

## **VCU Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion 2024 Annual Report**

## 2024 Accomplishments

**Goal 1: Access & Success. Ensure equal access in all student and employee programs and practices, reflecting a culture where success is supported and everyone matters and belongs. (modified from 2024 submission)**

### **Objective 1: Increase educational access and support student success**

- In Spring 2024, overall enrollment increased by 1.1% (+291) over Spring 2023. VCU's enrollment strategy is multi-faceted to attract a variety of learners at different life and career stages. VCU has also intentionally and carefully focused on affordability using financial aid optimization and cost-effective program structures. For students from families earning **less than \$110,000**, net price has declined by **20.5%**.
- VCU Libraries has implemented wide-reaching curricular affordability strategies that have resulted in more than \$12 million in textbook cost avoidance for over 135,000 students impacted since 2016.
- In 2024, VCU received a record 22,552 first-year applications – a 12% increase YOY
- 91% of undergraduate degree programs and concentrations have at least one transformative learning experience (ex. internships) for graduation.
  - **Internship Funding Program (IFP)** removes financial barriers for undergraduate students pursuing unpaid or underpaid internships. By providing direct financial support, IFP empowers students to engage in meaningful professional experiences that enhance their career trajectories. In its inaugural year, the program supported 51 students; by Summer 2024, expanded resources enabled over 88 students to benefit from this critical funding — significantly increasing access to career-building opportunities.
- The introduction of **interdisciplinary curricula in artificial intelligence and mixed and immersive realities** prepares students to thrive in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. These innovations — ranging from general education to advanced degrees — ensure that every VCU student, regardless of major, can become literate in the tools and ethics of the [AI era](#).
- VCU is investing in microcredentials and non-credit programming to create pathways for current and prospective students. The institution has created 29 credit-inclusive microcredentials and issued 590 digital badges.
- Program productivity analysis, the introduction of interdisciplinary minors and degrees, and the [“Every Ram’s a Researcher”](#) campaign ensure that our students graduate with the [skills and knowledge](#) needed to excel in their careers. The [LED Studio](#) for online course leadership has empowered educators and learners to create innovative, student-centered, online learning experiences.
- VCU was selected as one of only eight institutions nationwide to participate in the **Work+ initiative** at Arizona State University, an ambitious effort to reimagine the student employment experience on campus. With a focus on integrating career readiness into campus work opportunities, VCU began piloting this initiative in Fall 2023, collaborating with institutions across the country to develop new strategies that enhance the educational and professional value of student employment. Key achievements include:
  - Hosted VCU's first in-person student supervisor training for 85 individuals in July 2024; 96% found participating in the training to be a valuable professional development opportunity and 93% stated that they are interested in participating in future working learner supervisor professional development opportunities
  - Streamlined student positions into one job posting platform (Handshake) resulting in easier access and visibility of student positions at VCU
  - From 65 applications, 50 supervisors/mentors in 44 departments were selected to participate in the Transforming Federal Work Study program to transform on-campus FWS roles into career-building internships that include mentoring and reflection requirements
  - Launched the [RamsAtWork website](#) to support and enhance the VCU working learner journey for both student employees and student supervisors.
- VCU was awarded the 2024 Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) Employer of the Year award. DCDT is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), an international professional organization that helps shape policy and practices that impact career development and transition services for youth with disabilities. The award, presented at the DCDT international conference, is given to a business committed to promoting employment opportunities for students with disabilities.
- VCU partnered with the National Institute of Student Success (NISS) which resulted in recommendations to boost retention and graduation rates by systematically using data to deliver timely, coordinated and personalized support to students at scale. An implementation steering committee was launched in Summer 2024. Examples of the committee's significant work include the development and action plans for 4 primary initiatives:
  - Leverage academic outcome data, specifically targeting a reduction in DFWs
  - Strengthen the financial support of students - reducing the number of students withdrawing or pausing their education due to financial considerations
  - Strengthen academic advising systems
  - Improve coordination of student communications
- Received a \$200k NISS Quality of Care grant recognizing VCU advising expertise and providing additional development as national leaders

**Objective 2: Drive equal opportunity for faculty success**

- VCU launched an annual faculty hiring plan process with each college and school dean to align strategic academic priorities and develop the infrastructure for hiring faculty in thematic areas to form [Convergence Labs](#). This process enhances academic excellence and enables VCU to be strategic and quickly respond to emerging societal needs.
- We continue to drive excellence through faculty awards like [NIRA](#), the inaugural Excellence in Pedagogical Innovation (EPIA) award, and the introduction of the [Expanding Networks of Expert Scholars](#) award. The utilization of academic analytics also contributes to a culture of excellence and support for our faculty.
- Investments in faculty hiring support enrollment growth and improve student-faculty ratios, particularly in general academic instruction.

**Objective 3: Drive equal opportunity for staff success**

- VCU's staff senate and Human Resources office host an annual career development conference with multiple presenters (primarily from VCU) presenting over 30 sessions, drawing over 1000 employee participants from both VCU and VCU Health.
- The central HR team participates in veteran recruitment fairs and fosters strong relationships with organizations supporting employment of persons with disabilities.
- Our recalibrated staff performance rating scale provides the foundation for performance based merit increases.
- VCU provides significant support for staff career development, with external recognition of our quality programming demonstrated by requests to speak on the topic by Richmond SHRM, Richmond Compensation Association, and Peninsula SHRM (Hampton Roads).
- We have reduced staff turnover from 13.5% in CY 2023 to 12% in CY 2024. We have intentionally targeted reductions in turnover in key strategic areas including academic advisors and research staff.
- Our staff senate awards and presidential awards for professional and administrative distinction recognize excellence among staff members.

**Goal 2: Welcoming & Respectful Culture. Nurture an institutional climate that is caring, welcoming, respectful and aligned with our commitment to community engagement. (modified from 2024 submission)****Objective 1: Support a culture of care and respect**

- The [VCU Cares](#) initiative demonstrates our commitment to understanding and supporting our students.
- Interim policies for *Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy* and *Concealment of Identity* focus on keeping our campus safe and welcoming to all while protecting free speech.
- A workgroup focused on strengthening organizational climate and respect for students, staff and faculty accomplished the following:
  - A new website to enhance transparency and access to resources, including reporting resources
  - Creation of a campus-wide training and event inventory
  - A re-draft of institutional values (still under consideration)
- We provide many mental health and well-being resources including:
  - Multiple websites that provide mental health and well-being resources, including [RamStrong](#) and HR's [Work/Life](#) page
  - Faculty and staff discounts
  - TimelyCare, a 24/7 mental health service line that provides real time support to faculty, staff, and students
  - Flu Clinics and Employee Health clinics
  - Critical Incident Response guidelines for faculty and staff
  - An online resource called "Navigating Uncertainty: Resources on Resilience"
  - Student and employee health services
- VCU administers twice annual pulse surveys to monitor staff's sense of belonging, support, respect, and appreciation.

**Objective 2: Connect with our community to improve student access to internship opportunities and improve the lives of those in the communities we serve**

- VCU has strengthened relationships with the business community, particularly VA Chamber, Chamber RVA, NVTC, VEDP and GRP
  - Focus is student internships and faculty partnerships, specifically identifying new funding sources for internships, as well as raising VCU's profile among the leading economic development and business organizations in the state and region.
  - Working with SCHEV, VCU applied for and received \$100K through the Institutional Student Support Grant and an additional \$100K Internship Data Collection Grant in November 2024.
- VCU has submitted its application for Carnegie Classification for [Community Engagement](#) reflecting our dedication to fostering meaningful connections with our community.
  - Growing student service learning opportunities as part of a holistic community engagement strategy aligns with our Carnegie Community Engaged classification.
- VCU generates more than \$10B of economic impact to the Virginia economy.

- Our designation as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) university from APLU, allows VCU to join an elite group of selected universities recognized for their successes in innovation and economic engagement
- VCU's Strategic Research Plan (currently under review, June 2025) supports our goal of improving lives.
- VCU's clinical and translational research promotes prevention and treatment of diseases that matter for Virginians.
- We have enhanced our longstanding high school dual enrollment efforts with Henrico County and Maggie L. Walker Governor's School. Potential expansion into Richmond City Public Schools is being examined. We maintain an open line of communication with Reynolds Community College to ensure all dual enrollment efforts are complementary rather than competitive

**Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure and Training: Implement an organizational infrastructure to support, sustain and scale success initiatives.**

**Objective 1: Ensure employee practices are open to all and drive excellence**

- VCU's Executive Search team plays a pivotal role in supporting executive-level recruitments and enhancing the quality of candidate pools. Their success is driven by dedicated recruiting professionals who create strong talent pathways to attract high-caliber candidates. Since its inception, this team has provided strategic and operational value by identifying and securing leaders who drive the institution's success.
- VCU utilizes a centralized advertising plan ensuring that all of our postings are included in relevant online job boards including ChronicleVital, HigherEd jobs, and DiverseJobs.
- VCU HR establishes relationships with local and state organizations who support the employment of individuals with disabilities, including the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Service (DARS). The team collaborates with these agencies to increase the recruitment and retention of IWDs at VCU.
- VCU HR participates in and contributes to career fairs to attract individuals including veterans and IWD (as mentioned). Examples include the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) sponsored career fairs and resource fairs as part of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) at Fort Gregg-Adams.
  - In compliance with the Code of Virginia, we continue to ensure preferential hiring for veterans and their qualifying family members.
- VCU provides effective training, professional and career development opportunities. Examples of this include:
  - Hiring managers, search committees, HR business partners and other staff involved in each recruitment process are trained in effective hiring practices, including ways to eliminate bias in all facets of our hiring process. This includes training in how to facilitate a highly-structured interview process to ensure all candidates are asked the same set of interview questions and are assessed via a predefined evaluation rubric, customized for each role.
  - A dynamic career development program offers learning opportunities for employees to improve current job effectiveness, prepare for career advancement, and enhance personal career development.
  - Career communities made up of individuals doing similar work or having similar career interests provide opportunities for employees to connect with opportunities and access tools to explore their career path, share best practices, and build their professional networks.
  - A robust Career Pathing Program allows employees to plan their careers, enhance their knowledge and skills to master their current jobs, and identify paths toward potential promotions and internal VCU transfers.
  - The provision of career coaching services to staff assists employees in owning and sculpting their own careers, enhancing their ability to self-advocate and plan their career trajectories.
- VCU is a member of the [NCFDD](#) which provides faculty mentoring.

**2025 Goals**

**Goal 1: Ensure equal access in all student and employee programs and practices, reflecting a culture where success is supported and everyone matters and belongs.**

**Goal 2: Nurture an institutional climate that is welcoming, respectful and aligned with our commitment to community engagement.**

**Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure and Training: Implement an organizational infrastructure to support, sustain and scale success initiatives.**

Virginia Commonwealth University  
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