

**CREATING A GRADUATE COMMUNITY AT
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY**

A Strategic Plan for the

Graduate School

2015-2017

Mission

The mission of the Graduate School is to foster the nurturing of aspiring scholars and the maturing of established scholars by creating an intellectual, social and humanistic environment for teaching, learning, research, creative expression and public service at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Vision

The vision of the Graduate School is to become a model academic environment for nurturing intellectual growth, developing humanistic values and fostering a strong sense of community among graduate students and graduate faculty as they actively collaborate in becoming and maturing as scholars. In achieving the model academic environment, the Graduate School will distinguish and bring pre-eminence to Virginia Commonwealth University for explicitly and proudly recognizing academic research and graduate education as, first and foremost, the work of scholars interacting as a community.

Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University, established in 1968 through the merger of the Richmond Professional Institute and the Medical College of Virginia, has matured into a Doctoral/Research University - Extensive University. Today, VCU enjoys a national and international reputation in teaching, research, and community outreach. The faculty at VCU is recognized for its high quality of scholarly performance, productivity and impact, and the accomplishments of graduates have received considerable recognition. Clearly, VCU offers exceptional educational programs that meet many of the needs of the Commonwealth and the nation.

By developing and nurturing the strongest graduate programs, VCU can aspire to be a national and international leader in higher education. Excellence in graduate education requires strong academic programs centered on the needs of students and society, strong faculty with records of accomplishments and activities in cutting-edge scholarship and a bright student body capable of taking maximal advantage of these strong programs and faculty for their educational and professional development. Achievement of this aspiration will require unwavering commitments for infrastructure to support graduate enrollment growth; assurance of the highest standards for faculty hiring and promotion; assurance of the highest standards for graduate student admission and progression through the curriculum; and an aggressive agenda for garnering funds for research, graduate student assistantships and fellowships, and other programmatic needs.

The Graduate School administers all graduate programs on the Monroe Park and Medical Center campuses of Virginia Commonwealth University as well as those offered off-campus. The Graduate School offers 24 certificates, 76 master's and 40 doctoral degree programs.

The primary functions of the Graduate School are:

- To promote graduate education at the University.
- To advance the well-being and professional development of graduate students.
- To ensure the integrity of master's and doctoral degrees offered at VCU.
- To provide administrative support for graduate education.

The Strategic Plan for the Graduate School is focused on creating a community of graduate students and graduate faculty to lead Virginia Commonwealth University to preeminence as a nationally recognized urban, public research university.

Goal I. *Recruit highly qualified and diverse graduate students (Quest: Theme I)*

1. Work with Strategic Enrollment Management to enhance graduate student recruiting efforts and graduate student enrollment.
 - a. Analyze potential market areas and universities and colleges to determine the most appropriate locations to focus recruiting efforts.
 - b. Recruit underrepresented minority graduate students through collaborations with historically black colleges and universities and attendance at minority conferences.
 - c. Continue to work with the Virginia Council of Graduate Schools to recruit underrepresented graduate students.
 - d. Sponsor events to introduce VCU undergraduate students to graduate education at VCU.
 - e. Become an institutional partner with the Southern Regional Educational Board Doctoral Scholars program.
2. Identify graduate programs that can and should increase the size of their graduate student enrollment.
 - a. Factors including job market, demand from students, state needs, availability of resources and availability of financial support for the students will be taken into consideration.
3. Encourage VCU undergraduate students, particularly high academic achievers, including those in the Honors program, to enroll in more challenging graduate level courses as they complete the requirements for the bachelor's degree.
4. Encourage and facilitate the pursuit of combined bachelors/masters degrees by qualified students.

Goal II. *Assess the organizational structure of the Graduate School (Quest: Theme I)*

1. Review VCU Spans & Layers report and seek input from stakeholders

2. Review roles and responsibilities of Graduate school staff
3. Reorganize as needed

Goal III. Provide adequate financial support for graduate students (Quest: Theme II)

1. Increase the level of stipend support to be competitive with our peer institutions.
 - a. Increase assistantship stipends by \$1,000 each year.
2. Reduce tuition costs for doctoral candidates receiving assistantships.
 - a. Graduate School will pay one-half of resident tuition for doctoral candidates receiving an assistantship.
3. Establish permanent funding to support and expand the Thesis and Dissertation Year assistantship program.
4. Create a scholarship fund for graduate students to enhance VCU's efforts in enrolling non-resident master's students as well as unfunded doctoral students.
 - a. Hire a Director of Development for the Graduate School to direct, coordinate, and conduct fundraising activities focused on securing funding for graduate assistantships, fellowships and scholarships.

Goal IV. Enhance the Quality of the Graduate Student Experience (Quest: Theme II)

1. Strengthen programs for preparing teaching and research assistants prior to work assignments by continuing to develop the Preparing Future Faculty Program, the Leaders and Entrepreneurs Academy for Professional Development and the Graduate School Mentoring Program.
2. Develop and implement surveys to assess quality of graduate education and life at VCU.
3. Expand use of electronic technologies that allow the Graduate School and graduate program directors to monitor all aspects of graduate records and progress toward the degree.
4. Promote interdisciplinary graduate programs

Goal V. Promote graduate education at VCU (Quest: Theme III)

1. Develop a Graduate School newsletter to be published at least once a year.

2. Increase efforts on social media.
 - a. Hire a graduate assistant to manage social media.

Goal VI. Promote the development of graduate and professional student center (Quest: Theme III)

Graduate students need opportunities to interact with one another, as well as graduate faculty, in an environment conducive to discussing their research and exchanging ideas. Currently graduate students live off-campus in a variety of locations, and as a result, many feel somewhat disconnected from the campus. A graduate and professional center would provide opportunities for graduate students in different fields to interact and share ideas. The center would have areas devoted to studying as well as social spaces where students and graduate faculty could come together as a community of scholars. A graduate and professional housing center would further enhance the graduate student experience, graduate student recruiting efforts and increase retention of students.

1. Explore the creation of a Graduate Center that will encompass the Graduate School, graduate student residential housing, as well as graduate student and faculty meeting areas.