VCU is one university with a common future, that is engaged with and committed to the community of which it is part, and which purposefully and proudly provides access and opportunity that many major research universities do not, while embracing and celebrating diversity in its student body, faculty, staff and administration, and recognizing that learning, scholarship, service and practice are at the heart of what VCU does.

Approved by the VCU Board of Visitors on February 9, 2006.
President’s Message

Having served as president since 1990, I have had the great privilege to be part of a major transformation of Virginia Commonwealth University. Our successes can be attributed to many factors, but there is one word that seems to capture the overarching theme connecting our achievements — innovation.

Our practice of exploring new ways of doing what we do so that we may discover what will better serve us in our research, teaching, service and patient care is at the heart of our success and is the fuel that has propelled us through challenging times. The results have been outstanding.

We have dissolved traditional barriers that have separated departments and schools from one another, generating incredible opportunities for learning, scholarship, research and public service. We have created collaborations with neighboring communities to address the challenges of our shared urban environment. Additionally, we have become a key player in economic development in the region by forging partnerships with business and industry. These and many other accomplishments certainly would not have been possible without the University community’s willingness to welcome change and open itself to new possibilities.

We are, once again, at a critical point in our history. We have made great strides and now we must look anew. VCU 2020 Vision for Excellence provides an exceptional road map for us to continue to fulfill our mission as a leading urban research institution for the 21st century, while at the same time allowing us the flexibility to embrace unforeseen opportunities that will undoubtedly present themselves along the way.

With this plan in place, we are poised to experience the year 2020 much as we experience today — proud of our accomplishments, excited about our future and delighted that where we find ourselves is far beyond what we ever imagined.

Eugene P. Trani
President
Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1968 through the merger of the Medical College of Virginia and Richmond Professional Institute. Still relatively young, the University has drawn on the rich history and accomplishments of those two institutions, joining their two histories, campuses, faculties and staffs, and academic programs into a single institution shaped by a common mission and shared goals.

In 1992, VCU President Eugene P. Trani established a Commission on the Future of the University and charged it with developing a strategic plan to guide the University through the end of the decade. The Commission was first chaired by Dr. Charles Ruch, provost and vice president for academic affairs, and then by Dr. Grace E. Harris when she assumed that position in January 1993. Following a year of work on the part of the Commission, and after extensive discussion by all of the University’s constituencies, the Strategic Plan for the Future of Virginia Commonwealth University was approved by the Board of Visitors of Virginia Commonwealth University in September 1993.

The plan included 15 strategic directions and more than 160 specific actions, all shaped by a realistic assessment of the financial, political and competitive environment of higher education at that time. The consistent goal of the plan was to advance the University within that environment as a leader among urban research universities.

Some of the key accomplishments arising out of the 1993 Strategic Plan include the creation of the Adcenter, the Master of Arts in History, the Ph.D. in Art History, the Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering and the initiation of the Pharm.D. Program. The plan also led to the elimination and consolidation of several programs, the creation of the School of Engineering, and the creation of University-wide interdisciplinary centers in public policy, cancer neuroscience, environmental studies, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. The plan resulted in the addition of new faculty positions to strengthen select programs and the enhancement of faculty and staff recognition and awards programs as well.

As a result of the 1993 Strategic Plan, the University also reorganized its enrollment services, appointed a dean of the Graduate School, created the position of vice president for research, created a new Office of Information Technology and new research-oriented institutes in relation to the Virginia BioTechnology Research Park, and expanded community service activities through a reorganization of the Division of Community Outreach. The University also implemented new Faculty Roles and Rewards and Promotion and Tenure policies.
Phase II of the Strategic Plan also was led by Dr. Grace Harris, provost and vice president for academic affairs, and was completed and approved by the Board of Visitors in January 1998. Key accomplishments resulting from Phase II included a greatly enhanced national and international recognition, impressive U.S. News & World Report rankings, and the establishment of VCU Life Sciences, the VCU School of Medicine campus at INOVA Hospital Fairfax, the Carver-VCU Partnership, the VCU Health System and the VCU School of the Arts in Qatar, among others.

VCU now finds itself at the nexus of an extraordinary confluence of events — six in particular — that, if handled judiciously, can literally be transformative of the University.

VCU — like virtually all major institutions of higher education — experienced tremendous growth in the tenured faculty ranks during the 1970s and 1980s, and today more than half of the tenured faculty at VCU are over the age of 50, with more than one-third over the age of 60. This fact, coupled with the realities of the tenure system, results in few degrees of freedom within which the University can respond to a changing educational environment.

Rather than simply accepting the fact of its demography, VCU has capitalized on it through the implementation of retirement transition programs intended to provide the administrative flexibility needed to deal with a challenging economic climate while also providing substantial benefit to faculty contemplating retirement. This has provided major benefits:

- VCU has an opportunity for growth, since faculty members toward the end of their careers are typically enjoying salaries that are considerably in advance of those at the beginnings of their careers.
- VCU’s faculty is becoming younger and more diverse both ethnically and with respect to gender.
- VCU is ahead of the curve with respect to its sister institutions with similar faculty demographics. This positioning will help VCU avoid some of the competition that will be seen in the future, as more and more institutions struggle with large numbers of retirements and seek to hire increasing numbers of faculty from what is a nationally declining pool of talented young faculty.
- VCU also is advantaged because it is hiring aggressively during a time in which, because of the problem of state budgets nationally, other institutions are not. As a consequence, VCU has been attracting candidates of extraordinary quality.
- Rapid, high-volume changes in the faculty ranks provide an opportunity for strategic change that is not afforded by more usual — and slower — faculty turnover.
The second transformative phenomenon that deserves mention is VCU’s extraordinarily rapid growth in enrollments, and particularly in out-of-state enrollments. This growth has had an enormous impact. Focusing on the problem of attracting and retaining high-quality non-Virginia residents has forced VCU to think outside of the box and to find ways of differentiating itself from other institutions. The development of two new schools in the College of Humanities and Sciences — the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs and the School of World Studies — has had important consequences for VCU’s ability to attract these students, but so too has the development of new academic programs that are unique in the region, if not in the country. VCU’s undergraduate degree program in forensic science — established only three years ago — now is one of the largest programs in the University, with a large proportion of out-of-state students. VCU anticipates a similar result for the newly created B.A. in Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. VCU has developed new and unique programs at the graduate level as well, such as the Ph.D. in Integrative Life Sciences and the Ph.D. in Medical Physics. Collaborations among departments continue to develop and new program possibilities continue to grow.

Thirdly, and deservedly, VCU has benefited from an infusion of new state funds — more than $15 million over the biennium in recognition of the University’s base adequacy shortfall.

A fourth transformative influence stems from the University’s investment in its research infrastructure and the concomitant growth of the sponsored research budget, which now exceeds $206 million.

Fifth, VCU is rapidly changing from a commuter to a residential posture, requiring not only the addition of residential opportunities, but also the development of a host of student services, most recently highlighted by the opening of the new dining facility on the Monroe Park Campus. This rapid structural change will advance dramatically over the next two to three years, with the development of the Monroe Park Campus Addition and the residential campus for the schools of Business and Engineering.

Finally, with the Board of Visitors’ approval of the VCU 2020 Master Site Plan in August 2004, the University has embarked on a bold initiative that will significantly expand and enhance its physical footprint to support a broad, but as-yet largely unspecified, range of academic activities.
This confluence of events presents VCU with a rare opportunity — and one that it is determined not to squander — to decide the future of this great institution. Given the opportunities made available through the faculty transition programs, through tremendous growth in its student body, through an infusion of new state dollars, and with an eye firmly on the need to grow further its out-of-state enrollments and research budgets — which will buffer the University from the continuing vagaries of state budgetary actions — the time is now to ask how best to chart the course for the future of VCU.

President Eugene P. Trani has determined that this juncture is an opportune time to initiate a new strategic plan for Virginia Commonwealth University. Accordingly, in August 2004, he charged Dr. Stephen Gottfredson, then interim provost and vice president for academic affairs, and Dr. Sheldon Retchin, vice president for health sciences and chief executive officer of the VCU Health System, with co-chairing a new Strategic Planning Commission and with developing a vision for VCU that corresponds with the time horizon envisioned for the University’s capital expansion: VCU 2020.

**The Process**

The process followed in the development of this strategic plan mirrored that employed in VCU’s previous planning efforts. The co-chairs first established a small Executive Committee comprised solely of persons having University-wide responsibilities. In addition to the academic vice presidents, these included the vice president for external relations and chief-of-staff to the president, the vice provost for life sciences, the dean of the graduate school, and the president of the faculty senate. The executive committee determined the staffing, composition and structure of the full Strategic Planning Commission. Commission membership included 48 VCU faculty, staff, students and administrators, two Board of Visitor representatives, and four ex-officio members comprised of the vice presidents for government relations and health policy, finance and administration, research, and University advancement. Two special advisers, Dr. Grace Harris, former VCU provost and vice president for academic affairs and now executive director of the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, and Dr. Hermes Kontos, former vice president for health sciences and currently professor emeritus in the School of Medicine, assisted the Commission. Thirteen additional VCU faculty, staff and administrators served as staff to the Commission.

Between August and October 2004, the Executive Committee met and considered VCU’s core assets, core values and essential character, and developed several strategic themes along which discussions could proceed. In October 2004, the full Commission met and, after much
thoughtful discussion and a planning exercise, embraced seven strategic directions proposed by the Executive Committee:

1. Embracing a world-class student experience.
2. Taking our position among the top research institutions.
3. Developing and sustaining a world-class faculty.
4. Serving VCU’s many communities.
5. Accelerating our entrepreneurial spirit, developing resource flexibility and ensuring accountability.
6. Developing a global presence.
7. Leveraging our strengths and building bridges through interdisciplinary activities.

Committees were established for each of the strategic directions and charged with the task of identifying strategic priorities and initiatives in each of the areas. Their reports form the basis of this strategic plan.

In addition to the commission members, more than 100 individuals from the VCU community — with expertise specific to each strategic direction — were added to the seven committees. From October 2004 through mid-March 2005, these seven committees met to determine a vision for each area, to state where VCU is today with regard to the strategic direction and to identify an action plan to help VCU achieve its vision. Several of the committees held focus groups in their quest to gather as much information and input as possible. These focus groups targeted students (nine focus groups) and outside communities (two focus groups). Including the Commission and Strategic Direction Committees, focus group participants, those attending open meetings, those responding to surveys and those providing feedback electronically, more than 450 people actively participated in the development of the committee reports and initiatives.

Once the committee reports were completed in March, the process of developing the strategic plan began. The Executive Committee drafted a document, which was then shared with the full Commission in April for their input. After modifying the draft plan to include the suggested changes, the co-chairs and members of the Executive Committee and full Commission began meeting with various University groups to generate additional review and comment. The plan was presented at meetings of key groups, including Staff Senate, Faculty Senate, University Council, President’s Council, Vice Presidents’ meetings, and meetings of faculty and staff from departments and schools on both University campuses throughout the spring, summer and early fall of 2005.

Early in the planning process, two open meetings were held for faculty and staff (December 2004) and two additional meetings were held specifically for students (February 2005). After receiving input from
other University groups, additional open meetings for faculty, staff and students were held to discuss the draft strategic plan in April 2005 and then again in October 2005. In all more than 125 University meetings were held in the development of this strategic plan.

Additional input was solicited electronically. A Web site for the strategic plan (www.vcu.edu/vcu2020) was available beginning in September 2004. Over time, the Web site included information about Commission membership, Strategic Direction Committee membership, communications from the co-chairs to the general community, minutes from the Commission meetings, committee reports and drafts of the strategic plan. A customized, real-time feedback system was made available through the Web site and allowed students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the VCU community to comment throughout the strategic planning process. All feedback received was reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate committees for their consideration. In addition, VCU alumni and students were surveyed to ensure that their unique issues and perspectives were represented in the planning process.

After extensive review and input from the VCU community, the Strategic Planning Commission forwarded this plan to President Trani for his review and approval. The strategic planning process then culminated in the adoption of this strategic plan in February 2006 with approval from VCU’s Board of Visitors.

**Virginia Commonwealth University: A Vision for Excellence**

The Executive Committee recognized early in the process that VCU’s current mission statement, while providing a solid framework for day-to-day activities of the University, was somewhat dated for developing the vision for the next 15 years. Accordingly, the Executive Committee adopted a revised version of the mission statement as a working model for the strategic planning process, recognizing that a formal restatement of the mission statement would be required once the VCU 2020 Strategic Plan had been adopted.

The Executive Committee adopted the following working mission statement:

*The University provides a fertile and stimulating environment for achieving excellence in learning, teaching, scholarship, research, clinical practice, creative expression and in public service. Essential to the life of the University is a faculty actively engaged in scholarship and creative exploration — activities that increase knowledge and understanding of the world and inspire and enrich teaching.*
The University is dedicated to excellence in instruction in an atmosphere of free inquiry and scholarship so that its students may realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment to learning and service.

The University serves the local, state, national and international communities with excellence through its scholarly activities, its diverse educational programs and its public service activities. The University also contributes its intellectual and creative expertise in the development of innovative approaches to meet the changing needs of our society.

**VCU’s Core Assets, Core Values and Essential Character**

VCU is blessed with a wealth of riches, the principal among which is its outstanding and diverse faculty, staff, students and administrators. Among its other core assets:

- Its location in a vibrant, livable city that is the seat of government for the commonwealth of Virginia.
- Its community partnerships, which stress a mutually supportive synergy that is rare among major metropolitan institutions.
- Its strong and continuing commitment to and investment in the future, which has included $1.2 billion in capital investment in the past 14 years, recent major investments in its research infrastructure, and a bold vision for the continued expansion and improvement of its physical facilities as expressed in the VCU 2020 Master Site Plan.

The existence of a major academic medical center and health system, both in Richmond and in Fairfax County, Va., provides another core asset and defining characteristic, as does recognition that VCU, which contributes $1 billion in direct expenditures and $0.6 billion of indirect expenditures within the commonwealth, is an engine for regional economic development.

The values that VCU cherishes help to define it as an institution. The following expression of VCU’s core values has resonated well within the University community:

VCU is **one university with a common future, that is engaged with and committed to the community of which it is a part, and which purposefully and proudly provides access and opportunity that many major research universities do not, while embracing and celebrating diversity in its student body, faculty, staff and administration, and recognizing that learning, scholarship, service and practice are at the heart of what VCU does, and define what VCU is.**
VCU reflects, through its students, faculty and staff, the diverse multicultural and multinational character of Richmond and Virginia. VCU will continue to serve as a model for this diversity and for creating responses to the issues that it generates.

VCU will facilitate a climate in which all employees may contribute and feel valued.

VCU’s developmental history and continuing evolution as an institution have given it several essential and defining characteristics:
- VCU is a young, modern university built on the pillars of historically strong health care, professional and arts programs.
- VCU is an agile institution with the ability to create, respond to and capitalize on opportunities.
- VCU has an entrepreneurial spirit and a strong work ethic.
- VCU is an institution with incredible momentum at a time when much of higher education is retrenching.
- VCU is an institution that has had a history of a diverse student body.

**The President’s Charge**

President Trani charged the Strategic Planning Commission with ensuring that the plan attends well to two presidential priorities:

1. Research and scholarship are and will be a major priority of the University.
2. There will be a decided focus on the student experience at VCU.

And indeed, these two priorities have driven VCU’s vision for the future and the specific initiatives that must be undertaken if it is to move the VCU of 2005 to the vision expressed for the VCU of 2020.

**VCU’s Strategic Vision**

The strategic vision for VCU rests upon five themes:

1. Ensure and maintain the highest levels of University efficiency, accountability and infrastructure support required to achieve our strategic vision.
2. Achieve national recognition as a learning-centered research university that embraces a world-class student experience.
3. Assure continued international recognition for our research, scholarship and creative expression.
4. Achieve preeminence for our academic medical center.
5. Maintain VCU as a model for university-community partnerships.
Theme I: Ensure and maintain the highest levels of University efficiency, accountability and infrastructure support required to achieve our strategic vision.

VCU’s ability to take its place among the best universities in teaching, research, service and practice will be predicated on how well it meets the challenges it currently faces and the extent to which it creates and maintains the most robust and supportive intellectual environment possible for its students, staff and faculty. Creating an environment that supports achievement at the highest levels requires a decided focus on the administrative and structural foundations that support all activities and individuals at VCU.

As noted earlier, the VCU of 2005 is faced with tremendous opportunities as well as significant challenges:

• With the approval of the VCU 2020 Master Site Plan, the University has embarked on a bold initiative that will significantly expand and enhance its physical footprint.
• The University has experienced tremendous growth in terms of the numbers and types of students pursuing their studies at VCU.
• Unfortunately, this comes on the heels of a half-decade of budget cuts that, by the 2003-04 fiscal year, amounted to about a 25 percent reduction in base budget state support for education and general activities.
• With annual increases in tuition and fees of as high as 15 percent in recent years, VCU students are bearing an increasingly larger share of the cost of their education.
• Some state support has recently been restored through the addition of base budget adequacy funding of more than $15 million per year by 2005-06, an amount that will allow VCU to begin to address its pressing needs.
• In 2007, VCU will complete The Campaign for VCU, the largest capital campaign in VCU’s history, and will raise $330.5 million that will support research, teaching, scholarship, and service and outreach to VCU’s local and global communities.
• Rapid growth in the instructional and research enterprises combined with required budget reductions is straining core infrastructure support systems, and calls into question the efficiency and accountability of key structures.
• VCU has embarked on a three-year project to replace and re-engineer its student, human resources, payroll and finance computer applications and business processes. This project is intended to result in more effective administrative processes and improved decision making at all levels of the University.
The VCU 2020 Strategic Planning Commission believes that it has an unprecedented opportunity to build on VCU’s existing administrative and infrastructure foundations to support the VCU of 2020 and beyond. The Commission’s vision is that VCU can quickly address any immediate needs in its current administrative foundation, and that it can put in place the mechanisms to maintain the necessary levels of effectiveness and accountability to support achievement at the highest level in teaching and learning, research, service, and clinical practice. The Commission believes that the process of developing such an administrative foundation can proceed in a straightforward fashion that capitalizes on and rewards the strong work ethic of VCU’s faculty, staff and administrators.

Further, VCU’s strategic planning process always has been based on the understanding that no university can be all things to all people and on the recognition that a university aspiring to achieve or maintain genuine excellence will be required to make critical choices affecting resource allocations.¹

**Initiative 1:**

Under the leadership of the provost and vice president for academic affairs, the vice president for health sciences, and the senior vice president for finance and administration, VCU will initiate a review of its administrative foundation and make recommendations to assure that VCU is the most effective university that it can be, that it is aware of and employs best practices in all areas, and that it demonstrates the highest levels of accountability for the use of the various resources entrusted to it. This effort will begin immediately, will seek broad involvement of faculty, staff and students, and will be completed no later than May 2007. The review should consider matters related to:

- VCU’s Faculty Roles and Rewards and Promotion and Tenure policies.
- Activities associated with sponsored research and technology transfer.
- Policies that will attract, retain and support outstanding, diverse and dedicated faculty, staff and administrators.
- Academic and administrative technology, including research computing.
- Interdisciplinary activities in teaching, research and scholarship.
- Faculty compensation models.
- Allocation of staff support resources.
- International collaborations and partnerships.

• Community service and programs.
• Clinical practice.
• Facilities and administrative cost-recovery allocations.
• Use of teaching and research space and research equipment.
• Use of space for informal learning activities.
• Communication with internal and external audiences.
• Consolidation of student services.
• Optimal use of distance learning in expanding access to and improving the quality of VCU’s degree programs and reducing the cost of education.

The vice presidents should strive to ensure that, to the extent possible, modifications to current administrative structures, policies and functions are revenue neutral.

**Initiative 2:**
Establish a unit concerned with ongoing University effectiveness to ensure that VCU maintains its effectiveness as an institution and its accountability for the resources entrusted to it, and that the institution is aware of and employs best practices in all areas of its operation. This unit would have both University-wide and campus-specific responsibilities, to include:

• Institutional research, evaluation and planning activities.
• Assessment, both of student learning outcomes and of unit effectiveness.
• Working with University officials to assess the implementation of the University’s diversity plan.
• Advising the provost and the vice president for health sciences concerning academic, classroom and research space utilization and allocation on both University campuses (including anticipated impacts on FACR).
• Organizing and implementing a program of systematic review of academic programs on both University campuses.
• Providing informed advice to the provost and the vice president for health sciences concerning program strengths and weaknesses to facilitate resource allocation decisions, and routine resource planning, development and allocation on the Monroe Park Campus.
• Working with academic units to identify best practices and to develop metrics of performance that can guide decision making.

**Initiative 3:**
Develop a common set of policies and processes to guide all individuals and units that generate revenue through entrepreneurial activities, and encourage all units to identify and take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities.
Initiative 4:
Develop a University-wide strategic plan for increasing philanthropic opportunities beyond 2007, when VCU’s current capital campaign is scheduled to end. At a minimum, this plan should address the following needs:

- The need to raise VCU’s overall endowment to be in line with that of our peers.
- The need to increase membership and engagement among VCU’s current and future alumni in the University alumni associations.
- The need to capitalize on the increased engagement and goodwill among alumni, and private and corporate donors brought on by The Campaign for VCU.
- The need to establish institutional strategies and guidelines to ensure optimal University benefits from philanthropic opportunities while still allowing academic units to pursue appropriate school- or department-level opportunities.
- The need to develop an infrastructure that enhances institutional competitiveness for large national philanthropic opportunities and that supports the appropriate development of those opportunities.
- The need for private support of initiatives outlined in this strategic plan and elsewhere.

Theme II: Achieve national recognition as a learning-centered research university that embraces a world-class student experience.

The most severe critiques of research universities and their treatment of undergraduates, and first-year students in particular, are harsh. These perspectives hold, in summary, that large research universities regard the admission of undergraduates as a necessary political and financial evil; that the tuition undergraduates pay is quickly funneled to graduate programs and research; and that faculty are not only supported in their disengagement from undergraduate students, but are punished if they linger among them too much. First-year students arrive on campus as numbers, not individuals, and are thrown into massive classes taught by indifferent faculty or ill-prepared graduate students. It’s sink or swim, because for every student who falls by the wayside, another of equal qualifications is waiting to take the seat.

(Cutright, 2002, at www.brevard.edu/fyc/ruproject/essay.htm)

That there has been a historical tension between the needs and requirements attendant a major research focus at a university and between those needs and requirements that attend a focus on students and their instruction is a truism. The Strategic Planning Commission’s charge, as determined by the presidential priorities referenced earlier, is to find a way to integrate an institutional focus on research, scholarship and creative activity with a decided focus also on the student experience. VCU is not alone among major research universities in this struggle: of the 148 Carnegie Classification Doctoral/Research Extensive Universities,
70 recently have developed programs specifically intended to increase a focus on the student experience — particularly the first-year student experience (Cutright, 2002). Even a cursory review of the programs developed by these strong research institutions suggests, however, that VCU has a clear opportunity to become a national leader in such efforts.

To build on this opportunity, we will undertake the strengthening of skills of the faculty in teaching a student population that is diverse in age, ability, racial and ethnic background, international origin, and religious affiliation, in addition to many other ways. The University will achieve a national reputation for the effectiveness of its faculty in teaching diverse students.

The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University’s *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities* (1998) provides a thoughtful and incisive summary of the challenges that VCU faces and the problems that it will encounter. But indeed, VCU's vision is larger yet, and encompasses graduate and professional programs as well as those at the undergraduate level.

The Strategic Planning Commission notes that a shift in focus from “teaching” to “learning,” and a realization that teaching, research, service and clinical care are all “learning” activities, can do much to negate this tension. From this perspective, rather than conceiving of scholarship as an activity that takes away from students’ opportunities to learn, scholarship is seen to add to those opportunities. With this realization, the University can envision ways in which it can become a new kind of research university — one that puts learning at the center of all that the University does, and that benefits everyone as a result.

As a learning-centered research university, VCU will bring the resources of a major national research institution to bear on the learning opportunities of it students. VCU recognizes that all activities of the University — teaching, research, service and patient care — provide opportunities to learn. The University will place the creation, application and dissemination of knowledge at the heart of all that it does. VCU will recognize that creating learning is the purpose of the University and strive to make all activities of the University directly support the creation of learning. As a result, VCU will prepare students to thrive in a complex, interdependent, diverse and constantly changing world, and to be prepared to continue learning throughout their lives.
VCU faces some challenges that many of its peer institutions do not:

- At the undergraduate level, VCU’s students are more diverse, not only in their backgrounds, but in terms of academic preparedness; many are not highly engaged learners; and many face financial and personal barriers less common among traditional college students. As a consequence, VCU must redouble efforts to engage its students, to retain them from year to year and to assure their graduation.

- At the graduate level, VCU lacks a diversity and sufficiency of programs; stipends are less competitive than needed to attract the very best students; and the University is supporting only about 25 percent of the students it should be supporting given the size of its research budgets.

- Despite calls for the creation of a University-wide general education curriculum in the previous strategic plan (phases I and II), VCU has not in fact achieved that goal. Even in the College of Humanities and Sciences, which fully embraced general education and did, in fact, create an exemplary curriculum, repeated budget reductions concomitant with increasing enrollment pressures has resulted in a de facto distributional system of general education requirements that is at least 20 years out of date. As a consequence, students report a feeling of disengagement from their learning and that their programs of study — particularly during the critically important freshman and sophomore years — appear to lack coherence and structural meaning.

Initiative 1:
Establish a “University College” that will become VCU’s front door. It will oversee all academic support services for undergraduates in their first year (and, as resources permit, through the sophomore year), all undergraduates who have not declared majors, all conditionally admitted students and all undergraduates in interdisciplinary majors. The University College will share responsibility with existing schools and the college for the University-wide foundational core undergraduate curriculum (see Initiative 2), will coordinate all academic advising for first-year students, will oversee all first-year student services, including VCU 101, STAR, new student orientation programs, the Campus Learning Center, and all tutoring and mentoring programs now in place. The dean of the University College will be charged with developing and maintaining articulation agreements with sister institutions and, in conjunction with other University offices as required, for assuring fidelity to VCU’s Quality Enhancement Plan and other SACS requirements.
Initiative 2:
Establish a compact with VCU’s students and their parents that ensures all graduates have the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for lifelong success. The VCU Compact will create a University-wide shared experience for all undergraduates that focuses on the foundations necessary to enable and ensure lifelong learning. VCU will commit itself to a higher level of engagement between faculty and students while raising the performance expectations of the entire University community through this Compact.

Initiative 3:
Accelerate the VCU Libraries’ expansion and support in recognition that the libraries are a foundational underpinning of the University’s commitment to excellence and to its plans for growth and quality enhancement in its undergraduate and its graduate programs, and in its research enterprise.

Initiative 4:
Fully implement the SACS Quality Enhancement Plan as articulated in VCU’s Reaffirmation of Accreditation. This initiative will require the development and maintenance of faculty and student learning communities, the development and maintenance of opportunities for undergraduate and graduate student interaction and research initiatives, and expanded opportunities for service-learning experiences, among other things. Recognizing the centrality of the Quality Enhancement Plan to the ongoing mission and development of the institution, create the position of vice provost for instruction, to be charged with the continuous assessment and improvement of instruction at all levels and of all types. The dean of the University College and the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence should report to this vice provost, and an inventory of related assets should be undertaken to ascertain their relevance to this initiative. This office also will be responsible for the implementation of Initiative 2 and, in conjunction with the Center for Institutional Effectiveness and the vice provost for academic affairs, for assuring and overseeing SACS accreditation and assessment requirements.

Initiative 5:
Develop the University Honors Program into a true Honors College, and seek to establish a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at VCU.

Initiative 6:
Develop the strength and vigor of the summer sessions, with attention given to the breadth of offerings, to the involvement and support of graduate students and collateral faculty, and to appropriate incentives for academic units. Summer sessions should be seen as a viable “third semester” that can shorten the time it takes to earn a degree from VCU.
Further develop VCU’s off-campus and distance-education offerings to allow VCU to better meet the lifelong learning needs of VCU’s communities and to better respond to demand for higher education among populations that do not have easy access to VCU’s Richmond campuses.

**Initiative 7:**
Continue to strengthen the Graduate School through the addition of new graduate programs (particularly at the doctoral level), through the expansion of and increases in graduate stipends, and the initiation of developmental programs designed to increase graduate student involvement in undergraduate student learning.

**Initiative 8:**
In conjunction with Initiative 10 under Theme III below, develop strong and continuing semester- and year-long international exchange programs for undergraduate students, with a goal of 2,000 VCU students studying abroad per year, matched by a similar number of students from our sister institutions studying on our campuses.

**Initiative 9:**
Build on current efforts to develop a University-wide approach to enrollment management with particular attention to student selectivity, student mix by discipline and by level (graduate/professional and undergraduate), and diversity. Require all schools and the College of Humanities and Sciences to develop annual strategic enrollment plans that serve as the basis of enrollment projections and planning for changes in enrollment. These plans will be guided by the University’s commitment of aggressively recruiting high quality students, diverse in terms of race, gender, age, disability and national origin. Identify and explore opportunities to collaborate with area community colleges in meeting enrollment demand consistent with VCU’s important role as the region’s major research university.

**Initiative 10:**
Develop opportunities for formal and informal student life activities through optimal use of existing, enhanced and new facilities, such as student recreation centers. Consideration of impact on student life should be made in all master site planning activities.
Theme III: Assure continued international recognition for our research, scholarship and creative expression.

VCU has a history of excellence in research, scholarship and creative expression, and many of its historically strong medical, professional and arts programs have long been nationally recognized for excellence. More recently, the strengths of VCU’s programs in psychology, creative writing, public policy and administration, and advertising have been applauded for national excellence.

Not surprisingly, VCU’s recognition as a nationally ranked research university is due in large part to activities of the medical school and other schools in the health sciences. However, and as recognized by the Strategic Plan for the School of Medicine, the prominence of VCU’s academic medical center stalled by the early 1990s; while its NIH budget has continued to grow, the rate of growth experienced by the University’s peer institutions substantially eclipsed VCU’s own. Three factors have contributed greatly to this problem. First, VCU lacked the ability to expand research space — and particularly wet laboratory space — needed to assure accelerated growth, and also lacked the ability to significantly renovate outdated research space. Second, the health care economy in the Richmond region changed dramatically; it moved quickly from a region with virtually no managed care to one of the most active managed-care regions in the country. As a consequence, the medical school was required to focus faculty attention away from research and toward patient care. Third, the state’s fiscal crisis has had serious consequences not only in the erosion of faculty and staff ranks, but in developing a situation such that faculty and staff salaries are becoming less competitive than they once were.

VCU’s unique developmental history also must be considered. Virtually all other major research universities in this country began from the traditional core of the liberal arts and sciences; as these grew in strength, the universities added various professional appendages, such as schools of medicine, law schools, business schools and so forth. VCU, of course, was built largely on the pillars of strong professional and arts programs. As a consequence, some of its traditional liberal arts and sciences disciplines (largely housed in the College of Humanities and Sciences) lag substantially behind its peer institutions along several dimensions: size, expectations in terms of scholarship in relation to teaching, student-to-faculty ratios and, not surprisingly, national recognition. Similar imbalances can be observed in other areas of the University (e.g., the School of Business). Other programs, such as the School of Engineering and VCU Life Sciences, are still in early stages of development, and will need careful nurturing if they are to achieve full potential.
Furthermore, VCU’s commitment to rebuilding the faculty after years of budget cuts — a commitment that now will be funded given recent infusions of base budget adequacy funding — means that the University will hire new faculty who share our commitment to research, scholarship and creative expression, and that existing faculty can be relieved of excessive teaching loads so they can engage more fully in these activities. Since the majority of the faculty at VCU in the year 2020 will be hired in the coming few years, the institution has a unique opportunity to decide the kind of institution that it will become and to build its faculty accordingly.

Finally, the institution has committed to a visionary master site plan that calls for the creation of hundreds of thousands of additional square feet of space for teaching and research activities. While the VCU 2020 Master Site Plan presents a bold vision for the future footprint of the institution, it does not specify how and in what ways the physical plant of the University will be used.

The decisions made at all levels regarding resource usage will have a direct impact on the level of national and international recognition of VCU’s research, scholarship and creative expression. The Strategic Planning Commission envisions an institution that has made careful choices regarding its faculty and critical resources, and that has benefited from those choices by being recognized internationally for the quantity and quality of all forms of research, scholarship and creative expression.

Initiative 1:
Under the leadership of the provost and vice president for academic affairs, initiate the development and implementation of an action plan that recommits the University to embracing and celebrating diversity in its student body, faculty, staff and administration.

Initiative 2:
Require each school and the college to develop a detailed plan for identifying and, over time, achieving an appropriate mix of tenure-eligible, collateral and part-time faculty, and graduate assistants. Plans should recognize that as we replace retiring senior faculty, we must not rely on junior-level, collateral or part-time faculty alone in response to enrollment demands, because to do so would seriously affect our national reputation.

Initiative 3:
Require all academic and administrative units to review their classified pay practices and staff-recognition awards plans annually to ensure that available funds are being utilized to attract and retain the best staff in
support of the unit’s business needs, and to develop plans to ensure that current and future staffing supports the unit’s goals and objectives. Plans should recognize the need for succession planning, and should include an analysis of training and professional development needs and a commitment to meeting those needs.

Initiative 4:
As VCU develops new graduate programs, concentrating on doctoral-level education, it needs to double the total number of graduate students by 2020, increase the proportion of full-time graduate students, provide funded assistantship opportunities for at least 50 percent of doctoral students and set institutional guidelines for compensation and benefits for postdoctoral fellows that are competitive with VCU’s peer institutions.

Initiative 5:
Encourage the development of interdisciplinary programs by supporting and following the successful model of VCU Life Sciences. One such program could be in the digital media and arts, which capitalizes and builds on VCU’s existing strong programs in the visual arts, advertising, mass communications, digital media and marketing.

Initiative 6:
Establish a mechanism for sensibly identifying the needs for, the initiation of, and maintenance and oversight of core scientific instrumentation and research computing facilities to support current and emerging research priorities. This initiative must be seen as a University-wide priority that, while not inexpensive, should allow VCU to concentrate and target resources to the maximal benefit of the research community, and that should prove attractive as the University recruits the next generation of faculty. Many of these core facilities support a more competitive standing for the University in the interdisciplinary research emphasized by funding agencies for the coming decades.

Initiative 7:
Increase total non-National Institutes of Health federal research to a level that is at or above 50 percent of the level of NIH-sponsored research. As VCU strives for substantial increases in its share of the NIH budget consonant with the Strategic Plan for the School of Medicine, this effort will require the active targeting of research opportunities with the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security as well as VCU’s industry partners. Agencies and foundations funding environmental research can now be more effectively targeted because of VCU’s Rice Center for Environmental Life Sciences.
Initiative 8:
Engage all undergraduates in research, scholarship and creative expression by including research-intensive courses in the core undergraduate curriculum and by initiating and ultimately requiring an appropriate senior capstone experience for all majors. Support for the undergraduate research program in the Honors Program should be expanded as the University develops the Honors College.

Initiative 9:
Enhance strong faculty development and mentoring programs intended to increase and sustain faculty excellence in research, scholarship and creative expression, building upon the successful model exemplified by VCU’s Center for Teaching Excellence. Attention must be given to issues of balance in faculty workloads, and to the proper application of VCU’s faculty roles and rewards policy in recognition not only of faculty strengths, but in recognition of differential balance in assigned workload and consequent expectations.

Initiative 10:
Initiate strong and mutually reinforcing interdisciplinary research and training relationships with carefully selected sister institutions (e.g., University of Messina, Fudan University, University of West of England), that expand opportunities for faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows and that, in conjunction with Initiative 8 in Theme II above, provide opportunities for international exchanges of student and faculty scholars with VCU.

Initiative 11:
Capitalize fully on potential collaborations with the Virginia BioTechnology Research Park in the development of intellectual property and transfer of technologies developed by VCU faculty into the market place. Recognize individuals associated with the Virginia BioTechnology Research Park as a potential source of faculty expertise.

Initiative 12:
Engage in a continuous master site planning process that ensures that the current and future physical plant supports both the current research priorities of the University and emerging research opportunities, and that allows VCU to maintain its competitiveness for both faculty and research awards.

Initiative 13:
Expand and capitalize on the diversity of VCU’s students and the faculty’s reputation for achieving excellence. The University’s academic programs, its systems of recognition and rewards, its campus climate
and its scholarly expertise should reflect and support intercultural understanding and community responsibility.

**Theme IV: Achieve preeminence for our academic medical center.**

VCU’s academic medical center is among a select number of comprehensive health science centers in the nation to include nationally recognized educational programs in medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and the allied health professions, and this is one of the defining characteristics of the institution.

The rapidly changing health care environment in the U.S. (and internationally) creates extraordinary demands as well as presents important new opportunities for the University, as funding sources in support of health sciences education continue to change and as educational costs continue to rise. Changing demand for and practice scope of health care professionals require changes in curricula and in teaching practices. Changes in public policy, as well as the emergence of private-sector managed care have had major implications for traditional revenue sources for medical education, health sciences research, clinical practice and indigent care.

The VCU Health System has weathered the storm of the late 1990s and early 2000s and is currently in excellent financial condition. There will likely be other future downturns, but for now we are in our best position in decades to bring the academic medical center to preeminence.

As noted earlier, and as recognized by the Strategic Plan for the School of Medicine recently approved by the Board of Visitors, the rate of growth in NIH funding experienced by the University’s peer institutions substantially eclipsed VCU’s own (even though the dollar value of VCU’s NIH budget increased substantially). Preeminence as a medical center is synonymous with excellence in teaching, patient care and life-changing research. The health sciences schools at VCU and the clinical programs have a continuing reputation of excellence in teaching and patient care; however, our reputation as an academic medical center with a growing and expanding research program has declined. Correcting this must be a high priority for VCU 2020.

Virginia’s population has increased 7 percent from 2000 to 2004 while many other states have remained stable or lost population. Virginia and the Richmond area have a substantial percentage of medically underserved and those suffering disproportionately from manageable acute and chronic disease. There is no single academic institution in the state serving in a leadership role in research, education and public policy on these problems. VCU is well positioned to assume this role. VCU’s
history of community outreach and position as a recognized leader in health care, creative management of indigent care and health policy research — combined with its geographic location and, now, a new School of Public Health — offer the resources to make a true difference in the health of the citizens of the commonwealth.

There are exciting opportunities in the use of technology and innovative curriculum and learning models that must be applied to health sciences education. Clinical simulation, robotics, human simulation, virtual reality and distance-education technology come to mind as one imagines health sciences education in 2020. To keep pace with the expanding knowledge base and to still provide faculty time for the critical one-on-one clinical mentoring that is key to training health care professionals, VCU must incorporate innovative curricula and learning methods into its health sciences programs. Students must become highly proficient with searching for and filtering clinical information on which to base patient care. If this charge were not a sufficient challenge by it own merits, the need to increase the interdisciplinary nature of the education by removing traditional silos between programs is a vision now and will be a reality by 2020. We must prepare now for the training of the interdisciplinary health care team members.

Cancer rates are on the rise with malignant neoplasms the second leading cause of death in Virginia and in the U.S. The VCU Massey Cancer Center is a National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center and plays an important role in the community and region, and serves to influence standards of cancer prevention and treatment. Importantly, all NCI-designated cancer centers make significant contributions to advances in cancer research that are key to understanding, preventing and treating this disease.

After exhaustive review of cancer centers’ programs, the NCI makes two types of designations: “Cancer Center” or “Comprehensive Cancer Center.” Until recently, the NCI offered a middle category called “Clinical,” which is the designation that Massey has held for many years. This designation signifies that the center’s agenda is primarily focused on basic research, population sciences or clinical research, or any two of those three components. The Comprehensive Cancer Center is the most prestigious designation and opens more avenues for federal and private funding. Comprehensive Cancer Centers demonstrate integrated research activities across laboratory, clinical and population-based research. In addition, they offer extensive cancer-related activities such as outreach, education and information dissemination.
Massey will open a new 80,000-square-foot research facility in 2006, which will provide more state-of-the-art laboratories and a modular environment designed to encourage researchers from various programs to collaborate. With its niche in translational research (bringing discoveries rapidly from the laboratory to the patient bedside), the building’s proximity to the hospital and Massey’s oncology clinics will foster a more integrated environment to facilitate bringing research and clinical trials to patients.

VCU has close ties with the local and state health departments and would be expected to serve in a major role in the event of terrorist attack or natural disaster. Recent success in receiving funding to train first responders and health care workers in Basic Disaster Life Support bolster our efforts in public health safety. Parallel with this effort is the new degree program in homeland security and emergency preparedness and the new School of Public Health, which plans emphasis on bioterrorism. It is only logical that VCU coordinate its efforts in research and training in emergency preparedness to further our strengths in these areas.

Another major initiative in which VCU partners with state and regional public health officials is in women’s health. The VCU Institute for Women’s Health is one of 21 nationally designated Centers of Excellence— a designation earned through exceptional achievements over the past 12 years in clinical care, research, community outreach, professional education and leadership training. VCU faculty members have received international recognition of their preeminence in the field through their appointment as editor and deputy editor of the Journal of Women’s Health. More than 120 VCU faculty members from all schools and the college actively support the institute’s mission, and an external Steering Committee and a Community Advisory Board provide further oversight and integration with local, state and regional activities. Recognizing the importance of and potential for significant growth in this area, the Office of Research has developed plans for a Women’s Health Research Support Core. VCU is a national leader in women’s health, and this achievement must be institutionalized within and embraced throughout the entire University.

Initiative 1:
The VCU Medical Center should achieve national recognition for growth of biomedical science, translational and clinical research by supporting the implementation of the VCU School of Medicine’s Strategic Plan as well as development of the research enterprise in the schools of Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy and Public Health.
Initiative 2:
Support the development of VCU as the leading institution in Virginia working to solve the disparities in the health of its citizens through public health community outreach and recruitment of minority and disadvantaged students and faculty into the health sciences.

Initiative 3:
Provide the infrastructure for innovative health sciences curricula and student-centered learning to include development of a core interdisciplinary approach to training health care professionals, clinical and human simulation, evidence-based patient care, bioinformatics and knowledge-based health care, integrated biomedical science instruction, and community-based education.

Initiative 4:
The Massey Cancer Center should achieve NCI comprehensive status by 2010.

Initiative 5:
Become the recognized academic authority in Virginia on public health and safety and emergency preparedness as a resource for homeland security through local, state, federal and global collaborations.

Initiative 6:
Institute a process of systematic, periodic review of all VCU research centers and institutes to assess their state, effectiveness and alignment with the overall goals of the University, and to recommend actions to improve centers and institutes and the institution.

Initiative 7:
Support the development of an independent School of Public Health to make the VCU Medical Center a fully comprehensive academic medical center.

Initiative 8:
Continue to expand education, research and patient care services throughout the commonwealth. Current examples include medical and pharmacy students at the Northern Virginia Campus at INOVA Health System, and allied health students at the Medical Education Center of Northern Virginia Community College and at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.
Initiative 9:  
In collaboration with other VCU initiatives to improve administrative efficiency, develop and implement a comprehensive space management plan for the MCV Campus based on analyses of utilization metrics and setting priorities for work that must remain on campus versus work that may occur at off-campus sites.

Initiative 10:  
As a critical component of the VCU Medical Center, the VCU Health System has embarked on a multiyear strategic plan. The major components of this plan are as follows:

• Focus investment on programs that offer strategic potential, meet forecasts of demand and support the academic purpose of the institution. Recruitment of physicians, staff and technology to broaden the clinical and research base of the institution is an essential element of these investments.
• Develop short- and long-term approaches to meeting the workforce needs, including the retention and recruitment of physicians, nurses, technical staff and development of the emerging workforce.
• Invest in information technology.
• Continue pursuit of improvements in clinical and service quality.
• Maximize utilization of existing staff and facilities.
• Begin the phased, long-term redevelopment of the clinical facilities supporting health system operations.
• Secure the long-term financial stability of the health system.

Theme V: Maintain VCU as a model for university-community partnerships.

VCU was founded in 1968 with a mission unique among Virginia’s public colleges and universities. The rationale for the new university was abundantly clear in the Wayne Commission Report. What was said then remains relevant to this day. The commission noted,

It has become increasingly apparent that the conditions prevailing in our urban centers present many of our most critical national, state and local problems. However we may view the social, political or economic issues facing our nation today, we are aware that our future depends in large part upon the wisdom with which we attack and solve the dilemmas of our ... cities. ...  

... Rarely has so challenging an opportunity to combine the free pursuit of knowledge in its own right with the ready availability of that knowledge for the enlightenment and enrichment of the larger community of which it is a part been presented to an institution of higher education.

(Report of the Commission to Plan for the Establishment of a Proposed State-Supported University in the Richmond Metropolitan Area)
As recognized in the Wayne Commission Report, the proximity of VCU to its community creates unique learning, scholarship and clinical service learning opportunities for its students, faculty and staff. As a campus without walls, VCU has embarked upon the process of seamlessly integrating with its community.

Great universities are characterized by a strong sense of community. Staff, administrators and faculty working together with a unified sense of purpose and a shared vision for the University will engage the community. The diversity of faculty, staff and administrators at VCU (diversity of roles as well as racial, ethnic and religious diversity) is one of VCU’s strengths.

VCU’s strengths as a university and its essential character allow the University to extrapolate and apply its mission to proximal and distal communities. Also, VCU reflects a microcosm of the world in the heart of Richmond with a far-ranging diversity of students, faculty and staff.

VCU excels in community engagement areas; its strengths include:

• The ability to address community needs with interdisciplinary collaboration due to the breadth of academic and health care expertise.
• The dedication of life sciences resources to the economic landscape of the region through initiatives such as the establishment of the Virginia BioTechnology Research Park.
• A history of establishing partnerships with the community in response to community-identified needs, such as the Carver-VCU Partnership, the Adcenter and Virginia Coordinated Care for the Uninsured.
• A respected position among community opinion leaders for its active participation in urban and metropolitan issues.
• A president who is actively engaged in the economic development of the commonwealth through his leadership roles in the Richmond Chamber of Commerce and Richmond Renaissance, and serves as a model for university-community partnerships.
• Collaboration between VCU and state agencies on matters affecting the community, such as the VCU School of Social Work’s Virginia Institute for Social Services Training Activities, and the VCU School of Education’s Partnership for People with Disabilities and the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.
• Membership in national organizations of urban- and metropolitan-serving universities that allows VCU to learn from peers and to contribute to their knowledge.
• A strong network of affiliated private foundations that link the University to its external communities in a powerful way.
VCU must now build on these strengths by marshalling and enhancing its intellectual resources, forging linkages and extending VCU’s impact by totally assimilating community engagement into its university culture.

Initiative 1:
Enhance and extend a culture of community engagement within all campus units by:
- Drawing from the strength of diversity of the faculty, staff, administrators and students to develop community engagement initiatives that are reflective of the community.
- Restructuring and elevating an infrastructure that facilitates and supports University-community partnerships.
- Providing faculty and professional development in community-based research and learning methods.
- Integrating community-based learning into the undergraduate and graduate curricula.
- Recognizing faculty and staff for community engagement activities.
- Establishing an agenda for University-community partnerships that addresses community-identified needs.
- Creating mechanisms for soliciting community input and disseminating knowledge and opportunities.
- Seeking resources from multiple sources to support community-based initiatives.
- Creating a seamless educational experience for P-12 students.
- Being the regions’ institution of choice for lifelong learning opportunities.

As a university residing in the heart of Virginia’s capital city, VCU and its community partners create a unique synergy of collaborative research, learning and service aligned with the community’s challenges, opportunities and needs. Through University-community partnerships, scholarship generates knowledge with local, national and global application; learning instills a commitment to civic responsibility; and service ensures a vibrant quality of life for the Richmond region.

Initiative 2:
Work collaboratively with VCU’s community to be a catalyst to enhance access and improve outcomes for health care for the population of Central Virginia by:
- Integrating health care workforce strategies into the strategic planning activities of each school and the college.
- Serving as a leader in defining state policy regarding the design of health care access strategies for the uninsured and underinsured.
- Developing an infrastructure that coordinates the activities of existing and future outreach initiatives, incorporating the core value of community collaboration into its culture.
• Developing strategies for each school, the college and the health system to enhance the diversity of its student population, faculty, staff and health care workforce to be more reflective of the community in which it resides.
• Serving as an adviser on public policy to local and state governments through the new VCU School of Public Health.

VCU is among an elite group of universities that house an academic medical center within their organizational structure. VCU also is among a select group that maintains the full complement of training programs in the fields of health sciences. The inner-city location of the medical center provides an opportunity to integrate the cultural, racial and economic diversity of the Greater Richmond community into the academic and health care settings.

Initiative 3: VCU will continue its ongoing efforts to develop collaborations between businesses, government agencies, communities and higher education institutions in the Richmond metroplex and throughout the I-64 Corridor between Richmond and Tidewater and throughout the commonwealth.

Implementation and Assessment

The VCU 2020 Strategic Planning Commission recognizes the wisdom of its predecessors, who noted that:

The purpose of strategic planning is to establish the vision for the University and to identify initiatives to achieve that vision. It is a means by which the University builds consensus about its direction and future, identifies actions, coordinates decision making and focuses resources. Implementing a strategic plan involves making hard choices among important initiatives, setting priorities, identifying or reallocating resources, holding people accountable for carrying out initiatives, assessing results, and regularly communicating progress to the University community. The success of strategic planning rests on the success of implementation planning.²

Several of the initiatives embraced in this strategic plan relate directly to the University’s ongoing relationship with and commitments to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, our accrediting body, through our approved Quality Enhancement Plan. As such, a ready mechanism for their assessment is provided through our normal

reporting requirements and through the reaffirmation of accreditation process.

Several key initiatives of this strategic plan are intended to assure fidelity to and progress on the University’s Quality Enhancement Plan (e.g., initiatives 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 under Theme II), and the provost and vice president for academic affairs clearly has responsibility in these areas.

Equally clearly, other initiatives central to this strategic plan are primarily the responsibility of the vice president for health sciences (e.g., initiatives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 under Theme IV). But many of the initiatives needed to achieve the University’s vision for 2020 will require the active cooperation of both academic vice presidents, and the active participation of many offices throughout the institution.

The unit proposed under Initiative 2 of Theme I will be charged with oversight of the administrative implementation of this strategic plan, and will establish an oversight process for the ongoing evaluation of strategic initiatives. This unit will be charged with advising the vice presidents on budgetary requirements, assisting in the setting of priorities, and setting and monitoring progress toward goals.

The Strategic Planning Commission recognizes that 15 years is a very long strategic planning horizon, and urges that the University establish and maintain a mechanism that assures fidelity to the strategic plan as the University’s growth and development is articulated and implemented through the budgeting process, through the capital planning process and through capital campaigns. In assuring fidelity to the strategic plan, VCU must make decisions about resource allocation in light of both funding opportunities and constraints and with regard to the impact of those decisions.

Equally importantly, VCU must establish and maintain a mechanism that provides for the plan’s assessment and adjustment in light of what surely will be a changing financial, political and competitive higher education environment over the next decade and a half.

Because of the recent budgetary crisis in the commonwealth, the University’s Executive Budget Committee has not been fully utilized for the past few years. However, the charge to this University-wide committee always has involved assuring fidelity to the University’s strategic planning activities:
The Executive Budget Committee concentrates on University-wide strategies, priorities and financial allocations. The University budgetary process defines the major directions for the institution on an annual basis. A Strategic Plan for the Future of Virginia Commonwealth University Phase II is the coherent document that is utilized to guide budget development and the University’s Mission and Goal Statement provides a comprehensive and workable context for the budgetary process.³

The composition of this committee is ideal for both needed purposes: to provide an ongoing mechanism for assuring fidelity to the strategic plan, as well as for assuring University-wide assessment and adjustment to that plan on a regular basis.⁴ Accordingly, the provost and vice president for academic affairs will assure that this is the principal activity of the Executive Budget Committee, which may be renamed for the purpose.

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³ Operating Guidelines for the Executive Budget Committee (www.vcu.edu/provost/acadadmin/ebc_guidelines.html)
⁴ Voting members (all appointed by the president) include the seven vice presidents, two deans (one from each campus), four faculty members (one from each campus, two at-large representatives), two members of the classified staff and two students. Five ex-officio (nonvoting) members include the associate vice provost for finance, the associate vice president for finance and administration, the associate vice president for health sciences, the director of budget and resource analysis, and the vice provost for student affairs and enrollment services.
Co-Chair’s Message

In nearly two years and more than 125 meetings with Virginia Commonwealth University students, staff, faculty and administrators, as well as community members and business leaders, we have reached an amazing and exciting juncture in our history: the development of VCU 2020 Vision for Excellence.

We have taken careful and deliberate efforts to listen to and consider all feedback in the most equitable way. In September 2004, we launched a Web site to host this living document and its evolution, and once again we invited the community to submit customized feedback — this time electronically.

The commitment and energy of everyone involved has been inspiring, and action is underway to implement the plan. Every initiative has been assigned to specific individuals or offices, and already the execution of this plan has become part of the budgeting and decision-making process at VCU. Funding for the strategic initiatives will come from existing resources, internal reallocation, new funds from the state and increased philanthropic provisions. By the year 2010, we hope to have achieved two-thirds of the strategic plan’s initiatives. As we ambitiously work toward our strategic goals, we encourage you to stay involved. We will continue to solicit your feedback and keep you abreast of our progress through correspondence and updates posted to the VCU 2020 Web site, www.vcu.edu/vcu2020.

We look forward to continuing this collaborative exercise as we roll up our sleeves and tackle some of the most important tasks that will shape the VCU of our future.

Cordialy,

Stephen D. Gottfredson
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Sheldon M. Retchin
Vice President for Health Sciences and Chief Executive Officer of the VCU Health System