University College Strategic Plan: *Supporting Faculty and Students for Interdisciplinary Success*

Recalibrated in response to VCU Quest 2028: One VCU Together We Transform[1]

University College Mission Statement

University College empowers all VCU students to think critically and practice civic responsibility by promoting agency, academic success, career achievement, lifelong learning, and active engagement in a diverse society. University College values our faculty and staff who dedicate their time and energy to this work.

University College Vision Statement

University College will be an exemplar for high-impact, scalable educational practices that lead to success for all students by leveraging the first-year experience, interdisciplinary approaches, inclusive pedagogy, and community engagement.

University College Strategic Plan Themes

Diversity Drives Excellence--The VCU Strategic Plan, [Quest 2028: One VCU Together We Transform](), states that VCU will "[c]hampion diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do and advance a conscientious drive to support a climate where excellence and success for all people are valued and differences are celebrated."

The University College is committed to this value, and to ensuring that all of our students, staff, and faculty have the resources needed to thrive. Like *Quest 2028*, University College also weaves this commitment throughout our strategic plan because "it is foundational to the success and excellence of our students, faculty and staff" (Quest 2028, p. 5).

Student Success--University College is committed to the success of all VCU undergraduate students. It is essential that all programs within University College actively engage our students in courses and programming that foregrounds inquiry, discovery, innovation, experiential learning, civic engagement and creative expression

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[1] Strategic Plan Recalibration Committee, 2022-23: Mariah Crilley, Andrew Marx, Constance Relihan, Kirk Richardson, Stephanie Rizzi

to prepare them for the future of work. We recognize that in order for students to be successful, their faculty must have the resources needed to support their professional development. Those resources include the pedagogical conditions that promote learning, including small-sized classes taught by full-time faculty.

Pedagogical Innovation--As the entry point for the majority of first-year students through the Focused Inquiry (FI) program and the home to the Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) Program, the VCU Common Book Program, and the Transform Living-Learning Program, it is essential that University College be dedicated to developing innovative pedagogy that will engage our students in active, experiential, interdisciplinary, and civically-engaged learning that prepares them to be professionally successful citizens. The subject matter of University College classes emphasizes the transferable skills that employers seek and that form the foundation of a thoughtful general education program as well as an interdisciplinary education. University College faculty commit to continuous emphasis on developing and sharing innovative pedagogies.

Community Engagement & Experiential Learning--Quest 2028 says VCU will, "[d]eliver on our commitment to solving social and health inequities in partnership with Communities" (p. 8), and University College is equally determined to support this commitment. Our programs and faculty aim to provide students with opportunities beyond the traditional classroom setting. Through experiential, community-centered opportunities, University College programs strengthen our students' civic engagement while helping them earn the hands-on experiences they will need in order to make the transition to their professional post-graduation lives.

Theme 1: Diversity Driving Excellence

Goal 1 (DDE1): Nurture a culture and climate within University College (UC) that is diverse, inclusive, equitable and engaged where all faculty can thrive.

Strategies
- Regularly survey current faculty to determine what they need to thrive professionally and determine strategies to address evolving requests.
- Periodically check in with faculty from underrepresented groups and educate faculty at-large on issues they face.
- Create a robust faculty mentorship program for both new and continuing faculty to include pairing underrepresented faculty with mentors who are specifically trained to support them.
- Expand yearly work plan goal setting to include three/six-year prep, practice, and service goals in order to create pipelines for leadership development for all faculty..
- Increase faculty compensation to national averages.
- Bring UC faculty teaching loads in line with recommendations from 2019 Focused Inquiry external review and best practices.

Expected Outcomes
- UC faculty and staff members report a strong sense of belonging and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully navigate and lead a diverse world.
- UC faculty of color report that they feel they have a voice in departmental decisions and have contributed meaningfully to the college's shape and direction.
- All UC faculty have access to career development and mentorship opportunities.
- Underrepresented minority faculty will increase participation in UC leadership.
- Staff at all levels—including the executive and management levels—reflects the rich diversity of the national and local talent pools
- UC faculty and staff more closely represents the racial diversity of VCU students.
- Retention of underrepresented minority faculty will significantly increase.

Metrics
- Biannual climate satisfaction survey results from IExcel
- Results from UC-designed surveys
- Responses to feedback forms
- Level of participation in the mentorship program (e.g., # of participants, degree of sustained participation for individual participants)
- Work plan goal-setting framework
- Retention rates for faculty of color
- Number of faculty of color serving in leadership opportunities

Goal 2 (DDE 2): Implement an organizational infrastructure to support, sustain and scale DEI initiatives that infuses them into curriculum, scholarship, and practice.

Strategies

- Conduct a periodic audit of policies and practices to ensure they are equitable and inclusive.
- Provide more opportunities for ongoing, small group, or anonymous feedback on individual departmental or college initiatives, curricula, programs, and services.
- Require research, training, or experience in diversity and inclusion as a preferred qualification for hiring.
- Ensure that classrooms and Common Book programming present materials, resources, and experiences that expose students to diverse viewpoints.
- Broaden the preferred qualifications for teaching experience to accommodate more diverse applicant pools.
- Create a Faculty Director for Diversity and Inclusion within the college to develop programming, create networks for people of color, and serve as a liaison between the Department Chair or Directors and faculty of color.
- Develop capacity within UC to collect student success data to increase our ability to undertake assessment strategies that will support DEI initiatives and to communicate findings to faculty and the wider university." .

Expected Outcomes

- UC devotes the leadership and resources to sustain and enhance equity, inclusion, and diversity at VCU.
- A greater number of UC faculty and staff have expertise (research, training, experience) in diversity and inclusion.
- Faculty are better prepared for difficult but necessary conversations on systemic racism, white supremacy, and economic inequity.
- Classroom environments in which students of color feel more empowered to speak their minds and advocate for change.
- Increased recognition by faculty of issues directly impacting students, and enhanced empathy by students for communities with which they do not directly identify.

Possible Metrics

- Percent of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color----classification based on demographic data collected by HR) faculty and staff, including new BIPOC faculty hires[2]
- Percent of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff,[3] including new LGBTQ+ faculty hires
- Areas of faculty expertise
- Quantitative and qualitative data from UC-designed student surveys, focus groups, and interviews

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[2] In striving to make UC a place where faculty and staff of all kinds (background, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, age, class, etc.) want to work, no groups are excluded. The strategies and initiatives expressed here are a direct reflection of the lack of Black and Latinx employees in UC as identified by the Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness, and Success.

[3] This information is not collected upon application or hire. This information, if provided, would be on a voluntary basis.

- FI and IDS course evaluations,[4] including responses to questions posed specifically on inequality and racial justice
- Feedback from UC classroom observations
- Wider recognition of UC's innovative approaches to brave/safer spaces conversations
- Commission an external review within 5 years and directly solicit feedback on organizational infrastructure and DEI practices.

Goal 3 (DDE3): Create initiatives and programming that are grounded in scholarship and evidence-based best practices in the field of DEI.

Strategies
- Train more faculty as Recruitment Inclusive Champions (RICs).
- Engage in direct recruitment of diverse faculty using "intentional, pre-search recruitment strategies," like "reaching out to diverse chapters or caucuses in relevant professional associations in their disciplines" and doctoral departments at HBCUs (Actively Seeking Diverse Faculty).
- Provide bias, quality, and rigor recalibration for members of the faculty search committee before the recruitment process (Actively Seeking Diverse Faculty).
- Charge the Council for Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Change to serve University College as an action-oriented group.
- Offer opportunities for professional development related to DEI topics, led by internal and external experts.

Expected Outcomes
- Diversity of UC faculty
- Increased output of scholarship of teaching and learning related to diversity and inclusion.
- Deeper UC faculty awareness of DEI best practices

Metrics
- The composition of the application pools as compared to national averages in relevant fields
- Percent of budget devoted to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Number and percent of faculty development opportunities that focus on DEI related topics
- Percent of BIPOC faculty and staff, including new BIPOC faculty hires
- Percent of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff (based on voluntary self-disclosures) including new LGBTQ+ faculty hires

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[4] Wherever in this document a reference is made to using student evaluations of teaching as a metric, it should be understood that research has documented the limitations of such data. Student course evaluations tend to be biased against faculty who teach required general education courses, against faculty of color, female faculty, and queer faculty. Nonetheless, if used cautiously and intentionally, the results of teaching effectiveness surveys may provide some useful information that can supplement data from other sources.

Theme II: Student Success

Goal 1 (SS1): Ensure that all students enrolled in UC programs engage in inquiry, discovery, innovation, experiential learning, civic engagement and creative expression to prepare them for the future of work.
Strategies
- Continue to develop innovative IDS pathways that promote student agency, flexibility, and career success.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with units across campus to provide educational opportunities for IDS students.
- Conduct robust assessment of all courses to ensure that students are being provided with opportunities for engaged, active learning.
- Strengthen awareness of how the Interdisciplinary Career Readiness Skills (ICS) minor can serve students and professional development.
- Charge a committee to research and develop new interdisciplinary programs.
- Ensure that all UC courses maintain a minimum REAL 2 designation.

Expected Outcomes
- Development of new IDS pathways in collaboration with other units across campus
- Increased enrollment numbers in the IDS program
- All UC courses will offer students the opportunity to partake in engaged, active learning
- Growth in the ICS minor
- New interdisciplinary programs
- All UC courses have at least a REAL 2 designation

Metrics
- Number of IDS pathways
- Number of IDS majors
- Number of promotional materials & other outreach efforts related to ICS minor
- Number of contacts about ICS minor
- Number of ICS minors
- Number of courses with REAL 2 designation or higher
- Number of service-learning sections
- Number of students in service-learning sections

Goal 2 (SS2): Significantly reduce the gaps in the success rates for students enrolled in UC courses & programs, ensuring that we provide equitable instruction to all students, regardless of their demographic or economic background.
Strategies
- Develop assessment measures to identify equity gaps in retention, graduation, and academic success & implement changes based on assessment findings.
- Provide academic support that promotes equity for all students.

- Develop opportunities and programming that are equitable for all students and support students' professional development and belonging.
- Seek student input on curricular revision and innovation through surveys, focus groups, and a student/faculty advisory council.

Expected Outcomes
- Assessment strategies will disclose existing gaps in academic success, such as graduation rates, retention rates, student satisfaction with academic programs, and participation in co-curricular activities.
- Assessment strategies will identify student needs and critical factors that prevent academic success.
- Academic support and other programming throughout UC will address the needs identified by assessment strategies.
- Gaps in success will be eliminated or significantly reduced.
- Students will report that our programs provide them with beneficial social and professional opportunities.
- UC faculty will have a greater understanding of grading bias and how it functions.
- UC curricula will be better tailored to student needs.

Metrics
- First- to second-year retention rates by demographic group
- Graduation rates in IDS by demographic group
- Student evaluations
- Creation of new courses that promote student academic success
- Participation in new courses that promote student academic success
- Number of new programming initiatives
- Level of participation in student programming (e.g., # of participants, degree of sustained participation for individual participants)
- Results from surveys, interviews, and focus groups assessing student response to programming
- Co-curricular REAL Designated Activities
- Faculty evaluations of training on grading bias
- Number of students providing input on curriculum

Goal 3 (SS3): Foster faculty career growth and satisfaction for student success
Strategies
- Seek external funding to provide for course releases or sabbaticals for professional development pursuits, including research supporting the college's teaching mission and participation in sustained programming related to teaching.
- Incentivize participation in professional organizations most relevant to UC's programs, including CCCC, NCTE, AIS, AAC&U, AGLS, etc.
- Reduce the UC faculty teaching load to 3/3 to allow faculty the opportunity to engage in professional development opportunities and to collaborate with colleagues.

- Provide course releases or other remuneration for participation in collaborative pedagogy
- Expand opportunities for teaching collaboration both inside and outside of UC.

Expected Outcomes
- More faculty will be engaged in professional development (PD)
- Availability of sabbatical or course release for similarly demanding PD efforts
- Heightened attendance at conferences by a greater number of faculty
- Higher number of sustained programming, brown bags, symposia, and talks offered to faculty by faculty
- Increased recognition of the department through active participation in professional organizations and pedagogical publications
- Increased partnerships outside of UC

Metrics
- Number of PD opportunities to faculty by faculty
- The number of conferences attended
- Information provided in faculty end of year reports
- Information in faculty evaluations
- Number of faculty with membership, participation, or leadership in community and professional organizations
- Number of faculty publications and presentations, both locally and nationally
- Total number of courses taught by full-time faculty
- Number of partnerships with other units

Goal 4 (SS4): Intentionally create and foster learning environments where UC classrooms are safer spaces for frank discussions that support student engagement, success and sense of belonging.

Strategies
- Ensure that UC faculty are trained in best practices for facilitating safer/braver spaces for classroom discussion of racism, classism, and marginalization.
- Utilize the Common Book program each year as an opportunity to encourage in-depth conversations on race, encouraging consideration of systemic racism even when the Common Book is not explicitly about race.
- Present materials, resources, and programming that exposes students to diverse viewpoints.
- Help students learn to become productive citizens and community members by distinguishing between fact-based arguments and opinions to better participate in honest public discourse.

Expected Outcomes

- A classroom environment better prepared for difficult but necessary conversations on systemic racism, white supremacy, and economic inequality.
- A classroom environment where white students are more inclined to acknowledge their white privilege and to use their privilege to advocate for the rights of people of color.
- A classroom environment where students of color feel more empowered to speak their minds and advocate for change.
- Public recognition of UC as a university community where such conversations can and do take place.
- Enhanced student satisfaction in UC as a unit devoted to promoting social and political progress.
- Increased recognition of issues directly impacting students and enhanced empathy for communities with which students do not directly identify.
- Wider recognition of UC's innovative approaches to brave/safer spaces conversations
- Increased opportunities for engaging with diverse viewpoints.
- A classroom environment & curriculum that enables students to understand and engage in argument.

Metrics
- Quantitative and qualitative data from UC-designed student surveys, focus groups, and interviews
- FI and IDS course evaluations, including responses to questions posed specifically on UC's approaches to discussions of inequality and racial justice
- Feedback from UC classroom observations
- Press references to UC's commitment to safer spaces and honest conversations
- Number of professional development opportunities related to facilitating safer spaces and honest conversations
- Number of perspectives and identities included in UC course materials

Goal 5 (SS5): UC will increase the scholarship funds available for Interdisciplinary Studies majors and other students engaged in UC programs.

Strategies
- Identify sources of funding, including grants, fellowships, and other opportunities, to support UC students.
- Enhance relationships with IDS alumni.
- Strengthen relationships with FI UTA alumni.
- Strengthen the relationship between the IDS Program and the National Scholarship Office.
- Increase UC's donor base.
- Take advantage of central development resources.

Expected Outcomes
- Increased tuition scholarship opportunities for IDSs majors.
- Increased scholarship opportunities for FI UTAs.
- Increased participation in VCU's undergraduate research and prestigious national scholarship programs.

- UC will have unit-specific media and other marketing materials to assist with donor solicitations.
- Increased scholarship funding available to UC students.
- Increased donations to and engagement with the IDS program and UC from IDS alumni.
- Increased donations to and engagement with the FI program and UC from VCU alumni who are former UTAs and FI students.

Metrics
- Increase in total funds awarded to BIS majors from UC
- Increase in total funds awarded to FI UTAs
- Number of BIS students participating in UROP program or applying for national scholarship programs
- Volume of marketing materials
- Website traffic
- Number of donors
- Amount of donated funds
- Number of alumni events
- Number of participants at alumni events
- Number of first-year IDS majors with scholarships

Theme III: Pedagogical Innovation

Goal 1 (PI1): UC will promote innovative experimentation in curriculum and pedagogy.
Strategies
- Broaden the range of modalities and formats used to deliver instruction, including hybrid, online, and alternative term courses.
- Encourage faculty to participate in programming sponsored by CTLE and VCU Online to support online/hybrid pedagogy and universal design.
- Incentivize participation in pilot programs, including collaborative pilots, by offering course releases or other remuneration.
- Implement best practices for conducting and assessing curricular development.
- Create more opportunities to reflect critically on pedagogical innovation.
- Encourage and incentivize collaboration with faculty across campus.

Expected Outcomes
- UC will contribute to VCU's vision of itself as a hybrid university.
- Greater student satisfaction with online and hybrid courses within UC.
- Increased student success in online and hybrid courses within UC.
- Enhanced faculty preparation for teaching across greater ranges of courses and modalities.
- Robust offerings of updated and newly developed courses with state of the art curriculum design.
- Improved accessibility in online/hybrid courses.

- Expanded interdisciplinary course content through relationships with other schools and disciplines at VCU .

Metrics
- Data on balances of hybrid, online, and alternative term courses within each program
- Course evaluation and program assessment data disaggregated by modality and designation (e.g., pilot, term)
- Number of faculty with training certification in online and hybrid courses within each program
- Student evaluations for hybrid, online, and alternative term courses
- Student enrollment figures across all course variations
- D/F/W rates across all course variations
- Application of UDL rubrics

Goal 2 (PI2): UC will promote the dissemination of professional development experiences and pedagogical innovation among its faculty.
Strategies
- Maintain and strengthen opportunities for professional development activities
- Create a system for internal and public-facing reflection or presentation of individual professional development activities.
- Develop an interdisciplinary scholarship of teaching and learning website.

Expected Outcomes
- An online repository for materials created in connection with professional development activities.
- Greater opportunities in UC for face-to-face professional development emphasizing pedagogical innovation.
- New methods of disseminating and sharing professional development experiences.
- Incorporation into the classroom of ideas, techniques, and strategies obtained through professional development.

Metrics
- Cumulative data on of publications and presentations on the scholarship of teaching and learning and core skills by faculty and staff
- Number of dissemination and sharing documents (e.g., podcasts, videos, write-ups)
- Data on traffic for all online repositories and professional development platforms
- Data on trends based on faculty work plans and end of year reports documenting implementation of new ideas, techniques, and strategies

Goal 3 (PI3): Enhance UC's recognition on a national level among other first-year, general education and interdisciplinary studies programs.
Strategies
- Share our work and grow our web presence by enhancing the VCU Writes! website.
- Enhance social media presence.

- Strengthen the visibility of the VCU Common Book program as a comprehensive resource for other institutions using present and past common books.
- Host at least one conference that highlights one of UC's programs in the next five years.
- Support UC faculty and administrators in publishing and attending regional and national conferences in general education pedagogy, first-year experience/writing, and interdisciplinary studies.
- Document and publicize the impact of the teaching assistant programs.
- Highlight the innovative nature of the IDS program.

Expected Outcomes
- Increased engagement with our approaches by other gen ed, first-year, and interdisciplinary programs.
- Greater utilization of UC resources by educators not affiliated with the unit.
- Improved networking with faculty and programs outside VCU.
- Greater visibility of UC faculty in regional or national initiatives that reflect the mission of UC.
- Clear recognition of the achievements of UC programs in wider circles.

Metrics
- Website traffic, file downloads, and active links
- Citations of UC resources, programs, and achievements in outside educational materials
- Correspondence with outside faculty and units regarding UC innovation
- Outside adoption of Common Book Program resources
- Presentation and publication records

Goal 4 (PI4): Promote UC's mission and distinctiveness to the campus-wide community and prospective students

Strategies
- Create and apply new course subject codes to identify UC units as independent and distinct from UNIV programs outside University College (e.g., IDST, REAL, FCIQ).
- Publicize mission statements for UC and each of its units.
- Employ innovative recruitment methods to attract and retain students to our programs.
- Develop a sustainable recruitment plan for IDS.
- Maintain and strengthen partnerships with academic and non-academic units.

Expected Outcomes
- Student expectations of FI and IDS coursework will align better with the mission of UC.
- Student recognition of the IDS Program as a distinct major with its own pedagogical framework.
- A greater presence for UC in VCU's general education curriculum.
- Greater enrollment in IDS and Transform programs and elective courses.

Metrics
- Course drop rates

- Data on course enrollment delays
- Representation of UC in VCU ConnectEd in terms of courses and numbers of seats
- Survey data on student perceptions

Theme IV: Community Engagement & Experiential Learning

Goal 1 (CEEL1): Develop and foster experiential and integrative learning that encourages students to engage in transformational and mutually beneficial relationships with the VCU and Richmond communities.

Strategies
- Curate resources to support teaching students to be critical and active participants in a global society to work toward the common good.
- Designate a full-time faculty member in UC to help develop new community partnerships, maintain existing partnerships, and develop service projects for the Common Book and courses that are not S-L designated.
- Increase the number of service-learning classes offered in UC, including ConnectEd and IDS courses.
- Advertise service-learning options to students by increasing communication with advisors for incoming first-year students and students themselves.
- Require service-learning instructors and instructors engaged in community projects to participate in ongoing training on best practices for engaging with community partners.
- Provide scholarships for UC UTAs and SLTAs.
- Facilitate opportunities for UTAs and SLTAs to provide additional professional development opportunities for their students beyond their roles as UTAs and SLTAs in the classroom
- Promote the Interdisciplinary Career Readiness Skills (ICS) minor as a way for students to integrate their experiential learning into their professional development.

Expected Outcomes
- An increased ability to provide service opportunities and community project ideas for faculty and students who are not attached to service-learning designated courses, particularly in relation to Common Book programming.
- More students will register in service-learning courses due to the increased course offerings.
- Increased student satisfaction in service learning courses.
- Students will have greater understanding of the courses for which they enroll.
- An increased presence and recognition of service-learning and community-engaged work in the UC and beyond.
- Enhanced student relationships with community partners that could lead to potential internships or jobs, advocacy, or activism on behalf of the community-based organization or organizations working toward similar goals.
- Increased diversity in the UTA and SLTA program by removing financial barriers.
- Increased opportunities for integrative learning that prepares students for careers.

- An increased understanding of the extent student service-learning impacts community partners.
- An increase in conference participation and publications from UTAs and SLTAs.

Metrics
- Number of service-learning courses offered by program area and course number
- D/F/W rate for UC courses
- Student reflections on community-engaged work
- Percentage of UTAs and SLTAs for UC courses by demographic group
- Number of presentations and publications by UTAs and SLTAs
- Number of students enrolled in the ICS minor

Goal 2 (CEEL2): Collaborate with the larger Richmond community to develop innovative curricula and outreach efforts.

Strategies
- Coordinate with community colleges to create pathways to four-year degrees
- Market regionally to adults with college credit who never finished their degrees.
- Organize events with broad community engagement.
- Work with community partners to identify needs and goals for student engagement.

Expected Outcomes
- IDS pathways and courses meet the needs and desires of community college students.
- Increased enrollment and retention rates in the IDS program.
- Increased enrollment of adult learners.
- Increased recognition of UC within the larger Richmond region.
- Broader community engagement with UC events.
- Measurable improvements for community partners that better align with their goals and objectives.

Metrics
- Enrollment numbers in the IDS program
- Enrollment numbers in IDS pathways designed for community college transfer students
- Volume of transfer and readmit inquiries to the IDS program
- Number of IDS majors who have transferred from community colleges with an associates degree
- Participation and attendance rates in UC events and programs
- Coverage of UC community events in local publications (e.g., *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *Style Weekly, RVA Mag*)
- Feedback from community partners