networking sessions and online tools
- Understand graduate and first-professional degree congruency between career options and field of study, skill, values and aspirations
- Build and share effective showcases of graduate and professional work that demonstrate the distinctive value of their work and formation as scholars and professionals
In 2011, VCU launched its latest strategic plan, Quest for Distinction. The vision of this plan is for VCU to become a premier urban, public research university while we strengthen our commitment to academic quality and student success.

The university’s vision shifted from a focus on enrollment growth to a strategy of enrollment management. This strategy addresses the demographic/geographic/programmatic mix of students, the capability of students to succeed at a major research university and the priority placed on student success that will lead to enhanced retention and degree completion. For VCU to reach its stated goal of becoming a premier urban, public research university, we must improve students’ progress toward degrees and their eventual completion of those degrees.

Over the past five years, we have done extensive work to understand the dynamics of both retention and graduation success. With the advent of our former QEP, we wanted to track both our progress and areas of improvement. The theory behind our former QEP (student engagement and a learning-centered approach to teaching) is well-documented (Krakauer, 2000; O’Banion, 1997; McClenny, 2002; Weimer, 2002; and Tagg, 2003). However, we knew
success would be determined more by implement-
ation than by abstract principle. Increasing student
engagement through personal advising, small class
size, dedicated instructors and an elaborate sup-
port system should and did lead to higher levels
of retention.

However, corresponding higher levels of graduation
success still trailed our expectations despite the very
high levels of early student success. From 1998
through the cohort of 2011, our first-year retention
has increased from 73 percent to 86 percent. Our
four-year graduation rate increased from 16 percent
to 30 percent and our six-year graduation rate
increased from 40 percent to 57 percent. Clearly,
there has been improvement in student success
metrics. Just as clearly, there is room for more
improvement. We appear to be well above the
national norms with regard to first-year retention,
and yet we are much closer to national norms with
regard to graduation rates (Tinto, 1993, in Habley,
Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

In a compendium of research in the area of student
success, “Increasing Persistence,” Habley, Bloom
and Robbins (2012) argue that the three primary
conditions for success are student performance
(students must learn), personal characteristics that
contribute to persistence (motivation, commitment,
engagement and self-regulation) and the ability to
identify and commit to a plan of study congruent with
interests and abilities. The authors identify four inter-
vention areas: assessment/course placement,
developmental education initiatives, academic advis-
ing and student transition programming. In our QEP,
we will be targeting a number of these areas, but it
is worth noting that the authors contend that the
overriding factor above all else is student perfor-
mance in the classroom.

Clearly students must be successful in the classroom
to persist in their chosen curriculum and to eventu-
ally graduate. What, then, are the precursors to
successful course completion? Students must be
prepared for the rigors of college-level course work.
This would be true for any particular course as well
as for the general experience of being in college.
Our former QEP targeted ways to help students with
that challenge.

The implementation of successful strategies to
enhance first-year retention presents opportunities
to expand successful strategies into the second and
third year of college matriculation. Nora, Barlow and
Crisp (2005 in Seidman) note that the literature high-
lights numerous investigations of the factors that
lead to success in the first year (many based on
Tinto, 1975, or Pascarella & Terezini, 1980 or Astin,
1984). However, studies after the first year are much
less frequent. One of the reasons for this appears
to be the assumption that similar factors operate in
the succeeding years that were prevalent in the first
year. While there may be truth to that assumption,
we suspect that other, more complex factors also
accumulate and emerge over time. For instance,
failing or withdrawing from a class each semester in
the first year followed by the same behavior in the
second year results in a student who is a full semester
or more behind by the third year. At that point, strate-
gies to empower student success need to take into
account the additional complication of failing to gradu-
ate on time with one’s initial cohort, a discouraging
and expensive state of affairs that by definition cannot emerge until the second or third years. Likewise, courses typically assume prior learning as one progresses through the curriculum, and failure to achieve deeper learning in early courses almost inevitably compromises students’ chances of success in later course work.

Perhaps most of all, however, students’ persistence and success are empowered by their growing conviction that their education is truly learning that matters. From matriculation to graduation, at every level and in every academic program, a culture of generalizable education will lift up the entire community of learning by foregrounding the rich intellectual, emotional and experiential gains that result from the essential qualities of “generalization in human thought” identified by noted cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter, Ph.D., in his book “Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies” (1996):

- Moving internal boundaries back and forth
- Swapping components or shifting substructures from one level to another
- Merging two substructures into one or breaking one substructure into two
- Lengthening or shortening a given component
- Adding new components or new levels of structure
- Replacing one concept by a closely related one
- Trying out the effect of reversals on various conceptual levels

These are not rarefied intellectual activities, but problem-solving, problem-finding and innovation-generating abilities that signify a truly generalizable education, one that has substantial and lasting impact beyond any particular course, major or degree.

Pillar I

Discovering Connections: Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum

The core curriculum is a common set of experiences for undergraduates that arc from matriculation to graduation. In the first year, critical skills (the seven competencies) that all first-year students must develop are embedded within a shared two-semester course sequence that creates an esprit de corps as students, reading the same material, think and write about shared areas of inquiry. The second tier of this core, the heart of VCU’s general education curriculum, was also intended to form a coherent set of intellectual experiences, one with strong commonalities among diverse offerings and one in which the seven competencies were emphasized in creative ways. For a number of reasons explored in this QEP, that goal was not reached and the mission was not fully shared. Part of our intention is to revisit the spirit and mission of the primary general education layer (Tier II) of the core so that we can renew the emphasis on the seven competencies as well as revive a commitment to creative, innovative course design by rethinking — with departments and within disciplinary frameworks (areas we did not emphasize strongly enough in the prior QEP) — what constitutes general education and how it can be both a satisfying experience for non-majors and a potential introduction to the major for those students who seek to specialize in that area. We cannot build a culture of generalizable education, that is, education that has substantial and lasting impact beyond any single course, major or degree, unless our core curriculum models that ideal effectively and leads toward learning that matters.

To that end, at least nine new Tier II/general education courses built on the conceptual framework of forms of inquiry will be developed and launched during the period of this QEP. Our existing 36 approved Tier II courses will remain but will be revisited periodically as part of the assessment plan to ensure deeper learning. These new courses, to be developed by teams of faculty within each relevant
Tier II discipline, will offer broad opportunities for creativity and deeper learning by focusing on most of the following key questions:

• What events, questions and people brought this discipline into being as a specific form of inquiry distinct from others?

• What are the characteristic skills, purposes and attitudes (Zemsky, 2013) of influential scholars in this discipline?

• What grand challenges, wicked problems or both have been successfully addressed by this form of inquiry?

• What grand challenges, wicked problems or both most conspicuously remain unresolved within this form of inquiry?

• What new forms of inquiry are emerging within and around this discipline, and how are they redrawing disciplinary boundaries or reshaping disciplinary identities?

• What are some of the most exciting and challenging opportunities for connecting this form of inquiry with other disciplinary forms of inquiry, particularly those across larger divides such as between science and humanities?

Offering students intellectually rich and engaging opportunities to consider such questions brings general education into renewed vitality as a hub of conversation about what constitutes a university. It also offers important metacognitive prompts for students, asking them to consider their own skills, purposes and attitudes across a wide variety of contemporary forms of scholarly inquiry. Most importantly, these Forms of Inquiry courses recognize and address three crucial findings from research into student learning (Beyer, Taylor, & Gillmore, 2013):

• Both learning and pedagogy have a “disciplinary nature … even [in] the earliest courses.”

• Practitioners of specific forms of inquiry do not separate factual knowledge from procedural knowledge, as faculty course design typically includes both “knowledge-based or content goals” and “thinking goals.”

• Goals and learning objectives for “content knowledge” and for thinking about the content are usually woven together: “[C]ontent simultaneously present[s] students with something to think about and, usually, with specific (i.e., disciplinary) ways to think about it.” This intertwining is “a kind of double helix, where each strand [is] inseparable from the other.”

Rather than limiting Tier II goals to the same seven competencies that characterize Tier I courses, as in the earlier QEP, we seek to respond to the research above and leverage the disciplinary organization of the contemporary university to generate innovative learning opportunities for our students, opportunities that will inspire and stimulate their intellectual growth instead of merely presenting them with a checklist of required courses to complete. By asking faculty teams within each discipline to design these courses, we hope to engage faculty in this same intellectually rewarding pursuit. And by asking students to produce and share work reflecting their deeper learning both within and among their general education courses, we hope to provide rich and exciting opportunities for integrative thinking within and among the disciplines. In short, our QEP seeks to bring general education into the larger framework of “generalizable education,” that is, education with lasting and substantial impact beyond any single course, major or degree. Only in this way can a checklist of distribution requirements, the typical fate of a general education curriculum, become instead a set of pathways toward learning that matters.

We also see great opportunities for these Forms of Inquiry courses within a fully online environment. Faculty teams could regularly curate the most fascinating, up-to-date online materials relating to the key course elements outlined above. Student
work could be undertaken in a variety of ways, including collaborative work on digital artifacts that would not only represent their understanding but potentially engage a global audience with the creative syntheses they could accomplish. (As an example of what’s possible in this medium, see John Boswell’s “Symphony of Science” videos at symphonyofscience.com.) Online Forms of Inquiry courses could facilitate team-teaching and other forms of intra- and interdisciplinary faculty collaboration that would be difficult or impossible to schedule in a face-to-face scenario.

We recognize that this is a difficult, complex task to accomplish as the first-year experience advances into the upper levels of an undergraduate education. Indeed, the difficulties accumulate and persist into the graduate level as well. As learners move into higher levels of expertise, new factors begin to emerge. The seven areas Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) analyze as constituents of expert modes of knowing will suggest some of these difficulties:

- Experts notice features and meaningful patterns of information that are not noticed by novices.

- Experts have acquired a great deal of content knowledge that is organized in ways that reflect a deep understanding of their subject matter.

- Experts’ knowledge cannot be reduced to sets of isolated facts or propositions but, instead, reflects contexts of applicability: That is, the knowledge is “conditionalized” on a set of circumstances.

- Experts are able to flexibly retrieve important aspects of their knowledge with little attentional effort.

- Though experts know their disciplines thoroughly, this does not guarantee that they are able to teach others.

- Experts have varying levels of flexibility in their approach to new situations.

We recognize that these characteristics, particularly the potential complications of uneven pedagogical insight and ability as well as path-dependencies that may hamper intellectual agility, present increasing challenges as one proceeds through the curriculum toward more specialized areas of learning. Nevertheless, we are committed to creating the same learning-centered approach in our second-year courses and beyond that we have been successful in fostering within our first-year program.

**Pillar II**

**Contributing to a Networked World: Digital Engagement**

This pillar includes all varieties of online learning, from online courses in the standard curriculum making distinctive use of this new medium (Murray, 2003) to integrative opportunities pervading and spanning the curriculum (blogging, social media and other architectures of participation — see Nielsen, 2011), to explorations of new and emerging forms of scholarly communication and publication. We have named this pillar of the culture of generalizable education Digital Engagement, to indicate both the variety of activities and the common imperative that unites them.
Of all students enrolled in higher education in the United States, 6.7 million (or 32 percent) took at least one online course during the fall 2011 semester (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Growing student interest and participation in online courses have raised the expectation that learning, degree completion and credentialing can be flexibly scheduled and location-independent. Students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels are increasingly coming to understand “college-going” as something that should be convenient and reconfigurable, offer “anytime, anywhere” access and support alternative pathways for them to expand opportunities for their lives and advancement of their careers. Online learning is a significant driver in these changed expectations.

Students are approaching postsecondary aspirations with the perception that their college education will consist of a mix of learning experiences that include face-to-face, blended and fully online courses. Increasing numbers of students combine learning and work at the same time, or move frequently between them, as they seek to acquire skills and experiences that will help them on a path to a better life or career (Soares, 2013). As a result, a proposal for student success must include a rationale for how the online environment will be integrated into the more traditional residential experience. That is precisely what we intend to do over the next five years.

Important as increased access to convenient learning is, our aspirations with this pillar reach even higher, as we and our students embrace this opportunity for generalizable education that has substantial, lasting impact beyond any single course, major or degree. Our world is rapidly becoming more digitally mediated and networked, with new affordances and technological advances appearing on what seems to be a daily basis. Indeed, we see phenomena ranging from SMS-based flash mobs and political uprisings substantially aided or catalyzed by social media to major new learning affordances on seemingly nonacademic platforms that nevertheless are important hubs for wider forms of scholarly participation. For example, Nature, a leading science journal, has recently increased and focused its participation on Reddit as part of what Rosen (2013) identifies as “increasing efforts to use the tools of the Internet to improve science communication, to make it more direct, responsive, and accurate.” Add to these emergent phenomena a host of emerging technologies such as game-based learning, augmented reality, telepresence robots and both wearable and gesture-based computing, and the connection of digital engagement to ongoing student success and enhanced learning outcomes at all levels becomes even more vital.

While not every student participates in online culture to the same degree, we believe it is crucially important that our students be empowered to learn in this new medium as well as to participate within it effectively in personally satisfying and civically responsible ways (see Jenkins, 2009). Higher education can no longer afford to ignore, corral or otherwise seek to domesticate the Internet. Instead, we must recognize the potential for both good and ill in this new medium, as has been the case in all other media, and in turn do what higher education has always striven to do: equip its learners with the arts of freedom and a path to both personal and civic fulfillment. We have an unprecedented opportunity to realize the vision of the late Douglas Engelbart, Ph.D., of an “integrated domain” that will truly “augment human intellect.” Engelbart foresaw a day in which networked, interactive computing would lead to “more-rapid comprehension, better comprehension, the possibility of gaining a useful degree of comprehension in a situation that previously was too complex, speedier solutions, better solutions, and the possibility of finding solutions to problems that before seemed insoluble” (Engelbart, 1962). Engelbart and his Augmentation Research Center helped to invent a future in which generalizable education could flourish more widely, deeply and effectively than ever before (Engelbart & English, 1968). The Digital Engagement pillar of our QEP seeks to build a culture of generalizable education that answers this extraordinary opportunity.
Moreover, the proliferation of Web-based communication platforms and modalities (blogs, wikis, shared writing and annotation environments, etc.) has also begun to widen areas of scholarly and professional communication. Socially mediated digital environments of all kinds bring new opportunities for both formal and increasingly informal avenues for scholarly and professional communication, as well as new understandings of what “counts” as academic work and intellectual property. Rapid growth in these areas of digital engagement has created new needs for guidance and conversation among graduate and first-professional students. This area of our QEP proposes to address these needs at all levels, recognizing the special character of such needs in advanced study.

**Pillar III**

**Mapping Your Learning Journey: Academic Advising**

Academic advising has become a crucial component of the learning environment. Its importance to degree completion and retention rates is supported both by research and by our own experience. Yet we recognize that effective academic advising is about much more than course selection or curriculum navigation, important as they are. Academic advising is a process of guided discovery toward learning that matters to each student. Students have diverse abilities and interests. Academic advising helps students match those abilities and interests with courses of study in which they can thrive. Additionally, academic advising tracks student development from matriculation to graduation, and can intervene at appropriate points to help select a major, change a major, or take awakening metacognitive capabilities and focus them in a process of guided discovery that will lead to greater learning outcomes across the board, within and beyond courses, majors and degrees. In these ways, academic advising is a crucial component of the culture of generalizable education we seek to build.

Certainly persistence and retention are essential element of this effort. Many institutions consider effective advising to be a key strategy for improving retention rates. Our own experience with centralizing advising for first-year students through the University College exemplifies the positive impact of advising on improving the first-year retention rate. According to Cuseo (2007):

> Although a direct, causal connection between advising and retention has yet to be established, a strong case can be made that academic advising exerts a significant impact on student retention through its positive association with, and mediation of, variables that are strongly correlated with student persistence, namely: 1) student satisfaction with the college experience, 2) effective educational
and career planning and decision making, 3) student utilization of campus support services, 4) student-faculty contact outside the classroom, and 5) student mentoring.

Institutional-level survey results, such as those from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, as well as unit-level satisfaction survey results, indicate mixed reviews of academic advising services at VCU. Transfer students seem particularly dissatisfied with the advising services they receive. Moreover, although VCU has implemented many examples of high-impact advising practices, these practices have not been developed to their full potential nor have they been implemented across the student body. Examples of such underdeveloped practices include strategic advising plans that clearly articulate the mission and objectives of the advising programs, a comprehensive early alert program for students in academic difficulty, an accurate online degree audit system that is used by all advisers and students, advising publications that clearly outline the curricular and extracurricular steps students need to take to achieve their education goals (degree maps) and a standardized adviser training program.

Laudable and necessary as these goals are, however, they paint only part of the picture of learning that matters. Student success is about much more than success at being a student within a single learning environment and a well-defined curriculum. The world is made of many ill-defined problems, sometimes also termed “wicked problems.” One of the most-wicked problems of all is that of an education that has substantial, lasting impact beyond a single course, major or degree, what we are calling generalizable education. Yet the most valuable learning students experience will equip them for a lifetime of learning and relearning, and help them be successful through a life of accelerating change and an often bewildering variety of opportunities. Academic advising should focus not just on degree completion or retention but also on learning that truly matters — learning that speaks to the heart and passions of each learner and empowers the curiosity and intellectual agility that can sometimes be diminished within the complexities of a contemporary curriculum and proliferating programs, majors and degrees.

Pillar IV

Finding Your Vocation: Career Planning and Professional Development

As career development experts (e.g., Habley et al., 2012; Lent & Brown, 2013) note, career development and exploration are lifelong pursuits. The last century has seen both an expansion and significant reconfiguration of occupational options for many Americans. The current situation requires students to learn both the changing requirements of particular career paths and whether they have the appropriate skills and attitudes to be successful in that path. Many of our graduates have the talent and drive to be successful but “stumble in how they conduct their job searches or are inadequately prepared to present what they know and what they can do as a result of their college experiences” (Humphreys, 2013). In short, they
may need assistance with career choice implementation and job-finding (Jome & Phillips, 2013). Although previous research in this area indicates only moderate success for structured career intervention (Brown et al., 2003), we feel that by combining new technology (Educational Advisory Board’s Student Success Collaborative) with more intensive career advising, we will create a greater likelihood for our students to be both persistent and successful, thus experiencing truly generalizable education that has substantial, lasting impact beyond any single course, major or degree.

Indeed, Habley et al. (2012) assert that “career planning has a positive impact on student success because it broadens student opportunities, increases a student’s sense of purpose, creates academic relevance between course work and a student’s real-life goals and increases a student’s overall engagement with the institution.” Additionally, second-year students specifically grapple with establishing identity, developing purpose and searching for direction and commitment (Lemons & Richmond, 1987; in Boivin, Fountain, & Baylis, 2000). This search for commitment not only applies to career development, but also to personal interests and life goals. Students, typically during their second year, experience a “crisis of meaning and purpose” (Boivin et al., 2000), and Graunke and Woosley (2005) advise institutions to create initiatives to help sophomores discover more about their academic and career interests. Gardner (2000) goes on to support this concept and indicates sophomores have particular challenges creating connections between academic study and future career goals. We have an opportunity at VCU to create services and programs that will guide students in their development and draw connections between the various elements that make up their personal educational experiences which, ultimately, prepare them for work. Career planning and professional development are vital elements of the guided discovery that empowers learning that matters. The University Career Center is poised to lead these efforts in providing coordinated services and programs to serve all students, alumni and the community in which VCU serves as a leader and contributor of talent, economic development, workforce development, innovation, venture creation and job creation.

Although career planning and professional development are key elements of the learning environment, they connect directly to student learning as well. When we look to the marketplace and what industry expects of our graduates in today’s ever-changing economy, we find that “employers endorse several educational practices as potentially helpful in preparing college students for workplace success. These include practices that require students to: a) conduct research and use evidence-based analysis; b) gain in-depth knowledge in the major and analytic, problem solving and communication skills; and c) apply their learning in real-world settings” (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013). For students who may pursue further education immediately upon completion of undergraduate degrees as a method of improving employability, “knowing the career opportunities and long-term benefits that come from obtaining a graduate degree is the first step to ensuring that potential graduate students have all the information they need to think about and weigh opportunity costs against career benefits of obtaining an advanced degree” (Wendler et al., 2012). Professional career counselors are uniquely prepared to assist students in understanding and accessing high-quality sources of and uses for occupational information (e.g., Gore, Leuwerke, & Kelly, 2013) while avoiding Internet-based scams.

The market for graduate and first-professional students is evolving and growing. Estimates indicate that approximately 2.5 million jobs will require a master’s, doctoral or other advanced degree between 2008 and 2018 (Wendler et al., 2010). However, at the same time, the decreasing number of tenure-track positions in academia will force reconsideration of traditional career options for many of our graduate and first-professional students. It is incumbent upon the institution to ensure that our graduate and first-professional students are “aware of and prepared for a wide array of careers across a full spectrum of employment sectors” (Wendler et al., 2012).
As Kuh (2008) states:

That is why doing one or more of these activities in the context of a coherent, academically challenging curriculum that appropriately infuses opportunities for active, collaborative learning increases the odds that students will be prepared to — in the words of William Cronon — “just connect.” Such an undergraduate experience deepens learning and brings one’s values and beliefs into awareness; it helps students develop the ability to take the measure of events and actions and put them in perspective. As a result, students better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world, and they acquire the intellectual tools and ethical grounding to act with confidence for the betterment of the human condition.

This imperative to connect is at the heart of what we are calling generalizable education, for such connections form the foundation of learning that matters. Brown and Ryan Krane (in Shivy & Koehly, 2002) noted that the most effective career decision-making interventions contain five critical components: written exercises, individualized interpretations and feedback, information on the world of work, modeling, and building support. Developing courses and modules that are integrated into existing courses such as Focused Inquiry reinforce the model that career development is part of the educational experience for students and that the “concept of advising as teaching emphasizes the importance of career advising for academic goal attainment and the value of aligning educational choices with future career plans” (Hughey, Nelson, Damminger, & McMalla-Wriggins, 2012). Students also recognize the value of these interventions that are structured and learning-centered and learn that “high-quality developmental internship programs help students boost employability credentials, test drive organizational environments, and establish all-important contacts” (Ceperley, 2013).

A strong connection to general education is necessary for a successful implementation of this recommendation, and additional peer mentoring opportunities and support for such activities will only reinforce the importance of experiential learning to the academic and career success of students. Barbour and Shivy (2013) recently advised “taking a holistic view” to understand and enhance the systemic nature of student support in biomedical education and training. They believe that these structures and mechanisms are particularly critical for underrepresented and minority students at VCU and nationally. Once students’ social support networks are better understood, peer mentoring and related activities could be established. These would be considered high-impact learning experiences and could be expanded. Research has shown (Shivy & Koehly, 2002) that many students favor career assistance scenarios involving direct interaction with employed individuals, including internship experiences, the opportunity to interview people at their worksite, and events such as career fairs. These high-impact learning experiences help to guide and meet such student preferences.

The delivery of cutting-edge, empirically supported career services is an institutionwide priority. Our students should not see silos but only a consistent level of accessible, effective service (Education Advisory Board, 2012). We have a responsibility to our students (undergraduate, graduate, first-professional) to support their career and professional development and ensure a consistent “product” for those who engage in the career education process. This QEP, with its focus on education that has a substantial, lasting impact beyond any single course, major or degree is an opportunity for VCU to make career development a higher priority.
F. Actions to be implemented

As explained in this document, VCU has organized its QEP around four pillars that will support the focus on building a culture of generalizable education, that is, education with substantial, lasting impact beyond any single course, major or degree. These pillars are Tier II (general education) within the undergraduate core curriculum, digital engagement, academic advising and career planning and professional development. In this section, we reiterate a rationale and detail the specific actions relating to each pillar.

Pillar I

Discovering Connections:
Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum

Rationale

The general education program (Tier II) within the core curriculum is at the center of a commitment to our mission as an engaged, learner-centered institution that fosters inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting. A general education program offers students a vital opportunity to frame their growing intellectual competence within more complex and specific forms of inquiry, while simultaneously situating those specific forms of inquiry within the larger context of human intellectual endeavor. General education can facilitate habits of mind that will serve students well as lifelong learners; it can offer students valuable experience in reframing their thinking rapidly as they move from the “micro” level of individual disciplinary questions and methodologies to the “macro” level of inter- and transdisciplinary histories and futures, understanding
the origins of intellectual specialization in the modern world as well as the potential (and need) for imagining new forms of inquiry that will emerge from increasingly complex questions that we ask of the world and ourselves.

General education should be liberating, and it should provide the scope and creativity of all great learning opportunities. It provides the basis for what we want VCU students to take with them when they graduate from the university, having recognized and experienced what we are calling Learning that Matters — matters to them, matters as a foundation for lifelong learning and matters to success of their work in the world. Tier II of the core curriculum also allows students to find their home in the university and to choose majors that will launch them into areas where they can discover their own paths to success.

Our data indicate that we have made great strides in the first year of the core, but also that faculty must work together to reimagine and revitalize our approach to general education if we are to realize the promise of a matriculation-to-graduation-and-beyond design. There are also technical obstacles that often interfere with students’ efforts to graduate on time; we can eliminate these obstacles if we expand the core to a consistent and complete general education agreement across all the schools and the college. This QEP has already outlined some of the challenges we face. What follows are some of the actions recommended by faculty focus groups to achieve these goals.

**Actions**

**Strengthen intentionality and communication.**
Our objective here is to help faculty become more aware of the expectations regarding all Tier II courses and develop a collective spirit around the teaching of the courses. Our efforts will be guided by a crucial finding of Beyer, Taylor and Gillmore in the 2013 publication “Inside the Undergraduate Teaching Experience”: “[C]hange [in teaching] appeared to begin when faculty members felt comfortable enough to step away from the need to demonstrate their own mastery of content to students and to enter the classroom as learners themselves.”

First, we will collaborate to review and revise a coherent rationale for our core curriculum/general education program that provides guidance for faculty and students. Next, we will launch a “course trailer” initiative, modeled on Harvard University’s, offering faculty the opportunity to articulate, in an informative and imaginative way, the learning outcomes their course anticipates as well as why their course is a general education course — i.e., how it incorporates the essential characteristics this QEP outlines for general education at VCU. On the Harvard website, course trailers are defined as “2-4 minute mini-movies that thematically encapsulate a given course; they are posted on course iSites as well as the Gen Ed Vimeo page, and serve as an aid for students when making decisions about what courses to take” (see general education.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k37826&pageid=icb.page285714). We anticipate these course trailers will serve three related purposes: They will help students be more intellectually prepared and engaged by the course design and content; they will gently prompt faculty to be more mindful, cogent and articulate about learning outcomes and course
F. Actions to be implemented
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design; and they will help to catalyze a conversation about general education within and beyond the VCU campus. VCU course trailers will include substantial student presence in their design and production — another opportunity for student engagement and for deeper, more reflective learning. To emphasize cross-disciplinary connections, students and faculty alike will be encouraged to create “playlists” (Harvard’s Vimeo site provides this capability: See vimeo.com/album/2434976.). These playlists will use social media both to share information about exciting individual courses and to suggest ways in which the courses interact in the learners’ minds and experience, further catalyzing the conversation about general education and the intellectual growth it fosters.

We will add an explanation of the core curriculum/general education mission to the VCU Bulletin and create a website that, using syndication affordances, will allow students to republish their general education playlists and their reflections on their general education connections in a dynamic, ongoing universitywide narrative demonstrating the value and purpose of general education.

We will also sponsor a comprehensive University Seminar on General Education to build leadership and facilitate an ongoing conversation around general education. This seminar will meet each spring for one week. The curriculum will focus on reflection and cross-disciplinary engagement. We seek as open-ended an engagement as possible, letting the conversation go where it will, rather than focusing on a particular set of outcomes. Our goal is to renew the intellectual passion that led faculty into their professional lives in the first place, to create an environment in which the heart of the university, its faculty, can connect to and learn from each other in ways that will continue to enrich and deepen our sense of ourselves as a university, especially as that sense is revealed in our general education curriculum. Each of the annual cohorts of this seminar will reconvene in mid-spring of the following year for an opportunity to review their development as faculty and curricular innovators over the previous year, especially in light of the general education tier of the core curriculum.

Develop a systemic approach to assessing competencies and demonstrating achievement in the core curriculum/general education program. VCU’s director of assessment will work on the development of a shared rubric to assess the competencies across Tier II courses. Our intention is to collect and monitor our progress toward improving student achievement in the seven competencies without overburdening the teaching faculty. This will require imbedding the assessments in each of the courses. We will use faculty learning communities as a mechanism to help faculty learn and share techniques to integrate the competencies into their courses as well as imbed assessments into their assignments. We will also develop assessment tools for the Forms of Inquiry courses that will monitor our progress in achieving the goals within those courses.

Stimulate innovation and showcase success. We have already described above our plans to develop a new set of Tier II/general education courses structured around the forms of inquiry that constitute scholarly disciplines. We will also extend this curricular innovation into universitywide opportunities to celebrate and showcase the innovative work both faculty and students are creating in response.

For example, as part of the first-year experience, all first-year students have the opportunity to participate in an end-of-the-year celebration called the Focused Inquiry Expo. This event draws more than 2,500 first-year students while more than 100 group research projects are displayed. We want to create similar events for our sophomore, junior and senior students that highlight both forms of inquiry and the connections among them discovered, imagined and created by our students. In “Where Great Ideas Come From” (2010), Steven Johnson describes the intellectual and organizational nutrients that innovation requires:
Innovative environments … expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts — mechanical or conceptual — and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts. Environments that block or limit those new combinations — by punishing experimentation, by obscuring certain branches of possibility, by making the current state so satisfying that no one bothers to explore the edges — will, on average, generate and circulate fewer innovations than environments that encourage exploration. The infinite variety of life that so impressed Darwin, standing in the calm waters of the Keeling Islands, exists because the coral reef is supremely gifted at recycling and reinventing the spare parts of its ecosystem.

We propose to make our general education curriculum such an environment, and to build a culture of generalizable education that includes not only undergraduates but also graduate students, faculty and staff within the overarching theme of Learning that Matters. To do so, we plan to showcase the work of students as intellectual connectors through a themed series of events each semester. Some of these events will feature panels of undergraduates or graduate students discussing their research and innovation within interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary frameworks. Some events will ask undergraduates and graduates to interact with faculty mentors and community leaders to address questions emerging from “grand challenges and wicked problems,” often as a complement to a larger speakers series we plan around that conceptual framework. (Events series centering on “Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems” will be an especially important part of the culture we plan to build.) In every case, the purpose is to give students at all levels a creative, public outlet for discussing and furthering their innovative work as intellectual connectors, highlighting the deeper learning and higher-order thinking skills required for transfer between intellectual domains. Our hope is that general education will become far more than the inch-deep, mile-wide superficiality of a distribution requirement. Instead, general education at VCU will become a model of “where great ideas come from,” uniting competencies and growing content mastery in a truly innovative intellectual opportunity for our students.

Improving progress toward degree. Over the past 10 years, we have established the first common curricula agreement (core curriculum) that spans all schools and the college. This agreement is based on 21 credit hours. We now need to move to an expanded agreement that would include 30 credit hours, so that students who change their major can safely assume that the general education credits earned in the first major will count toward the general education in their new major. Without this, we are often forcing students to take an additional nine credits of general education while they are trying to complete their new major. We believe that a revised strategy that blends disciplinary foci with an active-learning approach to considering forms of inquiry, as described above, will help to persuade departments that developing general education courses that serve both majors and non-majors is not only feasible but indeed a benefit for all. We already have a prime example of such a course in PSYC 101.
(Introduction to Psychology), designed to be a compelling introduction to this form of inquiry for majors and non-majors alike. We seek to generalize this example to all departments within the college as well as to many, if not all of the departments serving undergraduates in the various schools at VCU. This is an agreement that will take serious negotiations with all academic units, but the primary beneficiaries will be our students.

**Pillar II**

**Contributing to a Networked World: Digital Engagement**

**Rationale**

Online learning, a key element of digital engagement, creates meaningful alternative learning pathways for students. Some of these pathways involve providing more opportunities for degree completion within current curricula. For example, many of our students fall behind on a four-year degree when they either drop a difficult class or get out of sequence in a particular major. Additional opportunities to complete course work at a distance or with more temporal flexibility (i.e., with largely or wholly asynchronous modalities) will help students make more timely progress to graduation. Other learning pathways could offer substantial opportunities for curricular innovation, including more numerous opportunities for individualized major programs. Finally, a significant, high-profile commitment to exploring new forms of online learning will help to build a culture of generalizable education, education that has substantial, lasting impact beyond any particular course, major or degree, across all levels and programs of study. As we seek to build this culture, VCU will intensively explore and develop the potential of the Internet as a learning environment, as a medium for scholarly communication and intellectual collaboration, and as a creative platform.

With this context in mind, we have included the following actions as part of this pillar in the QEP.

**Actions**

**Begin to articulate, establish and market alternative pathways to degree completion that engage with a range of online educational opportunities (local online courses, MOOCs, strategic partnerships, transfer credit, etc.).** To accomplish this, we would help academic units develop comprehensive online programs in high-demand areas. In particular, we would develop a comprehensive set of online courses to be delivered during the summer term to support VCU students as well as students from other institutions. And we would create a path of entry for students from community colleges. Our goal is to partner with community colleges to offer degree programs that allow students to complete an associate degree online and then continue online through a baccalaureate program at VCU.

**Create greater faculty awareness of online learning as a sound and complementary alternative to face-to-face courses, and continue to provide faculty development options for designing and implementing online courses and programs.** We will provide outreach to academic units, via presentations at faculty meetings and other gatherings, to build more support and buy-in for online and distance education. These efforts will include hosting a speaker series in which internal and external online-teaching experts share real-world results. And we will organize a “teaching-online road show” where instructional designers and technologists go on the road to different schools and host short, informational sessions.

We will urge academic units to consider online teaching in annual evaluation and promotion and tenure processes. We also will continue to support the Center for Teaching Excellence’s range of assistance to faculty members regarding online courses. This will include the development of self-paced online tutorials and credentialing programs for faculty who want to teach online. We plan to provide incentives to both schools and individual faculty members for development and delivery of online courses.
We also will continue to expand the VCU Online Summit, a conference held the past two years at the end of the spring semester, as a way to align the VCU name with online expertise.

Enhance advising and support services for students in ways that promote student success in online courses and programs. We plan to ensure that academic advisers, recruiters and program administrators are fully aware of educational opportunities emerging from the Office of Online Academic Programs’ academic programs listings, which are published on the Online@VCU website. In addition, we would support remote online learners in several ways: by creating a single point of contact for administrative functions, by creating additional connection points to the VCU community (alumni association, guest speakers online, etc.) and, finally, by determining an approach to requests to transfer academic credits for students who have participated and succeeded in MOOCs (massive open online courses).

Engage in a systematic and ongoing process of collecting data about student demand, satisfaction and performance in online courses at VCU, and use these data to make informed decisions about enhancing support for online learners. We will use data from Blackboard, Banner and other online platforms to better understand student demand for specific courses and time frames; to identify high-demand courses and ensure that a version is available online; to identify student needs and support students, especially at-risk students, with advising and other services; and to ensure comparability between online courses and corresponding in-person courses. We also will continue participation in the Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners to identify areas for improvement and success factors. And we will implement ongoing focus groups for online students to ensure that they have a voice.

Support university efforts already underway to expand VCU’s capacity to offer high-quality online courses and programs, specifically through a full commitment to the general recommendations enumerated in the report of the Online Education Strategic Plan Task Force. The task force conducted a yearlong study and submitted its report to the provost in May.
F. Actions to be implemented

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General recommendations include:

1) Significantly expand summer school online course offerings.
   • Identify high-demand courses in the College of Humanities and Sciences and, where appropriate, develop online sections of these courses to be offered in the summer.
   • Extend the time frame for online summer school offerings to cover eight to 10 weeks for a course (e.g., beginning before the spring semester ends).
   • Partner with the college to significantly increase online offerings of high-demand courses (e.g., commit to putting 30 high-demand courses online over the next three years).

2) Strategically identify existing programs for online delivery, and develop an approach to move them to an online format within the next 18 months.
   • Develop existing programs that have expressed interest.
   • Develop existing programs that align with online approaches and market demand.
   • Partner with external organizations to deploy programs rapidly while working to build internal capacity.

3) Establish a VCU eCore program that provides students with alternate pathways to complete a portion of the general education/core curriculum online.
   • Create online versions of appropriate courses in the core curriculum.

4) Experiment with the creation of an open major, perhaps connected to the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree. This flexible major would examine the possibility of including:
   • VCU face-to-face and online courses
   • Open online courses (e.g., MOOCs) for transfer credit

5) Encourage and support faculty experimentation with innovative pedagogies and online course designs.
   • Create a program that provides resources and support for faculty interested in developing and experimenting with new online course designs (e.g., MOOCs, lab courses, etc.).
   • Determine required support for MOOC delivery.
   • Consider integration of competency-based credit for courses.

6) Establish an interdisciplinary (and cross-functional) idea incubator/think tank for online education to explore and discover the next “big ideas.”
   • Online education is a rapidly changing landscape and there is strategic benefit in establishing a group that engages a look-at-more/look-beyond approach.

Explore and develop opportunities for digital engagement outside curricular boundaries. In addition to these opportunities for digital engagement within the curriculum, we will bring to our students, faculty and staff opportunities across, outside and beyond the curriculum. Our aims will be supported by a campuswide WordPress blogging platform that will be a canvas, metaphorically speaking, on which the intellectual connections, course work and creativity of an entire campus can be demonstrated and shared. These opportunities will
Every student should at least have a chance to manage their own infrastructure.

– David Winer

span all degree levels and reach across the entire campus population toward a worldwide audience. As Harvard University Fellow and Web developer David Winer observed in 2011:

Every student should at least have a chance to manage their own infrastructure. In some disciplines, such as computer science and journalism, it should be a requirement. How can you have a free press if you’re depending on the goodwill of a corporation to give you your infrastructure. You must control it yourself if you want freedom. … This was … one of the basic tenets of the Internet.

To serve our students well in the area of digital engagement, we must move beyond the idea of course-centered learning-management systems toward the goal of generalizable education. Moreover, we must empower our first-professional and graduate students to explore new and emerging forms of professional and scholarly communication. This QEP envisions a universitywide conversation about how best to realize these goals. An iterative process led by the Office of the Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success, who led similar initiatives at Virginia Tech, Baylor University and the University of Mary Washington, will be the foundation of this conversation.

Pillar III

Mapping Your Learning Journey: Academic Advising

Rationale

Effective academic advising supports our QEP’s goal of building a culture of generalizable education in many ways. On a basic yet essential level, effective academic advising improves persistence to degree completion. Many institutions consider effective advising to be a key strategy for improving retention rates. Just as importantly, effective advising is a process of guided discovery, one that not only supports students but also stimulates their thinking and pushes their horizons out toward learning that matters and an education that has substantial, lasting impact beyond any course, major or degree. Since VCU has already made significant progress in implementing high-impact advising practices for freshmen, many of the following recommendations reflect an expansion of existing advising initiatives for second- and third-year students.

Graduate and first-professional students have different needs, yet studies at these levels also represent complex and urgent opportunities to pursue truly generalizable education. Traditional forms of attention to scholarly and professional training and knowledge acquisition must be matched by a growing emphasis on what Walker et al. (2008) refer to as the formation of “the scholar’s [and first-professional’s] professional identity in all its dimensions,” including “the growth of ‘the personality, character, habits of heart and mind’ and the role that the given discipline [or profession] is capable of and meant to play in academe and society at large” (Elkana, 2006, in Walker et al., 2008).

Actions

Implement all functions of DegreeWorks. DegreeWorks is a Web-based auditing tool implemented by VCU to assist students, faculty and advisers with monitoring student progress toward degree completion as defined by the student’s effective bulletin. DegreeWorks “provides a comprehensive set of Web-based academic advising, degree audit, and transfer articulation tools to help students and their advisers negotiate … curriculum requirements” (Ellician, 2012).
The degree audit function of DegreeWorks became available for advisers in September 2012 and for undergraduate students in January 2013. Advisers can now use this audit function to inform students about remaining degree requirements for graduation. Initial satisfaction survey results indicate high levels of satisfaction among advisers for DegreeWorks’ accuracy and usability. The software has additional advising functions that will be implemented over the next five years. These functions include:

- **Audit function for graduate degree programs:** This feature will afford graduate students the same options to track academic progression as currently exists for undergraduate students.

- **Planning function:** With this feature of DegreeWorks, students plan how they can fulfill remaining degree requirements (identified through the degree audit report) over the course of future semesters. By using this feature, advisers can help students make concrete plans for graduating in a timely manner.

- **Reporting function:** With this feature of DegreeWorks, departments can analyze data from degree audit and degree planning reports to determine future course demands. For example, departments can query how many students still need to complete a certain course to graduate and then make contingency plans for providing enough seats to meet the demand. This function will also allow us to track students’ progress toward graduation so advisers can identify students who need some sort of advising intervention.

- **Transfer student audit function:** With this feature of DegreeWorks, prospective transfer students can determine how their transfer credits will apply to the degree requirements of their intended major at VCU. Consequently, transfer students will be able to make informed decisions about transferring to VCU and advisers can advise prospective students more accurately.

**Create degree maps for all undergraduate majors.** The 2013-14 Undergraduate Bulletin includes curriculum templates for each degree program. These templates provide information about the degree requirements (displayed in a consistent format for all programs) and a recommended sample outline of how students can fulfill those requirements in four years. The information provided in these templates is consistent with what is displayed in students’ degree audit reports. In addition to these curriculum templates, VCU will develop degree maps for every undergraduate degree program. The concept of degree maps is modeled on Georgia State University’s “major maps” and “academic guides.” (See advisement.gsu.edu/self-service/academic-guides.) GSU’s major maps not only
recommend academic and extracurricular options for students but also link majors with possible careers after graduation. GSU’s academic guides provide a four-year schedule of courses, including important milestones students must fulfill each year. These milestones include specific requirements that must be fulfilled for the students to complete the degree in four years. Examples include minimum grades in certain required courses, a minimum overall GPA and mandatory advising appointments.

The VCU degree maps will include:

- Important degree milestones (Rams Tracks)

- Information about mandatory advising for students who do not meet those milestones (e.g., the 30-, 60-, 90-credit advising checkpoints)

- Information about learning support, extracurricular opportunities (study abroad, community engagement, etc.) and career-planning recommendations

- Recommendations of career and/or graduate school options after graduation

Additionally, working with the Education Advisory Board, the university piloted the Student Success Initiative in fall 2013. The programs participating in the pilot are the highly subscribed majors of biology, chemistry and psychology, as well as the cohort of students who have not declared a major; these groups have lower than institutional average retention rates. This pilot includes development of a predictive model based upon student data derived from high school and the university, identifying students at risk of not graduating in their major. The data were analyzed in fall 2013 and the institution began implementation of the second phase of the Student Success Initiative. The second phase consists of implementing an Education Advisory Board student advisement tool assisting with all phases of advisement, including identifying at-risk students and outlining alternative paths of study that students may consider. Advisers will be trained in how the tool functions and will develop means by which they will communicate with and serve students. Full-scale implementation within the pilot programs is planned for fall 2014 with the potential for expansion into other programs in subsequent semesters.

**Expand Early Alert Intervention Program.** The Early Alert Intervention Program was designed to identify students in 100- and 200-level courses who may be failing a course. Each semester, VCU requests instructors of introductory-level courses to submit midterm grades for their students, especially grades of D or F. However, the program requires the willing participation of faculty to input midterm grades, and the midterm grades do not provide detailed analyses of students’ progress within the course (as often found, for example, within the course’s Blackboard website). In addition, advisers are not necessarily informed of academic challenges occurring in students’ classes. Therefore, we propose an expansion of the Early Alert program by:

- Developing or purchasing computer software to allow Blackboard to interact with eServices
so that grades loaded into Blackboard are automatically downloaded into eServices (enabling faculty to submit grades only one time)

- Developing an electronic system whereby students and advisers are automatically informed whenever an instructor informs a student that he/she is failing the class (through Blackboard and/or eServices)

- Increasing utilization of an expanded Early Alert system to track academic progress in all courses, not just introductory-level courses

- Developing and sponsoring student success workshops focusing on techniques to improve academic success for students who are experiencing difficulties

Expand advising services for transfer students. In 2009, VCU established the VCU Transfer Center to centralize the evaluation and posting of transfer credits. Over the past two years, the Transfer Center has also started to provide transition services by advising prospective students and resourcing new transfer students during their first semester at VCU. The university has also increased the number of transfer articulation agreements with community colleges as a strategy for ensuring that courses earned at a community college fulfill degree requirements at VCU. Despite these additional services, transfer students continue to struggle during their first semester at VCU, particularly students who have earned less than 30 credit hours at the community college. Additionally, students who transfer to VCU with associate degrees from community colleges often experience difficulty registering for classes at VCU, as these students desire enrollment in upper-level course work with fewer sections and smaller class sizes.

We propose an expansion of advising services for transfer students by hiring two extra advisers for the VCU Transfer Center. By increasing the staff, the Transfer Center will be able to offer preregistration advising to associate degree students from community colleges in the semester prior to their enrollment at VCU. The Transfer Center will also be able to establish advising caseloads for new transfer students in their first semester at VCU. Each new transfer student will then have two advisers assigned to them during their first semester at VCU: an academic adviser in their department and a transition adviser from the Transfer Center.

Improve coordination of undergraduate and graduate student advising services. Undergraduate student advisers can play an important role in recruiting potential VCU graduate students. Many experienced advisers already fulfill this role and help students transition to graduate studies. We plan to expand the role of advisers in supporting the pipeline for enrolling more VCU students into graduate programs at VCU. The Graduate School will establish training workshops for undergraduate advisers regarding how to identify and advise potential graduate students. The degree maps for each undergraduate major will include information for students on graduate degree options. In addition, undergraduate advisers will encourage more eligible students to register for graduate-level courses as a way for students to explore their potential to be successful graduate students.
Expand professional development opportunities for advisers to improve the accuracy and consistency of advising for students. In 2012, VCU established the Undergraduate Advising Council. Membership of the council consists of all faculty and staff who advise undergraduate students. The primary purpose of the council is to improve communication among advisers across the entire university so that they can be kept better informed of advising-related topics and best practices at VCU. The establishment of the Advising Council has created an awareness of the need for additional professional development opportunities, including:

- A Graduate Advising Council for the graduate program directors
- A standardized orientation for new advisers
- An increase in the number of formal and informal training opportunities for advisers (e.g., webinars provided by the National Academic Advising Association, support for attending regional and national advising conferences)
- A centralized VCU Advising Manual website to be used by both undergraduate and graduate advisers
- The review and appropriate revisions of the roles and responsibilities as well as classification of professional and faculty advisers

Assist academic units to develop and implement a comprehensive advising plan for each undergraduate, graduate and first-professional degree program. We will assist each academic unit to develop a comprehensive advising plan. Each advising plan will include the mission and objectives of the advising program as well as a description of the advising actions or strategies to achieve those objectives. Examples of advising actions include advising checkpoints to determine whether students are making timely progress toward graduation; strategies for advising students in academic difficulty (i.e., students with low GPAs who are in danger of being academically dismissed from the program and/or university); and strategies for advising students who desire matriculation to VCU graduate programs. The plan will also detail whether students are advised by professional or faculty advisers as well as describe how the unit will assess the advising program.

Pillar IV
Finding Your Vocation: Career Planning and Professional Development

Rationale
Career planning is a structured developmental process by which students intentionally investigate, evaluate and reflect upon their skills, interests, values and the relationship of these individual characteristics to the world of work and the employment/industry marketplace. This process is also technical and iterative as students then ready themselves for specific experiences, including but not limited to experiential learning, jobs, graduate/professional school, postdoctoral opportunities, research and professional career paths within a variety of industries. The goal is to educate students to better articulate and communicate the value of their degree and, in general, the knowledge and skills they developed while at VCU, in and out of the classroom.

The University Career Center has recently taken a more active role and leadership position in coordinating these efforts for the university with the creation of the VCU Career Council, the Outcomes/First Destinations Working Group and a complete reorganization of its organizational structure, investment in new technologies and a redefinition of career and professional development at VCU.

Actions
These recommendations are offered as a means to centrally coordinate and manage key elements of the career planning process in order to enhance
the vocational development of undergraduate, graduate and first-professional students at VCU. While we call for coordinated efforts, we recognize and suggest flexibility to allow for the inherent variability among our diverse units and academic programs. These recommendations also require, and cannot be successful without, the allocation of the appropriate resources, including new staffing, programmatic funding, faculty/staff training and development, and the dedicated support (staffing and a mechanism) for the long-term tracking of metrics and outcomes to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the proposed career planning process.

Develop exploration and professional prognosis courses. We will develop and implement a coordinated program of exploration and professional prognosis interventions aimed at undergraduate, graduate and first-professional students during key transition points of their academic careers to assess and support progress toward career readiness. Identified transition points include incoming first-year, graduate and first-professional students; change of majors, including changing from undeclared to declared; first-year to sophomore students; incoming transfer students; and students enrolling in and/or completing experiential learning activities. Targeted efforts will focus on populations of students pursuing health science sector career paths. The interventions will be coordinated by the University Career Center with the development of content through a collaborative effort between the UCC, University College and various academic units to account for variability. The intervention modules and courses will be a blend of optional, elective or required courses based upon academic unit resource allocation, existing modules and courses dedicated toward these efforts, and a broad university dialogue.

Brown and Ryan Krane (in Shivy & Koehly, 2002) highlight that the most impactful career interventions contain five critical components: written exercises, individualized interpretations and feedback, information on the world of work, modeling and building support. We will develop interventions in which students explore career options and develop branding and application materials such as resumes, curricula vitae, portfolios and other materials critical for access to and success in the job market.

Each of the modules and courses would require the development of learning outcomes and consistent course evaluations in line with university policies. The design of these modules and courses must also take into account the developmental progression of individual students, as research shows that undergraduates prefer more time-limited career assistance, whereas graduate students may desire longer term help (Shivy & Koehly, 2002).
Recommended intervention methodology:

Focused Inquiry integration: Develop and incorporate pathways to introduce and integrate early consideration of career planning into Focused Inquiry courses and targeted graduate and first-professional programs

- This intervention emphasizes early engagement with students (all degree levels) and introduces basic elements of career planning and career decision-making. An outline of the services available to students at VCU and how various experiential learning activities (internships, service, shadowing, externships, field placement, practica) will be integral components of their education and academic experience will be provided and connected to the academic advising initiatives. Initial inventories can be provided to students to evaluate which stage they are within the career and professional development continuum.

Career exploration and professional prognosis courses: Revise the curriculum of UNIV 101 (Introduction to the University) and UNIV 103 (Education and Career Planning) for undergraduates to enhance the career planning and development elements with revamped learning objectives connected to exploration and career readiness skill development. Support efforts such as BEST and LEAPD career seminars and professional development courses for the graduate and first-professional programs. Develop new career courses targeted at health science career planning and experiential learning. Market courses to students at key transition points.

- This intervention is a more structured approach to career development and can either be required or offered as an elective for students depending upon academic units and existing program requirements. It is recommended that at least one course be offered, at a minimum, prior to completion of junior year (90 credit hours for undergraduates) and prior to final year of graduate/first-professional degree program. Targeted courses will be developed for the pre-health and health science-tracked students at all levels. All offerings will focus on career readiness and focused on skill identification and development relevant to industry sectors and marketplace.

Self-directed, online modules: Create online modules that can be utilized for self-directed
F. Actions to be implemented

Virginia Commonwealth University

exploration, research and planning. These resources can be specifically utilized by incoming transfer students and graduate and first-professional students.

- This intervention takes into account our growing number of distance learners as well as the increased offerings within some academic units. This will also be targeted toward incoming transfer students with limited career resources available to them at community colleges, thereby allowing them to not only remain in sync academically (based on articulation agreements) but also in terms of career planning. Online and self-directed career readiness assessment and services encourage students to take ownership of career decision-making, increase preparedness to work with advisers and maximize use of resources such as career fairs, on-campus networking and other online tools such as LinkedIn.

Develop an experiential learning portal within a learning-centered approach. Persistence data shows that transition and readiness points (incoming first-year, graduate and first-professional students; change of major, including undeclared to declared; first-year to sophomore students; incoming transfer students; and students enrolling in and/or completing experiential learning activities) are key places within a student’s academic career that are pivotal to their academic success. Education on alternate career tracks and the employment market is a growing expectation within many programs and units. These actions will not only increase student retention at, and immediately following, key junctures in their academic careers but also lead to more engaged alumni and financial investment back into the institution.

Educating students on potential career paths can be effectively implemented by providing experiential learning opportunities and by creating institution-wide standards and a portal for high-impact learning experiences (Kuh, 2008) for students to discover, understand and access. High-impact learning experiences would include structured versions of internships, study abroad, service learning, practica, research, research training, student leadership, externships, graduate teaching and research positions and capstone courses.

The resources allocated in this area would aid individual units to develop components not only specific to their curricula but also based in established university standards. Seminars would be developed to orient students for various experiential learning opportunities and to maximize career readiness development and meet identified learning objectives. Implementing standards would allow for associated improvements in tracking and the evaluation of experiential learning — a growing measurement of student success and engagement, as well as progression toward postgraduate outcomes and preparation. Resources would also be used to recognize faculty for effective leadership, mentorship and supervisory skills in the area of experiential learning, thereby supporting its value to academic units, the institution and student learning.

A strong connection to the core curriculum is necessary for a successful implementation of this recommendation, and additional peer mentoring opportunities and support for such activities would only reinforce the importance of experiential learning to the academic and career success of students. Once established, the definition and types of opportunities that would be considered high-impact learning experiences could be expanded, as they are natural extension of student preferences.

Track experiential learning and career outcomes. One of the inherent challenges for any institution is the tracking and management of student learning and career outcomes. The final recommendation within this section proposes a collaborative effort between various units throughout the institution that are involved with experiential learning (Division of Community Engagement, University Student Commons and Activities, University Career Center, various academic units)
to capture these data points and tell the story of
the impact of these activities on student learning
and the impact our students have within the
community.

Currently, VCU lacks a mechanism to track the
number of hours students dedicate to service, the
number of internships that students secure and
obtain credit for, and the learning and impact of
these activities on the community and students
themselves. We propose to become a model of
collaboration, innovation and efficiency for the
university as well as other public institutions
nationwide.

The primary goals of our recommendation are to
create a portal for internship and other experiential
learning opportunity reporting and a mechanism
to track and denote the engagement level of rela-
tionships with community partners. The learning
and engagement derived from service and intern-
ships can be directly correlated to increased
persistence and retention as outlined by the
National Survey of Student Engagement data and
the Association of American Colleges and
Universities' Liberal Education and America's
Promise initiatives. This information would allow
us to aggregate the contributions of VCU students
to the community and both quantify and, at the
same time, qualify the close connectivity of VCU
to Richmond and surrounding areas.

We also believe that in order to effectively tell the
story and report the outcomes of our students and
alumni, we must create a universitywide career
outcomes/first-destination data-collection strategy
and process for the undergraduate, graduate and
first-professional student populations. This will
allow us to report the data that we deem relevant
while also collecting pertinent information that is
in accordance with various governmental agencies,
accreditation bodies and marketing outlets.

The efforts of the QEP will support a proactive
approach to data collection and establish a means
to collect data at graduation, six-month, one-year,
five-year and 10-year marks for all graduates.

While we recognize that neither degree completion
nor eventual employment alone constitute learning
that matters, we also recognize that the process
of guided discovery inherent in advising and career
planning and professional development do consti-
tute a significant investment in a learning
environment that supports generalizable education,
that is, education with substantial, lasting impact
beyond any single course, major or degree. This
QEP envisions a unified, consistent environment
of data-driven discovery that will inform our profes-
sional interventions and guide students toward
fulfilling, successful lives, both within their course
work and in the lives they will lead after
graduation.
G. Key personnel and milestones

A QEP Steering Committee has already been appointed, and it will provide project oversight for QEP implementation. The QEP co-directors will chair the committee, which consists of students, faculty, staff and administrators. Representing stakeholders in the QEP process and implementation, the Steering Committee will work with the co-directors to refine project plans and assessment.

The QEP co-directors, both of whom are tenured faculty members, will oversee the implementation of the QEP. Where appropriate, they will have reassigned time from normally assigned courses/projects and a summer stipend to work on the QEP. The co-directors will chair the Steering Committee, provide hands-on implementation management for all areas within the QEP, and provide progress reports to the provost and the Board of Visitors during the time span of the plan. They will work closely with the vice provost for academic and faculty affairs, as well as the chairs of the subcommittees.
### Milestones for the pillars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Digital Engagement</th>
<th>Academic Advising</th>
<th>Career Planning and Professional Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>• Begin revising Tier II core curriculum guidelines to emphasize seven competencies, articulate Forms of Inquiry criteria for course development and approval and develop processes for ensuring application, review, approval, and compliance audits and quality control for Tier II courses.</td>
<td>• Identify and begin developing three online or hybrid graduate programs.</td>
<td>• Present analysis of Noel-Levitz survey results to Undergraduate Advising Council and initiate conversation about what to include in an advising plan.</td>
<td>• Define employer engagement and engagement levels in order to develop varied methods for employers to interact with the UCC.</td>
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<td>• Collaboratively identify 30 hours of general education course work to be accepted by all major programs.</td>
<td>• Identify eight to 12 highly subscribed courses and develop online delivery format.</td>
<td>• Start helping academic units to develop advising plans.</td>
<td>• Identify VCU partners invested in health care initiatives and health care-related Quest for Distinction goals.</td>
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<td>• Identify Forms of Inquiry development teams within each department to prepare for pilot courses to be launched in spring 2015.</td>
<td>• Continue monitoring degree delivery for students in all degree programs. Adhere to SACSCOC notification policy and, as required, timeline for subsequent substantive change proposals.</td>
<td>• Begin establishing advising council for graduate program directors.</td>
<td>• Inventory campuswide experiential learning to develop a concrete definition of experiential learning that includes internships, co-ops, shadowing, field placement, practica, volunteering and community engagement.</td>
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<td>• Develop and complete incentive structures for departments creating online Tier II courses, especially Forms of Inquiry courses.</td>
<td>• Finalize plans for Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems theme for the 2014-15 academic year: &quot;The Role of General Education Within a University Curriculum.&quot;</td>
<td>• Assess effectiveness of Student Success Collaborative.</td>
<td>• Enhance employer experience by creating educational content about the value of hiring VCU students, the recruitment and hiring process and the development of learning-centered opportunities.</td>
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<td>• Begin planning for 2015 University Seminar on General Education.</td>
<td>• Finalize plans for Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems theme for the 2014-15 academic year: &quot;The Role of General Education Within a University Curriculum.&quot;</td>
<td>• Start work on degree maps.</td>
<td>• Collaborate with University College to identify opportunities for partnership and seamless transition of students between academic advising and career services.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Begin offering VCU BEST.</td>
<td>• Finalize plans for Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems theme for the 2014-15 academic year: &quot;The Role of General Education Within a University Curriculum.&quot;</td>
<td>• Hire two new advisers for the Transfer Center.</td>
<td>• Identify two to three groups of unique student populations to focus staff research, training and attention for each year of the strategic plan.</td>
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<td>• Offer early preregistration advising to transfer students.</td>
<td>• Define and provide a structure and guidelines for the UCC co-op program.</td>
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<td>• Begin implementation of all functions of DegreeWorks.</td>
<td>• Partner with Division of Community Engagement and academic units with structured experiential learning opportunities and/or requirements to identify experiential learning gaps.</td>
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| Summer 2014 | • Begin work on course trailers, with a goal of completing them for each Tier II course by summer 2015.  
• Develop playlist website. | • Launch two MOOCs: “Global Health + Social Media” and “From Memex to YouTube: Learning, Creativity and the Internet.”  
• Launch substantial number (eight to 12) of online Tier II and other bottleneck courses.  
• Work with vice provost for academic and faculty affairs and deans to determine if 25 percent of any curriculum is being offered online with these new bottleneck online Tier II courses. If yes, send appropriate notification to SACSCOC.  
• Continue the monitoring of degree delivery for students in all degree programs. Adhere to SACSCOC notification policy and, as required, timeline for subsequent substantive change proposals. | • Research, benchmark and develop a learning-centered career curriculum.  
• Develop new partnerships and enhance current partnerships based on engagement rubric and use of educational content.  
• Develop an alumni engagement strategy and strategic framework.  
• Develop learning outcomes for career advising and overall career services.  
• Launch career outcomes and first-destination data collection for May 2014 graduates. |
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<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>• Submit revised core curriculum to University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee.</td>
<td>• Finalize development of new Tier II Forms of Inquiry pilot courses (at least three). Development of online versions of these courses will be concurrent with face-to-face versions — the goal is to launch the online versions by summer 2015.</td>
<td>• Submit advising plans for academic units for review and approval by December.</td>
<td>• Create Web-based and print resources for employers seeking internship development and refinement.</td>
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<td>• Solicit applications (for the online course initiative summer institute) from faculty in the college to create 10 online courses to be delivered the summer of 2016.</td>
<td>• Hold first meeting of the Graduate Advising Council and continue meetings of the Undergraduate Advising Council.</td>
<td>• Provide additional training opportunities for advisers.</td>
<td>• Assess student awareness of options within the health care sector.</td>
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<td>• Work with vice provost for academic and faculty affairs and deans to determine if 25 percent of any curriculum is being offered online with these CHS courses. If yes, send appropriate notification to SACSCOC.</td>
<td>• Offer new adviser orientation workshops for both undergraduate and graduate student advisers.</td>
<td>• Offer workshops for undergraduate advisers on identifying and advising potential with VCU graduate students.</td>
<td>• Identify a baseline of health care employers engaged with the UCC and VCU.</td>
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<td>• Continue the monitoring of degree delivery for students in all degree programs. Adhere to SACSCOC notification policy and, as required, timeline for subsequent substantive change proposals.</td>
<td>• Begin implementation of additional features of DegreeWorks.</td>
<td>• Continue developing degree maps.</td>
<td>• Develop and market a clearly defined, self-paced, educational portal for students that includes a checklist to be completed based on career curriculum.</td>
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<td>• Expand the VCU Online Summit (end-of-the-year symposium).</td>
<td>• Explore software programs for expanding Early Alert program.</td>
<td>• If approved, expand Student Success Collaborative project.</td>
<td>• Create and offer individual development plan workshops open to all graduate and first-professional students.</td>
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<td>• Begin work on fully online Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree pathways.</td>
<td>• Implement expanded transition advising for new transfer students.</td>
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| Spring 2015 | • Continue work on skill competencies assessment and come to a final agreement.  
• Communicate the assessment strategies and instruments to all faculty teaching Tier II courses.  
• Launch pilot courses in Forms of Inquiry as new general education/Tier II courses.  
• Create a year-end celebration of products coming out of the Tier II courses that are tied to the competencies as well as to the artifacts created by students in the Forms of Inquiry courses (General Education Summit).  
• Implement first iteration of the University Seminar on General Education.  
• Continue planning for 2015-16 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems theme. | | • Start implementing advising plans and collect data for assessing those plans.  
• Continue meetings of undergraduate and graduate Advising Councils and provide other training opportunities.  
• Complete implementation of additional features of DegreeWorks.  
• Complete all degree maps for undergraduate programs by May 2015 deadline. | • Continue to develop and market a clearly defined, self-paced, educational portal for students that includes a checklist to be completed based on career curriculum.  
• Create Web-based and print resources for students seeking information and guidance to connect experiential learning opportunities to their academic tracks, career goals and the career curriculum. |
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<td>Summer 2015</td>
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<td>• Launch online version of Tier II/general education pilot Forms of Inquiry courses.</td>
<td>• Conduct preliminary assessment of advising plans.</td>
<td>• Implement components of career curriculum for alumni with goals for program numbers and participation.</td>
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<td>• Launch eight additional sections of online Tier II and other bottleneck courses.</td>
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<td>• Develop an action plan for student engagement within health care sector based on needs assessment that includes pilot programs.</td>
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<td>• Launch second and third new fully online graduate programs.</td>
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<td>• Develop new partnerships and enhance current partnerships based on engagement rubric and use of educational content.</td>
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<td>• Develop self-paced online tutorials and credentialing programs for faculty who want to teach online.</td>
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<td>• Develop next three pilot Forms of Inquiry Tier II/ general education courses (both face-to-face and fully online versions).</td>
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<td>• Open discussion of how to integrate online teaching in annual evaluation and P&amp;T processes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Notify SACSCOC of fully online Bachelor of Science degree program. Develop a substantive change proposal if required by SACSCOC, keeping in mind due dates for SACSCOC and start dates for VCU.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>• Launch 2015-16 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series.</td>
<td>• Conduct preliminary assessment of advising plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conduct a fall institute for Tier II faculty to discuss curricular challenges and revise implementation as necessary.</td>
<td>• Begin the use of degree maps in advising.</td>
<td>• Evaluate, refine and expand health care initiatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue meetings of undergraduate and graduate Advising Councils and provide other training opportunities.</td>
<td>• Create VCU-branded internship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue implementation of advising plans.</td>
<td>• Develop new partnerships and enhance current partnerships based on engagement rubric and use of educational content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Milestones for the pillars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Digital Engagement</th>
<th>Academic Advising</th>
<th>Career Planning and Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2016</strong></td>
<td>• Plan next year’s Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series.</td>
<td>• Launch fourth and fifth new fully online graduate program.</td>
<td>• Continue using degree maps for advising.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Director of assessment will conduct an analysis of competencies as well as on Forms of Inquiry student artifacts (portfolios, projects, creative products, etc.).</td>
<td>• Use data analytics to identify at-risk students taking online courses.</td>
<td>• Continue meetings of undergraduate and graduate Advising Councils and provide other training opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze D-F-W rates for online courses and compare them with rates for corresponding in-person courses.</td>
<td>• Develop another 10 courses to add to the summer online program.</td>
<td>• Continue implementation of advising plans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue using degree maps for advising.</td>
<td>• Analyze Tier II/general education courses with high D-F-W rates and bring faculty together to discuss solutions.</td>
<td>• Conduct assessment of advising plans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer 2016</strong></td>
<td>• Launch additional online summer courses, including three new pilot Forms of Inquiry courses.</td>
<td>• Launch sixth new fully online graduate program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Launch new degree pathways within a fully online Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree program.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2016</strong></td>
<td>• Present fall institute to discuss and reaffirm commitment to core curriculum and student success.</td>
<td>• Continue the data analytics regarding online courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Launch 2016-17 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series.</td>
<td>• Create student focus groups to identify areas of need in the online offerings.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze Tier II/general education courses with high D-F-W rates and bring faculty together to discuss solutions.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2017</strong></td>
<td>• End-of-the-year celebration of student products.</td>
<td>• Perform preliminary assessment of first three new fully online graduate programs.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze data on rubrics and Forms of Inquiry student products.</td>
<td>• Identify and begin to develop at least three more fully online graduate programs (Nos. 7, 8 and 9).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finalize plans for 2017-18 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Milestones for the pillars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Digital Engagement</th>
<th>Academic Advising</th>
<th>Career Planning and Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer 2017</strong></td>
<td>• Launch additional Tier II/general education courses, including three new pilot Forms of Inquiry courses (projected total: nine Forms of Inquiry courses, all online by this summer).</td>
<td>• Launch additional Tier II/general education courses, including three new pilot Forms of Inquiry courses (projected total: nine Forms of Inquiry courses, all online by this summer).</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Fall 2017**  | • Launch 2017-18 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series.  
• Fall institute should feature faculty who are being more successful embedding the competencies in their courses creatively, as well as faculty teams who have developed the most successful Forms of Inquiry Tier II/general education courses (sharing success). | • Launch two new fully online graduate programs (Nos. 7 and 8 within this QEP). |                      |                      |
| **Spring 2018** | • Year-end student product celebration.  
• Report all data on progress in the competencies and in Forms of Inquiry courses.  
• Finalize plans for 2018-19 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series. | • Launch ninth new fully online graduate program. |                      |                      |
| **Summer 2018** |                      | • Complete launch of fully online Tier II/general education courses, including all Forms of Inquiry courses (nine total). |                      |                      |
| **Fall 2018**  | • Hold fall institute.  
• Begin 2018-19 Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems series. | • Identify and begin to develop 10th new fully online graduate program. |                      |                      |
| **Spring 2019** |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| **Summer 2019** | • Launch 10th new fully online graduate program. |                      |                      |                      |
| **Fall 2019**  | • Submit interim report to SACSCOC. |                      |                      |                      |
QEP goals

We believe that the milestones articulated in this section will result in the achievement of the goals of our QEP. These goals include:

Student learning outcomes

• An improvement in the seven competencies: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, the ability to collaborate, information fluency, quantitative literacy and an understanding of ethical and civic responsibilities

• A commitment to deeper learning within the framework of general education considered as an introduction to forms of inquiry — i.e., the history, methodologies, grand challenges and wicked problems, and future directions of the disciplinary structures that make up the contemporary research university

Environment supporting student learning

• Better advising and career planning to help students with their learning pathways and support their awareness of vocational options, vocational preparation and innovative career opportunities

• An expansion of online courses and alternative learning pathways, with increased opportunities for degree completion as well as innovative, individualized major programs

• More vigorous and innovative departmental participation in general education across the university

The latter environmental element in particular will continue VCU’s Quest for Distinction by fostering a universitywide conversation around disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary intellectual activity at VCU and beyond.

By fulfilling these QEP goals, we will achieve our key institutional goals: higher retention and graduation rates.
H. Organizational structure

Below is the organizational structure for implementing and tracking progress for the QEP.

**SACSCOC and QEP liaison:**
Laura J. Moriarty, Ph.D., vice provost for academic and faculty affairs

**Co-directors of the QEP:**
Gardner Campbell, Ph.D., associate professor of English and vice provost for learning innovation and student success

Jeffrey South, associate professor of journalism, director of undergraduate studies, Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture (formerly School of Mass Communications)

**Pillar I (Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum) subcommittee lead:**
TBD

**Pillar II (Digital Engagement) subcommittee co-lead:**
Gardner Campbell, Ph.D., and Jonathan Becker, Ph.D., Interim Director of Online Academic Programs

**Pillar III (Advising) subcommittee lead:**
Seth Sykes, Ph.D., associate vice provost for academic services, University College

**Pillar IV (Career Planning and Professional Development) subcommittee lead:**
Joseph Testani, director, University Career Center

**Assessment lead:**
Scott Oates, Ph.D., director, Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

**Assessment support team:**
See Appendix VI.a.

Our QEP attempts to embody the kind of thinking and commitment it aspires to build and support at VCU.
I. Resources

The QEP will be funded to assure its success, much like our last QEP. The prior QEP started with a modest investment that was increased almost tenfold by the end of the plan. This investment reflects our VCU values, which include innovation, achievement and accountability. The advantage of being a large research university is that we have an elaborate support structure that can be utilized and focused around important priorities. Our size and robustness allows us to reallocate resources to important priorities and to bring about change through strategic investments. Our 2010 strategic plan, Quest for Distinction, aims to transform VCU into a premier public research university, as well as to preserve and enhance our consistent commitment to student success, and has been funded by investment of new revenues as well as reallocation of current resources. Likewise, our QEP aligns well with current institutional priorities and will be funded from a mix of new and reallocated resources. Most of the personnel resources are already in place as a result of our last QEP. However, there will have to be some new financial resources allocated to the advance the many initiatives outlined in Learning that Matters.
Bringing about a paradigm shift to a generalizable education mindset requires resources from across the university. The primary resource is the faculty who will be teaching the Tier II courses. We do not envision any major increase in faculty lines since these courses are already being delivered. Instead, we are proposing extensive work in course development, communication, supporting events and collaborative activities. These activities will dramatically improve the effectiveness of our Tier II offerings and the activities that will drive this change will necessitate some financial commitments. Part of our plan includes bringing faculty together in faculty learning communities. We will compensate faculty for their involvement, therefore there is a cost to this activity. Other faculty development activities, including collaborative course design for both traditional and fully online learning, as well as other learning innovation work, will also need staff support and remuneration for faculty time and effort. Event programming and execution — and the guest speakers we seek to bring to campus — will also require resources, particularly with the ambitions we have for the scope and quality of university and community engagement.

A move to generalizable education will leverage our efforts in digital engagement and online learning. We will reallocate our online revenue toward programs to engage faculty in the possibilities that online learning offers. We seek to move our faculty beyond the comfort of the past by showing them the exciting opportunities that already exist for them to improve their effectiveness as instructors and mentors. Support for online course development will be targeted to critical areas such as bottleneck courses, degree completion courses and alternatives to Tier II general electives. Students likewise will be offered enhanced advising to position them to succeed in the new and different environment that online courses offer. Finally, a robust data collection and archiving effort will seek to identify student interest and demand for online courses.

Further supporting an environment to improve the generalization of learning across the student’s university experience, we will continue to build on recent successes in a comprehensive student advising platform. This effort will require the hiring of some new personnel, mainly advisers, and some new software purchases. Again, we already have an extensive support staff for advising in the first year and much of what is being proposed seeks to build on that success and extend our professional advising into the second and third years.

The ultimate goal of a generalizable education is the addition of the skill to leverage lifelong learning to advance the learner’s chosen vocation or interests. To support this extension of the university education beyond the classroom and into our student’s future, VCU is committed to providing meaningful exposure and tools for career development. Although this will not be an easy task, we do believe that all of our students need this type of support and advising so that they can take their next step beyond their current degree with confidence. The investment in personnel will be made to support pivotal courses, coordinating experiential learning opportunities, offering more career development resources for our graduate students and, finally, tracking the outcomes of our efforts to enable our graduates to take the next step in life’s journey.

A summary of the total costs is shown in the table, “Detailed resources.” Slightly more than 50 percent of the required resources will be secured by reallocation of current revenue streams or resources. The remainder will be secured through the annual budget process as new recurring funds.
## Virginia Commonwealth University

### I. Resources

#### Detailed resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar I: Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Recurring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course trailers</td>
<td>12,250</td>
<td>12,250</td>
<td>12,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Seminar on General Education</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty development</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imbedded assessment tools</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused Inquiry Expo</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar II: Digital Engagement</th>
<th>750,000</th>
<th>750,000</th>
<th>750,000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online means of degree completion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Online course development/support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced advising and support to improve student outcomes in online courses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Data collection around student experience, demand, etc. for online courses</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar III: Academic Advising</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded professional development opportunities for advisers</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of comprehensive advising plan for all degree programs</td>
<td>1,270,000</td>
<td>1,270,000</td>
<td>1,270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of all DegreeWorks functionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of degree maps for all undergraduate majors and EAB Initiative</td>
<td>33,500</td>
<td>33,500</td>
<td>33,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded Early Alert program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded advising for transfer students</td>
<td>108,000</td>
<td>108,000</td>
<td>108,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved coordination between undergraduate and graduate student advising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional formation programs</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar IV: Career Planning and Professional Development</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration and professional prognosis courses</td>
<td>74,000</td>
<td>274,000</td>
<td>274,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential learning portal and learning-centered approach</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>67,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking: experiential learning and career outcomes</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student programs and mentoring (LEAPD expansion, etc.)</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipends for QEP director</td>
<td>13,410</td>
<td>13,410</td>
<td>13,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of QEP coordinators</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                                                   | 2,677,160 | 2,877,160 | 2,877,160 |
J. Assessment

Administration of our plan to assess *Learning that Matters* includes representation from each of the strategic pillars as well as key offices that will collect and analyze institutional and program-level data. The structure of the assessment support team (Appendix VI.a.) and the structure for the assessment plan (Appendix VI.b.) are designed to collect and analyze the evidence that student learning outcomes and program outputs are being achieved.

**Assessment support team**

Representatives from each of the four pillars comprise the assessment team. Specifically, assessment of the Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum actions will be represented by the general education coordinator; assessment of the Digital Engagement actions will be represented by the Office of Online Academic Programs’ director for Online@VCU; assessment of Academic Advising actions will be represented by an associate vice provost for academic services; and implementation of the Career Planning and Professional Development actions will be represented by the director of the University Career Center. Additional support team members include the co-directors of our QEP, *Learning that Matters*; a project manager who coordinates the overall implementation of the QEP; the vice provost for strategic enrollment management, who will coordinate the collecting of data related to retention, persistence and graduation; and the University Assessment Council, which comprises a representative from each academic dean’s office. The Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, under the auspices of the vice provost for planning and decision support, will coordinate the assessment calendar (Appendix VI.c.) to assure that
assessments are administered, data collected, and evidence analyzed and reported. The Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness will compile these reports into an annual summative report of QEP learning outcomes and program outputs.

Assessing outcomes and outputs

The assessment plan for *Learning that Matters* requires coordination among the four strategic pillars, as several of the assessment tools and processes will be shared across the pillars (Appendix VI.c.). The assessment support team is designed to facilitate this coordination.

Assessing student learning outcomes

The assessment of student learning outcomes will be the province of the first two strategic pillars: Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum and Digital Engagement. Student achievement of VCU’s seven core competencies will be directly assessed via faculty-developed rubrics of course embedded work products and ACT’s Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency tests of writing and thinking critically. Assessment data will be collected for student performance in face-to-face and online classes, thus enabling the comparison and contrast of student learning across the modalities.

Direct assessment of student learning in core/Tier II courses

Student work will be collected and assessed by faculty and outside readers using program-level rubrics. General education assessments will include two primary foci:

1. VCU’s core competencies will be assessed using Barbara Walvoord’s “embedded assessment” method (Walvoord, 2010). Rubrics for embedded assessment will be developed from the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education program (aaccu.org/value) of the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty from more than 100 universities and colleges for 16 essential competencies in undergraduate education. Faculty will use VALUE rubrics to develop program-level rubrics valid for VCU. The rubrics will be keyed to each of the seven general education competencies: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, the ability to collaborate, information fluency, quantitative literacy and an understanding of ethical and civic responsibilities. Faculty will deploy these rubrics to score key Tier II assignments, with the data captured in a Web-based assessment management system. The stored student work product will be de-identified and randomly selected for additional scoring by trained readers. Findings from the outside readers will become part of the annual orientation to VCU’s general education and core competency program.

Teams of VCU Tier II faculty, in 2012-13, modified VALUE rubrics for critical thinking and written communication (Appendices VI.d. and VI.e.). Currently, teams are completing
modification of VALUE rubrics for information fluency and quantitative literacy (Appendices VI.f. and VI.g.). The final set of teams is being assembled to modify VALUE rubrics for the understanding of ethical and civic responsibilities, for oral communication and for the ability to collaborate (Appendices VI.h., VI.i. and VI.j.).

2. Forms of Inquiry assessment instrument(s) are to be identified and/or devised by the Forms of Inquiry faculty leaders. This instrument or instruments will assess how well students can understand and apply the “inquiry skills that form the basis of a particular discipline” (Zemsky, 2013), defined as the “purposes, skills, [content] competencies, and attitudes” of that discipline, at the introductory level appropriate to a general education course. Such assessments must reflect the Tier II emphasis on the students’ experience of Forms of Inquiry as well as the artifacts students produce within and among courses to reflect their understanding of inquiry skills within disciplines and comparative inquiry skills across disciplines. Such artifacts may range from traditional essays and research projects to bold new digital expressions of deep and creative syntheses within and across disciplines.

This program for embedded assessment of student learning will be administered by a coordinated host of the Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office of Learning Innovation and Student Success.

Direct assessment of student learning: ACT’s CAAP

The Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency is a nationally normed, standardized test developed and administered by ACT. The CAAP measures student achievement levels on group and individual bases, compares VCU student achievement to national peers, documents student gains over times and can provide information to identify strengths and weaknesses in the general education program. ACT’s CAAP test has been selected for benchmarking because it can be efficiently administered in a 75-minute class and the analytical criteria of the tests aligns with VCU’s criteria for writing effectively and thinking critically.

The CAAP modules for writing and critical thinking will be administered in select general education/Tier II classes annually (writing in even years; critical thinking in odd years). The Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness will administer this assessment program.

Assessing outputs

In addition to assessing and tracking the effect Learning that Matters has on improving student learning, we assess and track a number of program outputs that, we believe, are indicators of program improvement.

At the highest, institutional level, we will track and assess our progress regarding retention, persistence and graduation rates. We plan to track each annual...
cohort — the class of first-year students who enter VCU every fall. We will collect and report the retention rates (the percentage of those students who continue at VCU from one year to the next) and the graduation rates (the percentage who graduate in four, five and six years). Most importantly, we will also report persistence, that is, measures of progress toward degree. Since, we, as others, have discovered that students who earn 30 credits their first year and each succeeding year are most likely to graduate in four years, we will track our success at increasing the percentage of students in that category as opposed to falling behind on earned credit. This will give us immediate targets (increasing percentages of each new cohort) while also giving us long-range targets (increasing the graduation rates of each cohort, which is a lagging metric).

In addition, we will evaluate the progress of three categories of transfer students: those who enter with fewer than 30 credit hours, those who enter with more than 30 credit hours and those who enter with an associate degree. As with the cohorts of first-time students, we will track the percentages of these transfer students who are retained from one year to the next, who make progress toward a degree by earning at least 30 credits per year and who ultimately graduate.

We are currently aware that many of our students earn significantly more than the required 120 credits to graduate in most academic programs. Using a survey or other assessment methods, we will follow up with such students to assess the reasons for taking “excess” credits. We then can address these circumstances if they involve institutional factors, such as unclear advising or ambiguous course or program requirements.

We will compile the above-described data for undergraduates at both the university level and at the school/college level. This will enable us to identify and address possible problems in the retention and graduation of students in specific programs and majors.

The Office of Strategic Enrollment Management, together with the Office of Planning and Decision Support, will generate the retention, graduation and other requested data on an annual basis.

Indicators of progress and satisfaction

The other large and extensive assessment strategy involves our four pillars. In Appendix VI, we have included tables that show the alignment of assessments to the strategic pillars, the actions and their outcomes. As you will note, there are a number of direct data-collection points as well as surveys of students and faculty that will assess the level of success that we achieve during the first five-year period.

Following is an inventory of the assessments proposed for supporting VCU’s Quality Enhancement Plan for Student Success.

Audit and analysis: Indicators of success in each of the four pillars

This assessment comprises an array of data collection and analysis projects primarily in VCU’s student information system, Banner, and in the advising software, DegreeWorks. Data will be collected to answer questions relevant to the effectiveness of many of the actions across the four pillars.
Below are examples of some of the questions for this annual assessment report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Digital Engagement</th>
<th>Academic Advising</th>
<th>Career Planning and Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the numbers, percentages and distributions of faculty participating in GE faculty development?</td>
<td>What are the numbers, percentages and distributions of students completing online courses? Completing online summer courses?</td>
<td>What are the retention and completion rates at program levels? At the school/college level? At the institutional level?</td>
<td>What are the numbers, percentages and cohorts of student using career planning services? Of these, what are their retention and time-to-completion rates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the numbers, percentages and distributions of faculty deploying embedded assessments?</td>
<td>What is the number of accepted online credits?</td>
<td>What are the retention and completion rates for student cohorts (transfer students, first generation, African-American, etc.)</td>
<td>What are alumni career outcomes at the six-month, five-year and 10-year intervals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are specific cohorts of students (race, socio-economic, pre-majors, transfers, etc.) performing on competency assessments?</td>
<td>What are the number, percentage and distribution of students completing online AA to online bachelor’s degrees?</td>
<td>What are the rates for students meeting degree milestones at program level? Among student cohorts? At the institutional level?</td>
<td>What are the numbers and demographics of students using the “experiential learning” portal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are specific cohorts of students (race, socio-economic, pre-majors, transfers, etc.) performing on inquiry skills and deeper learning (skills, content knowledge, knowledge transfer) assessments?</td>
<td>How many high-demand courses/GE courses are available online?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the numbers and sizes of wait lists for high-demand classes?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many students take innovative courses such as VCU-sourced or otherwise credit-earning MOOCs? What is the completion rate? What forms of participation and creative characterize this networked learning?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data will be collected to answer questions relevant to the effectiveness of many of the actions across the four pillars.
Tier II syllabus audits

Faculty teaching general education Tier II courses will submit a copy of the course syllabus for audit/review. The purpose of the audit/review is to reinforce the transparency and alignment of courses with the target general education/core goals. This biennial (years 1, 3, 5 …) assessment will account for the number and percentage of syllabi demonstrating transparency and alignment with the general education/core learning outcomes.

The audit of general education Tier II syllabi will be administered by a subcommittee of the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee in collaboration with the Office of Learning Innovation and Student Success.

Faculty and staff survey

Every two years, a locally developed and administered faculty and staff survey containing questions to gauge faculty knowledge, satisfaction and engagement in VCU’s general education/Tier II program; use of and satisfaction with VCU’s Center for Teaching Excellence programming; the rewards and benefits of online teaching and faculty members’ perceptions about the reputation of the Office of Online Academic Programs (Online@VCU); and the breadth and depth of awareness of Office of Online Academic Programs (Online@VCU) programming among VCU’s academic advisers, faculty and administrators will be administered.

The survey will be developed and administered by the Office for Planning and Decision Support, Office of Online Academic Programs (Online@VCU), and the Office of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness.

End-of-course evaluations

VCU has recently purchased an online course evaluation program (Explorance™) that makes it feasible to include course evaluations questions customized at the course level. Tier II/general education courses will have course evaluations questions specific to the targeted outcomes; online courses will have questions specific to the mode of learning; career planning courses will have evaluation questions specific to the objectives of career planning; etc.

The administration of course evaluations will be shared by the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, the Office of the Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success and the Office of Planning and Decision Support.

Advisee satisfaction survey

This locally developed and administered confidential survey seeks to know how satisfied students are with university-level advising services, with the accuracy, timeliness, and usefulness of meetings with advisers, and with the use and utility of DegreeWorks.

This biennial survey will be administered by the Office of Planning and Decision Support and the Office of the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Services.

Adviser satisfaction survey

This is also a locally developed and administered survey in counterpoint to the advisee satisfaction survey. This survey will find out how satisfied advisers are with advising programming, with elements of DegreeWorks, and with policy and procedures for advancement and professional growth.

This biennial survey will be administered by the Office of Planning and Decision Support and the Office of the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Services.

Noel-Levitz student satisfaction survey

This survey, administered to all undergraduate and graduate students triennially, has several questions regarding student satisfaction with general education. Prior findings from this survey have informed VCU identifying advising as a target for improvement.

This survey is administered by the Office of Planning and Decision Support.
Implementation evaluation

VCU will conduct formative and summative evaluations of the implementation of its quality enhancement plan (Patton, 1997). These evaluations will focus on the four pillars, the assessment plan and the resources. The evaluation effort will commence as soon as the plan is formally approved and will continue through all five years.

The formative evaluation will have four key components:

1. Monitoring the implementations of the pillars, the assessment plan, the use of resources and the timeline
2. Comparing the actual to the planned implementation of the pillars, assessments and resources
3. Surfacing and documenting the reasons for any divergence between the actual and the planned implementations
4. Producing a running historical record of the implementation of VCU’s quality enhancement plan

The formative components will inform leadership and other stakeholders along the way so that timely decisions can be made about adjustments to the timelines, resources and activities supporting the four pillars and the assessment component. In comparing the actual to the planned implementation, an eye can be kept on what is working and what is not, what challenges arise and how they can be managed, what unintended consequences emerge and how they can be addressed, what strategies need to be bolstered or abandoned. Documenting the implementation, including the decisions and adjustments made, will produce a running record that can be utilized for VCU communications and annual reporting to stakeholders and for writing its fifth-year QEP impact report for SACSCOC.

The summative evaluation will have three key components:

1. Describing what model emerged for supporting *Learning that Matters*
2. Determining whether the model, or what parts of the model, warrant continuation
3. Surfacing ideas to explore for the next quality enhancement plan

The summative component will consider the impact on student retention and success, student learning, and the environment supporting student learning. VCU will consider what institutional lessons were learned, how the quality enhancement plan evolved over time and what parts of it should be continued, recalibrated or halted. The summative evaluation, too, will provide important information for the fifth-year impact report. Further, it is anticipated that the efforts in formative and summative implementation evaluation will yield rich ideas to improve student learning at VCU and to explore for the next quality enhancement plan.


Virginia Commonwealth University. *2010 strategic plan: Quest for distinction.*


Appendix I. Summer 2012 leadership retreat

Summary of presentation
Beverly Warren, Joe Marolla and Laura Moriarty presented “Planning for SACSC Reaffirmation in the Context of Quest Implementation – Developing a Quality Enhancement Plan.” They reviewed the indicators of an exceptional QEP, the steps to developing the QEP, a definition of student success and the reasons good academic standing is important in terms of student success. They then conducted small-group exercises to determine top priorities in terms of platforms for student success.

The presenters made the following points:

• SACSCOC reaffirmation consists of the Compliance Certification and the QEP.

• The QEP will be aligned with SACSCOC principles and VCU’s strategic plan, Quest for Distinction.

• The QEP is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process, supports student achievement and the mission of the university and is a course of action directed at institutional improvement, specifically student learning.

• The QEP will be developed this year and must be implemented in five years.

• The 2004 QEP used a broad-based theme, was based on the learning-centered experience:
  • Students would learn more if they were more engaged with the material and the learning experience.
  • The more integrated the students are with the learning experience the more likely they will be committed and successful.

• The 2014 topic/theme should consider the following:
  • In a learning-centered environment student success and/or learning outcomes are the paramount objective.
  • Faculty do not function as screeners of successful and unsuccessful students but rather are facilitators for learning and success.
  • Student diversity is maintained as faculty work creatively to discover new methods for successful learners.

• The QEP should answer:
  • What is the link between student success and academic achievement?
  • Why is student success important for the institution?
  • What are platforms for success?

Results from the small-group exercise:

• Small-group discussions resulted in the identification of five platforms for student success. These are to be further developed with other VCU constituency groups:
  • Infrastructure issues: What are the inhibitors to student success based on VCU’s infrastructure (e.g., unlimited W grades, unlimited repeat courses)?
  • Advising: How can we improve advising for all students to increase retention, persistence and graduation rates?
  • Tier II courses: Recognition that we need more Tier II courses. What else needs to be considered when establishing a core curriculum that makes up a 30-hour general education experience?
  • Career planning: Career planning and data-gathering mechanisms to track VCU graduates are lacking. VCU has made some inroads with gathering such data but it is on an individual unit level. We need something more central.
  • Online learning: How do we improve VCU’s online presence in terms of new degree programs and course offerings in bottleneck courses?
Appendix II. Stakeholder input

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<td>VCU Provost Convocation</td>
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<td>Aug. 14, 2012</td>
<td>VCU SACS planning team</td>
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<td>VCU Monroe Park Campus/VCU Campus student leaders</td>
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Appendix III. Provost’s Convocation – table report out (sample)

Cathy Howard, Ph.D.
Definition of student success:
- Socialization (exposed to diversity)
- Transformative learning experience through exposure to challenges of world views, different backgrounds, life experiences, etc.
- Feeling of community
- VCU and greater community. Pride and respect for others in community
- Finding mentors/advisers
- Help to establish connections with university and community
- Transfer of knowledge and skills
- Example: Service-learning
- Interdisciplinary learning and experiences
- Making learning relevant

Platforms:
- Division of Community Engagement: to be more deliberate in students viewing Richmond region as home now and in the future

Luke Schultheis, Ph.D.
Definition of student success:
- Engaged
- Prepared: emotionally, academically, financially

Platforms:
- Identify areas
- Know resources available
- Target marketing
- Educating prospective students and families
- Strategizing aid packages

Promoting student success:
- Approachable
- Learning environments
- Responsive to emails and phones

Creative platform:
- Mandatory advising

Delores Taylor
Definition of student success:
- High GPA
- Achievement of individual goals
- Finish where they start
- Develop professional and social networks
- Network of social support
- Minimize exit trigger events

Platforms:
- Infrastructure targeting/changing/developing/academic needs beyond years 1 and 2
- Helps them connect based on their tenure
- Communication — how we communicate with students — on their terms and how they understand information
- Show empathy in the way we develop processes/procedures
- One-stop student services
- ASPIRE

Mentor

Adviser

Faculty

Tom Huff, Ph.D.
Definition of student success:
- Remain academically eligible
- Peer community
- Progress toward academic goal: advising capacity
- Learning is taking place and that it can be measured
- Experiential and academic learning
- The “whole person” is developing: the “course” is not the only unit of learning; “we’re in a post-course era”

Platforms:
- VCU Libraries
- VCU Rice Rivers Center
- Residential living/residential learning
- Faculty excellence
- Top-notch advisers
- Administrators
- Alumni engagement and networking; “giving back”
- Community engagement
- Student learning rather than faculty performance
Do well:
• Center for Teaching Excellence – engaged faculty to enhance their teaching
• VCU Libraries – purpose-built environment for academic work
• VCU Life Sciences – bring together silos to work in new ways
• Residential Life and Housing – Open to collaboration and partnership

Improve:
• Center for Teaching Excellence – reach more faculty
• VCU Libraries – more space
• VCU Life Sciences – more MCV Campus engagement; VCU Rice Rivers Center to encourage student research
• Residential Life and Housing – fix old facilities
• Faculty need clear and tangible rewards to engage in supporting students success

Seth Sykes, Ph.D.
Definition of student success:
• Critical thinkers
• Healthy/balanced
• Interpersonal/multicultural
• Flexible/adaptable
• Competencies/profession
• Coping with set-backs (persistence)
Platforms that are going well:
• Faculty/staff interactions
• “Breaking the silos”
• Building student leadership
• Identity
• Cultivate teachable moments (for students and faculty)
• Define responsibilities for faculty/staff
Platforms that need improvement:
• Provide opportunities but we do not assess how they impact students success
• Good at branding but need more work on helping students who still struggle
• Social media needs improvement
• Keep up with “changes” (students, communication)
Creative platforms:
• Motivational interviewing

Sybil Halloran
Platforms:
• Helping students determine if they're ready to attend VCU
  • Academically, financially, socially
  • A collaboration of different offices
  • Advising
Well:
• We know when to consult
• Provide leadership opportunities and social networking
Improvement:
• Helping students navigate university
• Red tape
Student success:
• Retention, graduation rates, academic support, and identifying students’ abilities and strengths
• Fostering success by helping students identify available resources
• Helping students to realize success is more than their grade and carries over outside of class

Michael Davis, Ph.D.
Definition of student success:
• Holistic: academic, social, families and career
• Ability to sustain themselves over time through careers
• Year-to-year success and how to feel after graduation; alumni participation and giving
Platforms:
• Attaching/connecting alumni w/ students
• Advising: more focus after first year
• Helping students know what is accomplished and where they are going
• Class/identity-pattern of giving program
• Pre-college (K-12) preparation/assistance
• Family support/outreach
Unknown group No. 1

Student empowerment:
• Can learn
• Tools to learn
• How to ask the questions to be able to learn
• Knowledge of expectations for achievement

Platforms:
• Faculty development around student success emphasis …
• Faculty buy-in as part of their own success …

Unknown group No. 2

Definition of student success:
• Retention/graduation rates
• Career achievement in five years
• Timeline: lifelong career development
• Networking and have developed over time; significant and supportive networking people at VCU and supportive peer group throughout life
• Identifies with VCU
• Strong work ethic
• Able to personally be able to stay at VCU

Platforms that are going well:
• Career advising: lifelong career development
• More work-study jobs on campus and in the community
• Helping students understand finances (ex: financial counseling)
• Interrelated jobs that relate to career
• Active employers
• Mock interview programs
• Replicating programs online
• Student organizations linked with employers
• Soft skill integration

Career services do well:
• Alumni – employment development
• Students are appreciative of career advising
• Make students feel part of communities
• Make strong relationships with employers

Platforms that need improvement:
• Connect with employers to connect certain majors with careers
• Let students know skills that are transferable
• Students need a success plan – life coaching
• Stronger institutional barriers

Creative platforms:
• Mentorship opportunities for career
• Development for international students – have a staff member to be a liaison
• Continually create small communities where student are integrated (Break down diversity).

Unknown group No. 3

Definition of student success:
• Very individualistic
  • Combines student and VCU effort
  • Requires communication and knowledge

Platforms:
• Academic work integrated
• In-living experience

Do well/improve:
• Project Excel
• Career and academic advising

Creative platform:
• Major/career party
• Registration/explore

Unknown group No. 4

Mentoring – Trained
• Grouped by residence and department
• Connectiveness
• Blueprint for success
  • Providing structure
  • Communication to advisers, RAs, financial aid officers
  • Using technology and social media for tracking on regular basis
• More residential halls
• Community engagement
• Portfolio of capstone experiences
• Change classroom configuration
• How to maintain second-year students
Appendix IV. VCU Monroe Park Campus/
MCV Campus student leaders meeting

Feb. 25, 2013, 5:30-6:30 p.m.,
Larrick Student Center
Meeting notes

Key phrase from Joe Marolla presentation:
• Student success is our business

Key focus identified by Joe Marolla:
• Focus on the 67 percent three-year retention rate because it is the cap on graduation rate

Key slide:
• Factors related to suppressed graduation rate

Comments from students:
• Hard to get the classes when you need them — if you get out of sequence for any reason — because the classes are not offered every fall and spring. Example given: Engineering.
• Need adviser protocols for at-risk students so that the intervention is not too late.
  • Joe indicated this will be a major emphasis. Over the next five years, the plan is to give advisers much more support, including software.
• Is there a correlate to these issues for graduate and first-professional students? Are there data available?
  • Laura indicated we have data and can share it.
• Need center for tutoring in math and science
  • Joe indicated we have 86 tutors, will have more, but have not focused on math or science.
• Need advisers to counsel on the path to take, not just the courses, because the path can provide balanced load. Example: saving some general education courses for final years.
  • Laura explained that VCU is purchasing software that will assist students in comparing different strategies.
Appendix V.a. QEP Steering Committee meeting

Feb. 28, 2013
Meeting notes

Points of clarification:
• The QEP can include platforms/strategies that apply to student success at the undergraduate through graduate level; postdoctoral level is beyond the scope.
• The measure of success (of the QEP) is not a finding of “failed” or “succeeded”; there can be aspects that, once implemented, require improvement or shoring up, etc.
• There will be data reports to guide committee work.
• The scope of the committee includes participation in the development of the entire QEP; the committee is a working committee and is advisory; the QEP will go to the BOV.

Points made by committee members:
• Learning outcomes can be simple to measure and easy to recognize.
• Employment can be considered an outcome.
• The difference between the student at arrival and the student at graduation should be measured; there are instruments available; VCU not currently doing this.
• The difference (directly above) should also consider employability — what is gained that is usable in the real world?
• Marketability should also be considered — our expectation of VCU student marketability and external forces such as the labor market.
• VCU core values must be part of this.
• Core values include diversity and diversity should be a measure of student success.
• Observation: SCHEV database is used by students and students compare VCU to other Virginia institutions’ “success”; VCU needs personal branding for the VCU experience and degrees.
• The 20th-century model won’t work for STEM education in the 21st-century world.
• Degree majors do not necessarily correlate with jobs/job titles.
• Neither the SAT score nor the high school GPA predict retention and graduation; the best indicators are an academically successful first-year experience and the number of credit hours completed.
• It will be important to separate out the effects of the introduction of University College and core curriculum from other factors; to examine transfer student data, gateway course, and the teaching environment (instructors with large classes and no support), among other influences.
• Financial aid is important factor? Recent examination shows that the group just above Pell (lower middle income) fluctuates the most. Pell participants are more likely to graduate in four years. Upper-income students appear less focused on graduating in four years. (Bed heads.)
• Important to use data but get beyond the numbers — what’s next? There are national trend data, too, that need to expand on the VCU definition of success.
• Exit data are now, for the first time, being collected from students who recently dropped out.
• Students change majors here very frequently.
• The question is, “What is driving the factors that are related to suppressed graduation rates?”
• The federal government is expecting colleges and universities to demonstrate that their investment is worth the outcome.
• Definition of success is graduating in four years.
• Advising: There’s a difference between what students are advised to do and the reality of the situation they experience. They can end up being overloaded with demanding upper-level course work.
• Access to courses is critical — do we know for sure that it is possible for a student to graduate in four years in all undergraduate programs? Curriculum
templates substantiate that it is possible. In practice, it might not be true because a student might need catch-up course work. But, the expectation should not be that a student graduates in five to six years. 
- Where students are having the opportunity to gain and practice competencies is also important.
- We’ve been trying to apply the graduate model to undergraduate education and it does not work; perhaps an undergraduate model could inform existing graduate model, too.

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**Appendix V.b. QEP Steering Committee meeting**

**March 11, 2013**

**Meeting notes**

**Joe Marolla made the following points during the meeting:**

- It is the responsibility of the steering committee to define “student success.”
- Steering committee members will represent VCU, transcend their unit identification.
- Retention and graduation are indicators of student success but leave out the student perspective, the student goal (e.g., student might intentionally come to VCU for one or two years and then transfer to another institution).
- Faculty need to shift away from the “student” being the problem.
- USF defined student success on the following:
  - Retention
  - Graduation
  - Graduation with low loan repayment obligations
  - Successful career
- VCU grew too fast, platforms and pillars cost money, but can borrow [strategies?] from some very successful programs at VCU:
  - VCU has heavy reliance on adjuncts and collaterals.
  - In summary, success at VCU can be considered from multiple aspects:
  - Academic success
  - Soft skill success
  - “Whole person” success (e.g., identity formation, diversity exposure)
  - Career potential
  - Integration of all of the above

**Committee member requests:**

- Would be helpful to have a summary of what’s been learned from the other presentations
- Would be helpful to have summary of early indicators in research:
  - AACU
  - Lumina Foundation
  - “Degree Qualification Profile”
- Additional data breakouts are needed (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, race)
- Analysis of transfer student data

**Committee member ideas:**

- American Federation of Teachers success:
  - Mastery of a certain level of content
  - Broad set of intellectual abilities improved upon
  - Application/use of both the content mastery and intellectual abilities
- Steps to getting the college degree:
  - Competencies and beliefs (about self and experience) in first, second, third and fourth years
• Student and portfolio:
  • Regardless of when they leave VCU (e.g., transfer, graduate), what is in the student portfolio besides competencies and skills?
  • Measure debt load, whether job secured is better than would have been without the VCU degree, alumni connection and giving, sense of readiness
  • Focus on the value-added, not the “quality” at entry to VCU
  • Think in terms of two tiers — absolute (e.g., retention) and growth
  • Broaden student awareness of opportunities
  • Don’t forget about graduate students
  • Think in terms of employers that want VCU graduates because they know they’ll get “X” — what’s the “X”?
    • One “X” is connection to the community, another “X” is diversity
• Put the resources where the most students are — expand the UC concept — and provide integrated experiences
• Don’t assume the students are getting the content/competency
• Get competency tests to evaluate and look at other dimensions to be measured
  • Issue is finding a competency test that measures adequately (measures what?)
• Student concerns are quality of advising, consistency across advising materials and advisers, and availability of courses
• A strategy could be a roadmap to graduation and guaranteed course availability for all students

Additional follow-up:
Additional materials will be posted to the Blackboard site; Joe’s definition of success will be posted for Blackboard discussion.

Appendix V.c. QEP Steering Committee meeting

March 27, 2013
Meeting notes

Laura Moriarty introduced Jeff South as the QEP co-director.

Juanita Sharpe summarized the input on definitions of student success and on the barriers to student success, to date.

Laura Moriarty explained that the committee membership will divide into teams to examine and refine the definition of student success at VCU and the pillars/platforms to support it.

Joe Marolla suggested that the definition of student success must link to student outcomes. For SACS, must focus on the undergraduate population, but for VCU can include graduate level.

Joe Marolla provided the following potential pillars/platforms for consideration — a “loose framework” to see things related to student success:

• Advising
  • VCU has a long way to go, remains challenged in certain areas
• Career planning and coordination
  • Systemwide, not only Career Center
  • Students graduate “toward” something
• Core curriculum/general education
  • Clear link in the persistence literature; currently struggling at Tier II level
• Online education
  • Literature indicates universities like VCU will disappear if online not incorporated meaningfully; strategic task force in place; federal government enthusiastic; accrediting agencies have not vetted
Organizational systems and processes
  • Includes infrastructure, policy, degree, curricular issues
The conceptual organization of the barriers (pillar/platforms) was discussed as were the labels of the pillars/platforms.

Points raised by committee members:
• In defining student success, remember to include cultural competencies and also keep in mind that in focusing on competencies, might overlook what VCU should be transmitting but is not
• Organizational systems and processes seem to get to the minimums of retention and graduation
• Should “success” be defined before the pillars/platforms are selected?
• Resource issue must be huge — aspects of optimization are: quality and quantity, human infrastructure, and facility infrastructure
• Where do faculty and academics fit into the pillars?
• Where do we incorporate the interdisciplinary? Core?
• Some confusion between core and general education
• What about opportunities for students to implement what they are learning along the way?
  • Redefine the capstone experience?
• Why are students leaving — three buckets:
  • Line up the ducks and the students will make it through to graduation
  • Students are experiencing difficulties not related to VCU — financial hardships, lack of preparation
  • Excellent students who need to be retained — what’s the hook to keep them
• Students are not aware of all the opportunities that are available to them at VCU
• Biggest bucket is the students who are underperforming academically
• Need alignment of student (strengths) with something that we offer
• The buckets (metaphorical buckets students are in) cut across all topicspillars
• Do we know what buckets the students are in?
• Do we know how well students have achieved core competencies?

Next steps:
• The committee will regroup during the second week of April to revisit and finalize the list of pillars/platforms and to sign-up for the teams.
Appendix VI.a. Administrative support structure for QEP assessment

Coordination office: Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

QEP co-directors

QEP project manager

Coordinating office:
Vice provost, planning and decision support

Coordinator, Tier II of the VCU Core Curriculum
Pillar I

University Assessment Council

Vice provost, learning innovations; director, online academic programs
Pillar II

Associate vice provost, academic services
Pillar III

Director, University Career Center
Pillar IV

Vice provost, strategic enrollment management

Vice provost, strategic enrollment management; director, online academic programs
Pillar II

Vice provost, learning innovations; director, online academic programs
Pillar II

Vice provost, learning innovations; director, online academic programs
Pillar II

Vice provost, learning innovations; director, online academic programs
Pillar II

Vice provost, planning and decision support

Vice provost, planning and decision support
Appendix VI.b. VCU QEP assessment plan

Learning that Matters

University student learning outcomes

VALUE rubrics
- Oral communication
- Writing proficiency
- Critical thinking
- Collaborative work
- Information fluency
- Quantitative literacy
- Ethical and social responsibility

University outputs
- Retention
- Persistence
- Graduation
# Appendix VI.c. QEP assessment tools

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</table>

* See appendices VI.d. through VI.j.
Appendix VI.d. VCU Core Curriculum program rubric – thinking critically (modified VALUE rubric)

A score of zero may be assigned to any work that does not meet the novice performance level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing of question or problem at issue</th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question or problem is appropriately identified but is poorly framed.</td>
<td>Question or problem is appropriately identified and basically framed.</td>
<td>Question or problem is appropriately identified and comprehensively framed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of information (evidence, data, observations)</th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information is used but lacks analysis and/or synthesis. Information is taken as fact, without question or evaluation.</td>
<td>Information is used to develop a basic analysis and/or synthesis. Evaluation of information is inconsistent: some information is taken as fact while other information is subject to questioning.</td>
<td>Information is used to develop a comprehensive analysis and/or synthesis; information is consistently evaluated and subject to thorough questioning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification of assumptions/biases</th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student demonstrates an emerging ability to question assumptions; begins to identify biases and contexts.</td>
<td>Demonstrates an ability to question some assumptions and biases; identifies several relevant contexts (may be more aware of others’ assumptions and biases than one’s own).</td>
<td>Student demonstrates an ability to identify and question one’s own and other’s assumptions and effectively evaluates both biases and contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development of perspectives/thesis/hypotheses</th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A limited perspective, thesis or hypothesis is stated.</td>
<td>The perspective, thesis or hypothesis acknowledges complexity of an issue, but lacks sophistication.</td>
<td>The perspective, thesis or hypothesis explores the complexities of an issue effectively and comprehensively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertion of interpretations/implications/conclusions</th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions/interpretations are logical, but undersupported or inconsistently tied to evidence; evaluation of evidence and alternative outcomes are neglected.</td>
<td>Conclusions/interpretations are logical, based on a cursory evaluation of evidence. However, alternative outcomes are oversimplified or understated.</td>
<td>Conclusions/interpretations are logical and reflect a comprehensive evaluation of evidence. Alternative outcomes are thoroughly explored and evaluated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VI.e. VCU Core Curriculum program rubric – writing proficiency (modified VALUE rubric)

*A score of zero may be assigned to any work that does not meet the novice performance level.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Novice performance (1)</th>
<th>Intermediate performance (2)</th>
<th>Baccalaureate performance (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context, audience and purpose</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates basic awareness of context and purpose for writing; writing generally meets reader needs but may lack consistent follow through</td>
<td>Demonstrates a consistent awareness of context and purpose for writing; reader needs are met throughout most elements of the work</td>
<td>Demonstrates a mature understanding of context, audience and purpose; writing is intentionally responsive to readers throughout all elements of the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Idea development</strong></td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and support simple ideas</td>
<td>Uses specific, relevant content to explore ideas; develops assertions with appropriate evidence and reasoning</td>
<td>Uses relevant and compelling content to illustrate understanding of ideas; shows skill in managing evidence and reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content organization</strong></td>
<td>Uses a system for basic organization and presentation</td>
<td>Uses a consistent system for organization; follows assignment expectations in order to manage basic organization, content and presentation</td>
<td>Demonstrates attention to multiple aspects of organization including disciplinary expectations regarding organization, presentation of content, formatting and stylistic choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics and usage</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates emerging control over usage and mechanics; may exhibit patterns of error that do not interfere with meaning</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent control over usage and mechanics</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent control over usage and mechanics; uses language skillfully and fluently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success. In July 2013, there was a correction to Dimension 3: Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically.

Definition

The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.

Adopted from the National Forum on Information Literacy

Framing Language

This rubric is recommended for use evaluating a collection of work, rather than a single work sample in order to fully gauge students’ information skills. Ideally, a collection of work would contain a wide variety of different types of work and might include: research papers, editorials, speeches, grant proposals, marketing or business plans, PowerPoint presentations, posters, literature reviews, position papers, and argument critiques to name a few. In addition, a description of the assignments with the instructions that initiated the student work would be vital in providing the complete context for the work. Although a student’s final work must stand on its own, evidence of a student’s research and information gathering processes, such as a research journal/diary, could provide further demonstration of a student’s information proficiency and for some criteria on this rubric would be required.
## INFORMATION LITERACY VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

### Definition

The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand. - The National Forum on Information Literacy

**Evaluation:**

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

**Benchmark:**

Has difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis. Has difficulty determining key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected do not relate to concepts or answer research question.

**Milestones:**

Has difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis incompletely (parts are missing, remains too broad or too narrow, etc.). Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected partially relate to concepts or answer research question.

**Capstone:**

Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis. Effectively determines key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts or answer research question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Capstone</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine the Extent of Information Needed</td>
<td>Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis. Effectively determines key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts or answer research question.</td>
<td>Defines the scope of the research question or thesis incompletely. Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected relate to concepts or answer research question.</td>
<td>Has difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis. Has difficulty determining key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected do not relate to concepts or answer research question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access the Needed Information</td>
<td>Accesses information using effective, well-designed search strategies and some relevant information sources. Demonstrates ability to refine search.</td>
<td>Accesses information using variety of search strategies and some relevant information sources.</td>
<td>Accesses information using simple search strategies, retrieves information from limited and similar sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically*</td>
<td>Chooses a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. Selects sources after considering the importance (to the researched topic) of the multiple criteria used (such as relevance to the researched topic, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view).</td>
<td>Chooses a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. Selects sources using multiple criteria (such as relevance to the research question, currency, and authority).</td>
<td>Chooses a few information sources. Selects sources using limited criteria (such as relevance to the research question).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose</td>
<td>Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.</td>
<td>Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources. Intended purpose is achieved.</td>
<td>Communicates information from sources. The information is fragmented and/or used inappropriately (misquoted, taken out of context, or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.), so the intended purpose is not achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and Use Information Ethically and Legally</td>
<td>Students use correctly all of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context; distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrate a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.</td>
<td>Students use correctly three of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context; distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.</td>
<td>Students use correctly all of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context; distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrate a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Corrected Dimension 3: Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically in July 2013
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

**Definition**

Quantitative Literacy (QL) – also known as Numeracy or Quantitative Reasoning (QR) – is a "habit of mind," competency, and comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QL skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate).

**Quantitative Literacy Across the Disciplines**

Current trends in general education reform demonstrate that faculty are recognizing the steadily growing importance of Quantitative Literacy (QL) in an increasingly quantitative and data-dense world. AAC&U’s recent survey showed that concerns about QL skills are shared by employers, who recognize that many of today’s students will need a wide range of high level quantitative skills to complete their work responsibilities. Virtually all of today’s students, regardless of career choice, will need basic QL skills such as the ability to draw information from charts, graphs, and geometric figures, and the ability to accurately complete straightforward estimations and calculations.

Preliminary efforts to find student work products which demonstrate QL skills proved a challenge in this rubric creation process. It’s possible to find pages of mathematical problems, but what those problem sets don’t demonstrate is whether the student was able to think about and understand the meaning of her work. It’s possible to find research papers that include quantitative information, but those papers often don’t provide evidence that allows the evaluator to see how much of the thinking was done by the original source (often carefully cited in the paper) and how much was done by the student herself, or whether conclusions drawn from analysis of the source material are even accurate.

Given widespread agreement about the importance of QL, it becomes incumbent on faculty to develop new kinds of assignments which give students substantive, contextualized experience in using such skills as analyzing quantitative information, representing quantitative information in appropriate forms, completing calculations to answer meaningful questions, making judgments based on quantitative data and communicating the results of that work for various purposes and audiences. As students gain experience with those skills, faculty must develop assignments that require students to create work products which reveal their thought processes and demonstrate the range of their QL skills.

This rubric provides for faculty a definition for QL and a rubric describing four levels of QL achievement which might be observed in work products within work samples or collections of work. Members of AAC&U’s rubric development team for QL hope that these materials will aid in the assessment of QL – but, equally important, we hope that they will help institutions and individuals in the effort to more thoroughly embed QL across the curriculum of colleges and universities.

**Framing Language**

This rubric has been designed for the evaluation of work that addresses quantitative literacy (QL) in a substantive way. QL is not just computation, not just the citing of someone else’s data. QL is a habit of mind, a way of thinking about the world that relies on data and on the mathematical analysis of data to make connections and draw conclusions. Teaching QL requires us to design assignments that address authentic, data-based problems. Such assignments may call for the traditional written paper, but we can imagine other alternatives: a video of a PowerPoint presentation, perhaps, or a well designed series of web pages. In any case, a successful demonstration of QL will place the mathematical work in the context of a full and robust discussion of the underlying issues addressed by the assignment.

Finally, QL skills can be applied to a wide array of problems of varying difficulty, confounding the use of this rubric. For example, the same student might demonstrate high levels of QL achievement when working on a simplistic problem and low levels of QL achievement when working on a very complex problem. Thus, to accurately assess a student’s QL achievement it may be necessary to measure QL achievement within the context of problem complexity, much as is done in diving competitions where two scores are given, one for the difficulty of the dive, and the other for the skill in accomplishing the dive. In this context, that would mean giving one score for the complexity of the problem and another score for the QL achievement in solving the problem.
QUANTITATIVE LITERACY VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

Definition
Quantitative Literacy (QL) – also known as Numeracy or Quantitative Reasoning (QR) – is a “habit of mind,” competency, and comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QL skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of forms (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate).

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Capstone</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to explain information presented in mathematical forms (e.g., equations, graphs, diagrams, tables, words)</td>
<td>Provides accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms. Makes appropriate inferences based on that information. For example, accurately explains the trend data shown in a graph, makes reasonable predictions regarding what the data suggest about future events.</td>
<td>Provides somewhat accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms, but occasionally makes minor errors related to computations or units. For instance, accurately explains trend data shown in a graph, but may miscalculate the slope of the trend line.</td>
<td>Attempts to explain information presented in mathematical forms, but draws incorrect conclusions about what the information means. For example, attempts to explain the trend data shown in a graph, but will frequently misinterpret the nature of that trend, perhaps by including positive and negative trends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Skillfully converts relevant information into an insightful mathematical portrayal in a way that contributes to a further or deeper understanding.</td>
<td>Competently converts relevant information into an appropriate and desired mathematical portrayal.</td>
<td>Completes conversion of information but resulting mathematical portrayal is only partially appropriate or accurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculation</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for deep and thoughtful judgments, drawing insightful, carefully qualified conclusions from this work.</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for competent judgments, drawing reasonable and appropriately qualified conclusions from this work.</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for workmanlike (without inspiration or nuance, ordinary) judgments, drawing plausible conclusions from this work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application / Analysis</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for deep and thoughtful judgments, drawing insightful, carefully qualified conclusions from this work.</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for competent judgments, drawing reasonable and appropriately qualified conclusions from this work.</td>
<td>Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for tentative, basic judgments, although is hesitant or uncertain about drawing conclusions from this work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>Explicitly describes assumptions and provides compelling rationale for why each assumption is appropriate. Shows awareness that confidence in final conclusions is limited by the accuracy of the assumptions.</td>
<td>Explicitly describes assumptions and provides compelling rationale for why assumptions are appropriate.</td>
<td>Attempts to describe assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Uses quantitative information in connection with the argument or purpose of the work, presents it in an effective format, and explicates it with consistently high quality.</td>
<td>Uses quantitative information in connection with the argument or purpose of the work, although data may be presented in a less than completely effective format or some parts of the explication may be uneven.</td>
<td>Uses quantitative information, but does not effectively connect it to the argument or purpose of the work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Cell 1:** Complete conversion of information into an appropriate and desired mathematical portrayal, resulting in a mathematical portrayal that contributes to a further or deeper understanding.
- **Cell 2:** Completes conversion of information into an insightful mathematical portrayal, drawing plausible conclusions from this work.
- **Cell 3:** Completes conversion of information into an appropriate and desired mathematical portrayal, but may occasionally make minor errors related to computations or units.
- **Cell 4:** Skillfully converts relevant information into an insightful mathematical portrayal, drawing insightful, carefully qualified conclusions from this work.
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

**Definition**

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

**Framing Language**

This rubric is intended to help faculty evaluate work samples and collections of work that demonstrate student learning about ethics. Although the goal of a liberal education should be to help students turn what they've learned in the classroom into action, pragmatically it would be difficult, if not impossible, to judge whether or not students would act ethically when faced with real ethical situations. What can be evaluated using a rubric is whether students have the intellectual tools to make ethical choices.

The rubric focuses on five elements: Ethical Self Awareness, Ethical Issue Recognition, Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts, Application of Ethical Principles, and Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts. Students' Ethical Self Identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues. Presumably, they will choose ethical actions when faced with ethical issues.

**Glossary**

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- **Core Beliefs**: Those fundamental principles that consciously or unconsciously influence one's ethical conduct and ethical thinking. Even when unacknowledged, core beliefs shape one's responses. Core beliefs can reflect one's environment, religion, culture or training. A person may or may not choose to act on their core beliefs.
- **Ethical Perspectives/Concepts**: The different theoretical means through which ethical issues are analyzed, such as ethical theories (e.g., utilitarian, natural law, virtue) or ethical concepts (e.g., rights, justice, duty).
- **Complex, multi-layered (gray) context**: The sub-parts or situational conditions of a scenario that bring two or more ethical dilemmas (issues) into the mix/problem/context for student's identification.
- **Cross-relationships among the issues**: Obvious or subtle connections between/among the sub-parts or situational conditions of the issues present in a scenario (e.g., relationship of production of corn as part of climate change issue).
# Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric

**Definition**

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self-identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (all one level) performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capstone</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical Self-Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Student discusses in detail/analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs and discussion has greater depth and clarity.</td>
<td>Student states both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</strong></td>
<td>Student names the theory or theories, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and accurately explains the details of the theory or theories used.</td>
<td>Student can name the major theory or theories she/he uses, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and attempts to explain the details of the theory or theories used, but has some inaccuracies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical Issue Recognition</strong></td>
<td>Student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues.</td>
<td>Student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</strong></td>
<td>Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application.</td>
<td>Student can independently (to a new example) apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</strong></td>
<td>Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of and can reasonably defend against the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/concepts, and the student's defense is adequate and effective.</td>
<td>Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of, and respond to the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/concepts, but the student's response is inadequate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, please contact value@aacu.org.
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Definition

Oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.

Framing Language

Oral communication takes many forms. This rubric is specifically designed to evaluate oral presentations of a single speaker at a time and is best applied to live or video-recorded presentations. For panel presentations or group presentations, it is recommended that each speaker be evaluated separately. This rubric best applies to presentations of sufficient length such that a central message is conveyed, supported by one or more forms of supporting materials and includes a purposeful organization. An oral answer to a single question not designed to be structured into a presentation does not readily apply to this rubric.

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- **Central message**: The main point/thesis/"bottom line"/"take-away" of a presentation. A clear central message is easy to identify; a compelling central message is also vivid and memorable.
- **Delivery techniques**: Posture, gestures, eye contact, and use of the voice. Delivery techniques enhance the effectiveness of the presentation when the speaker stands and moves with authority, looks more often at the audience than at his/her speaking materials/notes, uses the voice expressively, and uses few vocal fillers ("um," "uh," "like," "you know," etc.).
- **Language**: Vocabulary, terminology, and sentence structure. Language that supports the effectiveness of a presentation is appropriate to the topic and audience, grammatical, clear, and free from bias. Language that enhances the effectiveness of a presentation is also vivid, imaginative, and expressive.
- **Organization**: The grouping and sequencing of ideas and supporting material in a presentation. An organizational pattern that supports the effectiveness of a presentation typically includes an introduction, one or more identifiable sections in the body of the speech, and a conclusion. An organizational pattern that enhances the effectiveness of the presentation reflects a purposeful choice among possible alternatives, such as a chronological pattern, a problem-solution pattern, an analysis-of-parts pattern, etc., that makes the content of the presentation easier to follow and more likely to accomplish its purpose.
- **Supporting material**: Explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities, and other kinds of information or analysis that supports the principal ideas of the presentation. Supporting material is generally credible when it is relevant and derived from reliable and appropriate sources. Supporting material is highly credible when it is also vivid and varied across the types listed above (e.g., a mix of examples, statistics, and references to authorities). Supporting material may also serve the purpose of establishing the speaker's credibility. For example, in presenting a creative work such as a dramatic reading of Shakespeare, supporting evidence may not advance the ideas of Shakespeare, but rather serve to establish the speaker as a credible Shakespearean actor.
## ORAL COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

**Definition**

Oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners’ attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.

**Benchmark**

1. Oral communication is a delivered, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change in the listeners’ attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.

2. Oral communication is a delivered, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change in the listeners’ attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. The presentation is clear and consistently observable within the presentation.

3. Oral communication is a delivered, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change in the listeners’ attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. The presentation is intermittently observable within the presentation.

4. Oral communication is a delivered, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change in the listeners’ attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. The presentation is not observable within the presentation.

### Milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Milestone 1</th>
<th>Milestone 2</th>
<th>Milestone 3</th>
<th>Milestone 4</th>
<th>Milestone 5</th>
<th>Milestone 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is not observable within the presentation.</td>
<td>Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is clearly and consistently observable within the presentation.</td>
<td>Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is intermittently observable within the presentation.</td>
<td>Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is not observable within the presentation.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) are appropriate to the presentation.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) are not appropriate to the presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Language choices are imaginative, memorable, and compelling, and enhance the effectiveness of the presentation.</td>
<td>Language choices are thoughtful and generally support the effectiveness of the presentation.</td>
<td>Language choices are mundane and commonplace and partially support the effectiveness of the presentation.</td>
<td>Language choices are unclear and minimally support the effectiveness of the presentation.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) do not make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation compelling, and speaker appears polished and confident.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation interesting, and speaker appears comfortable.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation understandable, and speaker appears tentative.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, and vocal expressiveness) detract from the understandability of the presentation, and speaker appears uncomfortable.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) support the presentation and establishes the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
<td>Supporting materials (explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities) do not support the presentation or establish the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.</td>
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</table>

### Supporting Material

- A variety of types of supporting materials (definitions, explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations, from relevant authorities) make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.
- Supporting materials (definitions, explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations, from relevant authorities) make reference to information or analysis that minimally supports the presentation or establishes the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.
- Supporting materials (definitions, explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations, from relevant authorities) do not make reference to information or analysis that supports the presentation or establish the presenter’s credibility/authority on the topic.

### Central Message

- Central message is clearly and consistently stated, appropriate to the supporting material, and is not memorable.
- Central message is clearly and consistently stated, appropriate to the supporting material, and is memorable.
- Central message is clearly and consistently stated, appropriate to the supporting material, but is not often repeated and is not memorable.
- Central message can be deduced, but is not explicitly stated in the presentation.
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

**Definition**

Teamwork is behaviors under the control of individual team members (effort they put into team tasks, their manner of interacting with others on team, and the quantity and quality of contributions they make to team discussions).

**Framing Language**

Students participate on many different teams, in many different settings. For example, a given student may work on separate teams to complete a lab assignment, give an oral presentation, or complete a community service project. Furthermore, the people the student works with are likely to be different in each of these different teams. As a result, it is assumed that a work sample or collection of work that demonstrates a student’s teamwork skills could include a diverse range of inputs. This rubric is designed to function across all of these different settings.

Two characteristics define the ways in which this rubric is to be used. First, the rubric is meant to assess the teamwork of an individual student, not the team as a whole. Therefore, it is possible for a student to receive high ratings, even if the team as a whole is rather flawed. Similarly, a student could receive low ratings, even if the team as a whole works fairly well. Second, this rubric is designed to measure the quality of a process, rather than the quality of an end product. As a result, work samples or collections of work will need to include some evidence of the individual’s interactions within the team. The final product of the team’s work (e.g., a written lab report) is insufficient, as it does not provide insight into the functioning of the team.

It is recommended that work samples or collections of work for this outcome come from one (or more) of the following three sources: (1) students’ own reflections about their contribution to a team’s functioning; (2) evaluation or feedback from fellow team members about students’ contribution to the team’s functioning; or (3) the evaluation of an outside observer regarding students’ contributions to a team’s functioning. These three sources differ considerably in the resource demands they place on an institution. It is recommended that institutions using this rubric consider carefully the resources they are able to allocate to the assessment of teamwork and choose a means of compiling work samples or collections of work that best suits their priorities, needs, and abilities.
# Teamwork VALUE Rubric

**Definition**

Teamwork is behaviors under the control of individual team members (effort they put into team tasks, their manner of interacting with others on team, and the quantity and quality of contributions they make to team discussions.)

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributes to Team Meetings</th>
<th>Capstone 4</th>
<th>Milestones 3</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.</td>
<td>Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.</td>
<td>Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.</td>
<td>Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.</td>
<td>Shares ideas but does not advance the work of the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by both constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others as well as noticing when someone is not participating and inviting them to engage.</td>
<td>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others.</td>
<td>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others.</td>
<td>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others.</td>
<td>Engages team members by taking turns and listening to others without interrupting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances the project.</td>
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<td>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished advances the project.</td>
<td>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</td>
<td>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Supports a constructive team climate by doing any one of the following:  
  - Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.  
  - Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.  
  - Motivates teammates by expressing confidence about the importance of the task and the team's ability to accomplish it.  
  - Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members. | Supports a constructive team climate by doing any two of the following:  
  - Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.  
  - Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.  
  - Motivates teammates by expressing confidence about the importance of the task and the team's ability to accomplish it.  
  - Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members. | Supports a constructive team climate by doing any three of the following:  
  - Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.  
  - Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.  
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  - Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.  
  - Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.  
  - Motivates teammates by expressing confidence about the importance of the task and the team's ability to accomplish it.  
  - Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members. |
| Responds to Conflict | Addresses destructive conflict directly and constructively, helping to manage/resolve it in a way that strengthens overall team cohesiveness and future effectiveness. | Identifies and acknowledges conflict and stays engaged with it. | Redirecting focus toward common ground, toward task at hand (away from conflict). | Passively accepts alternate viewpoints/ideas/opinions. |