

A Report on the Administrative Structure at Virginia Commonwealth University

By the
VCU Chapter of the AAUP

and

endorsed by the VCU Chapter of the United Campus Workers

Presented as written comments to the VCU Board of Visitors December 10, 2021

Executive Summary

Over the past two years, administrative growth at Virginia Commonwealth University has out-paced faculty growth while the number of instructional employees overall has remained unchanged. **For every four tenure track faculty members at VCU, there are five administrators.** This growth in executive administration correlates directly to eroded working conditions for all faculty, but particularly for the growing contingent faculty workforce. Instructors' working conditions are students' learning conditions, and the erosion of the former negatively impacts the latter. Only 33% of the instructional employees are tenured or tenure-track, which is a lower percentage of tenure-eligible faculty than all of VCU's VA peer institutions, as well as the majority of national peer and aspirational universities. Tenure-eligible faculty are typically the research-active faculty that drive the university's R1 ranking, attract students, and provide the relevant experiential learning opportunities that set VCU apart from other universities.

VCU has developed an inefficient and expensive administrative overhead that is sapping cash flow, threatening the bond rating, and mismanaging student tuition and taxpayer dollars.

As an institution, VCU is responding to the crisis in higher education in the least effective way possible—hiring more and more administrators and non-instructional employees—rather than investing in the core, intertwined missions of education and research.

If VCU is an institution for transformative innovation that can lead the reinvention of higher education, then let it not be hampered by the lack of tenure-track faculty. VCU's faculty are forward thinking and highly adaptable, as we have witnessed over the past year. We are dedicated to

providing our students, many of them first-generation college students, an excellent education and to engaging in research for the greater public good. For our institution to reach its full potential we must decrease the level of administration, increase the percentage of tenure-track faculty and provide them with the resources needed to maximize student success.

According to financial data reported to the National Center for Educational Statistics by VCU administration, over the past two years the increase in the administrative salaries has been covered almost entirely by a rise in student tuition revenue. Since 2019, the number of management employees has increased 9.6%. **Students are paying the price and they are going to look elsewhere if VCU does not correct its course.** Finance-savvy students are not going to pay more and more for a VCU education—which is already among the costliest in the Commonwealth—when that additional revenue is being spent on management and administration, rather than being invested directly into their education.

The VCU Chapter of the AAUP is requesting that the VCU Board of Visitors immediately begin a comprehensive review of the administrative structure of VCU, as well as the structure of the instructional staff by an outside consulting group vetted by faculty. We believe this is essential for VCU to move to the next level and continue providing the best education possible for our students.

VCU Administrative structure is out of balance

An article published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities periodical peerReview in Fall 2002 explained that “Over-reliance on part-time and other ‘contingent’ instructional staff diminishes faculty involvement in undergraduate learning...such over-reliance particularly disadvantages the less-well-prepared entering and lower-division students in the non-elite institutions who most need more substantial faculty attention.” AAUP’s 2018 Data Snapshot of contingency in higher education shows that destabilization of the faculty workforce through conversion of instructional labor to contingent positions has continued unabated, eroding the working conditions of our instructional workforce nationally. Stabilizing and protecting the employment status of adjunct and term faculty would rectify this concern by

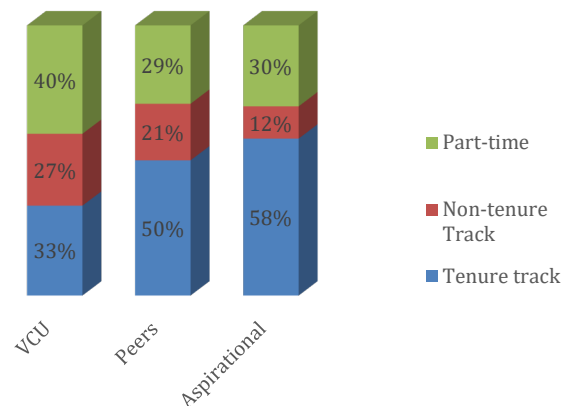
allowing those faculty to focus their attention on students rather than on their precarious employment status.

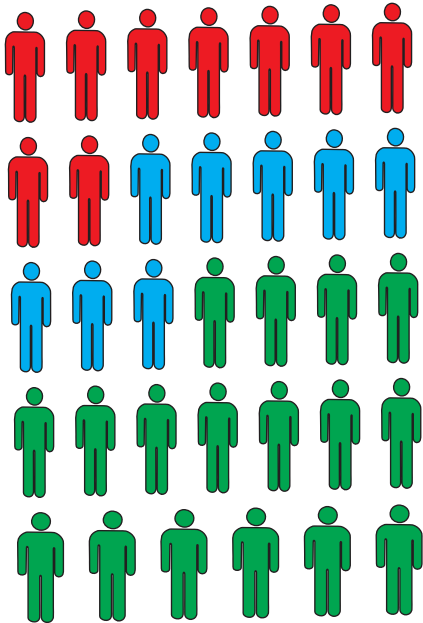
At VCU, 23% of employees are instructional employees. The percentage of tenure-track faculty per total instructional employees is the lowest of any of our peer institutions.

Tenure track employees at an R1 university are those faculty who are afforded more capacity for active research. These research-active faculty are directly responsible for the increase seen in VCU research expenditures over the past two years which, in turn, attracts students to our programs. **The ratio of tenured or tenure-track faculty to total instructional employees directly impacts program quality.** Tenured/tenure-track research faculty provide valuable hands-on research experiences to students, in line with

VCU’s commitment to the relevant, experiential, and applied learning initiative (REAL). Stable working conditions for full-time, tenure track faculty allows those faculty to focus our curriculum on addressing real world problems and experiential opportunities, not only within research fields, but also through possibilities for interdisciplinary convergence research and problem-based learning as outlined within VCU’s strategic vision. Active tenured/tenure-track research faculty are able to develop strong professional networks and community ties through their work and these connections help students secure professional opportunities. **In a world where it increasingly matters who you know (and not just what skills you’ve been credentialed in), providing these networked connections is essential to helping our students succeed in this challenging and dynamic economy.**

Instructional Employees Breakdown





There are nine management for eight tenure-track and 17 non-tenure track employees.

Key Information

At VCU, 23% of employees are instructional employees. **The percentage of tenure-track faculty per total instructional employees is the lowest of any of our peer institutions.** Only 33% of the instructional employees at VCU are tenured or tenure-track employees, compared to 50% and 58% at our peer and aspirational peer institutions, respectively.

At VCU, 15% of all employees are categorized as management. **This is twice the percentage of our peer institutions.**

VCU’s lack of tenure-track faculty is apparent on a per-student basis. **Simply, there are substantially fewer tenured and tenure-track faculty at VCU than at our peer institutions.** VCU has 36.3 full-time students per tenure-track faculty member. This is a worse ratio than peer institutions, both within the Commonwealth and nationally. At Virginia

peer institutions, the average ratio is 25.5:1, while at our national peer institutions it is 32.8:1. Only 55% of VCU’s full-time instructional employees are tenured or tenure-track faculty, as

	Student to Tenure Track Faculty Ratio	Tenure Track Faculty to Administration Ratio	Percentage Instructional Employees on the Tenure Track
VCU	36.3 : 1	0.82	33%
Virginia Peers	25.5 : 1	5.5	56%
Peer	32.8 : 1	1.7	43%
Aspirational Peers	34 : 1	2.1	55%



At VCU in 2020, Every student contributes \$3398 of their tuition to management employee salaries

compared to UVA and VA Tech at 75% and GMU at 65%. This could be one reason that those institutions gained students last year while VCU lost students.

The percentage of instructional faculty is below our peers

At VCU there are 2.5 instructional employees per every management employee. This stands in sharp contrast to our peer institutions, where there are 3.8 instructional employees per management employee—54% more. VCU's aspirational peer institutions have 3.9 such instructional employees, or 59% more.

Over 20% of all salary outlays are for managerial employees, while only 27% are for instructional staff. By comparison, VCU's Peer institutions typically spend on average 13% of all salary outlays on management employees and spend over 30% on instructional employees. To put this into financial perspective, in 2020 VCU spent a total of \$87M on 868 non-instructional management employees, compared to \$125M on 2133 full and part-time instructional employees responsible for conducting the educational and research mission of the university.

All too often, the low percentage of tenure-track faculty is defended as necessary to maintain favorable bond ratings with Moody's and S&P rating agencies. It is regularly suggested that a high percentage of tenured faculty negatively impacts the rating because it depresses operational cash flow. But upon examining the bond rating scorecard used by Moodys, it is not the percentage of tenure-track faculty that impact the bond rating per se, but rather committed salary outlays, which include those for administration contracts. At the Moody's-identified peer institutions, the instructional-to-management employee ratio is even larger at 5.3 instructional employees per management employee. Even the for-profit University of Phoenix has 4.7 instructional employees per management employee ratio. In contrast, the ratio of instructional employees to management at VCU is an abysmal 2.5-to-1.

In April 2017, the California state auditors examined administrative costs at the University of California system and found that the ten executives in the president's office were earning over \$3.7M. At VCU in 2020, the 14 individuals listed in the president's cabinet had combined salaries of over \$5.3M, while management salary outlays increased from \$55M in 2015 to over \$87M in 2020. The disproportionate number of management employees and the large amount of salaries for them reduces the success rates for our most vulnerable students and negatively impacts the faculty's ability to complete our educational mission. **As an institution, we are responding to the crisis in higher education by hiring more and more administrators and non-instructional employees, as opposed to focusing on our core, intertwined missions of education and research.**

When we look at just tenured/tenure-track faculty to administrators, VCU's ratio further drops to 0.81:1, or more than one administrator per every tenured or tenure-track faculty member.

Key Information

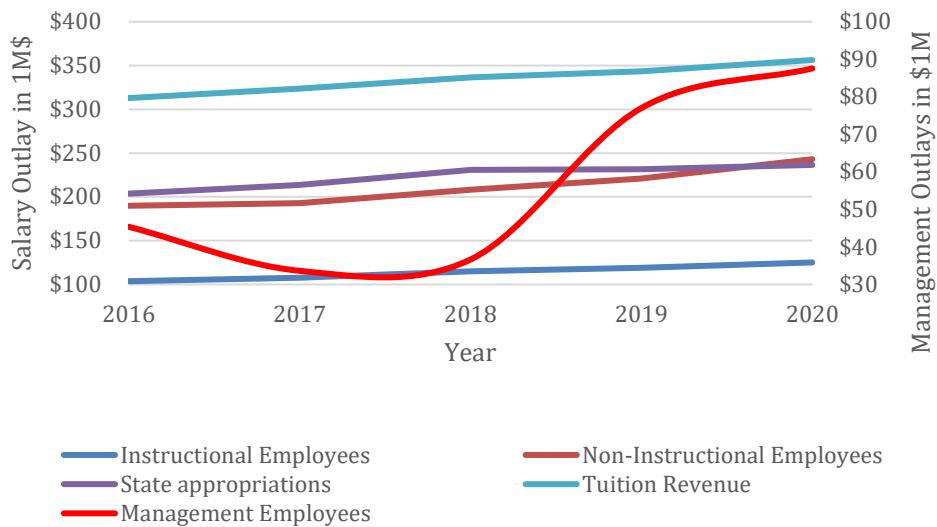
- Every student at VCU pays \$3398, or 27% of their tuition to management employees who do not directly contribute to the overall instruction.
- The most vulnerable students are those eligible for Pell Grants. The inflation-adjusted Pell Grant award has been almost flat at \$6195 since 2013. However, the overall salary outlays for management employees at VCU increased 31% from 2016 to 2020.
- From 2019 to 2020, revenue from tuition increased by \$13M while management salary outlays increased

by \$10.5M.

- Since 2015, VCU has seen the overall full-time student enrollment drop about 5% while the number of full-time instructional employees has remained unchanged. Since 2019, the number of management employees has increased 9.6%.
- According to data provided to the IPEDS system, in 2020 35% of all salary outlays were for 868 managerial employees, while only 45% of salary outlays were for the **entire body** of instructional employees.

VCU serves the Commonwealth by providing excellent educational opportunities to first-generation college students. Our mission states that we are an “urban public research institution dedicated to the success and well-being of our students.” **However, the choices made to expand executive, administrative, and managerial staff, and their compensation, have been paid for by our students, particularly our most financially challenged students who are disproportionately likely to be first-generation college students and students of color. This development puts our mission at risk.**

Key Financials since 2016



VCU and the National Conversation About College Price

- Benjamin Ginsberg, a professor of political science at the Johns Hopkins University has argued that universities would be better off with fewer administrators. The three-to-one ratio “makes a lot of sense,” Mr. Ginsberg said, because it would shift the staff balance in universities.
- Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity and a professor of economics at Ohio University (a VCU peer institution) during testimony to US senate budget committee in June 2014, said *“shifting the balance back toward faculty is key to keeping universities’ missions focused on teaching, as opposed to becoming too focused on other activities, like business development or sustainability efforts. “We need to get back to basics,”* said Mr. Vedder. The basics are “teaching and research,” he said, *“and we need to incentivize leaders of the universities to get rid of anything that’s outside of that.”*
- Part-time positions of one year or less make up the largest share of non-tenure track positions at all types of institutions, ranging from 19% of all faculty positions at public research institutions to 50% of all faculty positions at community colleges. The employment status of these non-tenure track contingent faculty is tenuous, allowing institutions to hire and relieve most of their contingent instructional staff relatively quickly over a short period of time. Their precarity is harmful for all faculty and for the capacity of programs to fulfill their missions to students, and stabilizing adjunct and term faculty should be considered a priority by providing better pay and longer contracts.
- Contingent faculty have substituted for tenure or tenure-track faculty in most types of institutions. While the addition of contingent faculty has outpaced the loss of tenure or tenure-track faculty at private bachelor’s and master’s institutions, **the rise in the use of contingent faculty has merely offset declines in tenure-line faculty at all other types of four-year institutions.** At public community colleges, the decrease in the number of tenure-line faculty surpassed the growth in the number of contingent faculty, resulting in a net loss of 3 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty per 1,000 FTE students.
- Colleges and universities with higher shares of contingent faculty also have higher shares of students at risk of noncompletion, particularly among private four-year institutions. Among private four-year colleges and universities, those with the largest shares of part-time students reported higher concentrations of contingent faculty. Likewise, private four-year institutions with the largest shares of Pell Grant recipients also reported higher concentrations of contingent faculty. Some evidence indicates that the intense workloads and high levels of precarity that affect adjuncts and other contingent faculty may also negatively affect student success outcomes (Bickerstaff & Chavarin, 2018). However, existing tenured faculty do not have the capacity to teach the course loads that contingent faculty currently cover and increasing course loads would further diminish positive student outcomes and compromise research productivity. Therefore, universities should rectify faculty precarity by offering longer and more robust contracts and benefits to their current contingent faculty members. Rather than running costly national searches for tenure-eligible positions, universities should seek to convert existing faculty from contingent to full time or tenure eligible.

Methodology

Publicly available data were obtained using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). IPEDS is an annual data collection distributed by the Postsecondary Branch of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a non-partisan center within the Institute of Education Sciences under the U.S. Department of Education. NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S. and other nations. IPEDS is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Institutions must complete the IPEDS surveys in eight areas: institutional characteristics; institutional prices; admissions; enrollment; student financial aid; degrees and certificates conferred; student persistence and success; and academic libraries, institutional, and human fiscal resources. These data are made available to

Data collected from the IPEDS surveys herein represent a direct statement of information provided to the NCES by VCU, without further interpretation. There were no changes made to employee categories, university revenues, or salary outlays as reported by VCU.

students and parents through the College Navigator college search Web site and to researchers and others through the IPEDS Data Center. To learn more about IPEDS Survey components, visit <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/survey-components>.

The completion of all IPEDS surveys is mandatory for institutions that participate in or are applicants for participation in any federal student financial aid program (such as Pell grants and federal student loans) authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 USC 1094, Section 487(a)(17) and 34 CFR 668.14(b)(19)).

Tuition, as reported to the IPEDS system, includes the average amount of money charged to students for instructional services. For this analysis, we concentrated on VCU's average in-state tuition.

Additional data were obtained via a Freedom of Information Act Request of the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management for the salary information of all state employees with salaries over \$50,000 per year at Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Virginia's Main Campus, and Virginia Tech. Salary information used from the IPEDS system are for full-time, non-medical, instructional staff, and include base salaries only – no supplements, overloads, or bonuses. Additional stipends for administrative, managerial, or other responsibilities are NOT included in the salary outlays data for instructional staff. The excluded medical staff is any staff employed by or staff working in the medical school. This also does not include staff employed by or employees working strictly in a hospital associated with a medical school, or those who work in health or allied health schools or departments such as dentistry, nursing, or dental hygiene unless the health or allied health schools or departments are affiliated with (housed in or under the authority of) the medical school.

Cash and Financial statements are publicly available from the September 2021 Board of Visitors meeting of the committee on finance and budget. Copies of the Moody's bond rating scorecards were obtained from Virginia Commonwealth University. Salary outlays were reported in the IPEDS human financial resources survey. The salary outlays used herein were for full-time non-medical instructional staff per academic year.

Data Used and Definitions

Institutions of higher education are required to report headcounts of graduate and undergraduate enrollment as well as staff numbers through the IPEDS system. Staff are classified in three general categories:

1. Instructional employees are those whose primary responsibility is instruction (i.e., faculty). For this analysis, the number of instructional employees does not take into account those faculty from the medical school whose primary responsibility is clinical or research. Instructional employees are broken down into full and part-time numbers as well as tenured, tenure track but not yet tenured, and non-tenure track numbers.
2. Executive/administrative/managerial employees are those whose primary responsibility is administration (i.e. deans, associate deans, vice presidents, etc.).
3. Non-instructional employees are those whose primary responsibility is university support through means other than teaching.

Selection of Peer institutions

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education classifies Virginia Commonwealth University as an R1: Doctoral University - Very High Research Activity. VCU is one of four Virginia institutions to earn an R1 classification. The selection of peer institutions was matched to those provided by VCU's Quest 2025 peer institutions, aspirational peers, and other Virginia R1 institutions. We routinely measure ourselves against these institutions to help track our progress toward VCU's strategic plan goals.

Peer Institutions

University of Cincinnati - Main Campus
University of Louisville
University of South Florida - Main Campus
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Aspirational Peer Institutions

University of California - Los Angeles
Florida State University
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities
University of Buffalo
The Ohio State University - Main Campus
University of Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh Campus

Virginia R1 Peer Institutions

University of Virginia
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
George Mason University

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Appendix 1: VCU data compared to the averages of our peers

Institution/ year 2020	Virginia Commonwealth University	AVERAGES	
		Among Quest 2025 and Virginia Peers	Among Aspirational peers
Total degrees awarded	7552	17444	12303
Total degree programs	156	321	253
Reported full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate enrollment	21177	44417	31499
Reported full-time equivalent (FTE) graduate enrollment	4586	12832	8260
Full-time equivalent fall enrollment	26707	57642	39862
Full-time instructional employees (excluding medical schools)	1278	2935	1923
Part-time instructional employees (excluding medical schools)	857	1200	823
Full-time non-instructional staff - number	3521	8244	7604
Instructional employees (excluding medical schools), faculty with tenure or on tenure track	708	2000	1411
Instructional employees (excluding medical schools), faculty not on tenure track	1425	2066	1151
Management - number	868	1133	942
Graduate assistants (excluding medical schools)	834	3757	2657

Institution/ year 2020	Virginia Commonwealth University	Among Quest 2025 and Virginia Peers	Among Aspirational peers
Total Instructional Employees salary outlays	\$ 125,127,494	\$ 330,939,524	\$ 244,012,714
Full-time non-instructional staff - outlays	\$ 243,016,365	\$ 546,065,817	\$ 513,420,206
Management - outlays	\$ 87,547,533	\$ 133,622,191	\$ 110,791,260
Total state appropriations	\$ 270,852,010	\$ 450,047,128	\$ 547,430,191
Revenue from Tuition and fees, after deducting discounts and allowances	\$ 356,255,280	\$ 840,120,259	\$ 614,568,725
In-state average tuition for full-time undergraduates	\$ 12,177	\$ 21,575	\$ 10,883
Out-of-state average tuition for full-time undergraduates	\$ 32,825	\$ 61,470	\$ 30,078

Appendix 2: VCU IPEDS data from 2016-2020

Survey year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total degrees awarded	7420	7588	7506	7379	7552
Full-time equivalent fall enrollment	27466	27490	27282	27399	26707
Full-time instructional employees, faculty tenured or on tenure track	680	686	708	727	707
Full-time instructional employees, faculty not on tenure track	510	527	536	557	569
Part-time instructional employees	857	883	912	874	857
Full-time non-instructional staff - number	3112	3122	3256	3392	3521
Graduate assistants (excluding medical schools)	836	867	887	834	834
Management - number	354	228	249	785	868
Salary outlays - total	\$ 103,702,659	\$ 107,700,428	\$ 115,009,234	\$ 118,890,899	\$ 125,127,494
Full-time non-instructional - outlays	\$ 189,851,894	\$ 192,646,252	\$ 208,272,816	\$ 221,085,795	\$ 243,016,365
Management - outlays	\$ 45,368,017	\$ 33,630,122	\$ 36,641,148	\$ 77,001,359	\$ 87,547,533
Total state appropriations	\$ 230,869,666	\$ 256,173,107	\$ 278,093,185	\$ 291,281,124	\$ 270,852,010
Core revenues, total dollars (GASB)	\$ 890,255,313	\$ 915,859,947	\$ 998,590,651	\$ 990,909,896	\$ 997,264,534
Core expenses, total dollars (GASB)	\$ 815,610,258	\$ 859,999,736	\$ 886,570,229	\$ 937,414,339	\$ 949,820,539
Revenue from tuition and fees	\$ 312,809,796	\$ 323,586,088	\$ 336,426,527	\$ 343,183,127	\$ 356,255,280
In-state average tuition for full-time undergraduates	\$10,669	\$10,846	\$10,972	\$12,177	\$12,177
Out-of-state average tuition for full-time undergraduates	\$28,735	\$29,378	\$29,824	\$32,825	\$32,825