The strategic plan of VCU Career Services served as an outline to redefine career services at VCU and to bolster our efforts to match the university’s goals of becoming an institution of national distinction. The effective delivery of career services and the learning by our students and alumni has a deliberate and proven impact on related functions within the university including student retention and persistence, admissions, alumni relations, alumni development and fundraising, economic impact upon the community, and federal and state relations – all of which are integral to the Quest for Distinction and its intended outcomes. Complimenting this plan, we made extensive efforts to efficiently manage our budget and financial resources, continued the discussion regarding space and our physical environment, developed effective assessment and evaluative instruments to measure our progress and created a comprehensive communications plan to share our vision and progress towards our goals. VCU Career Services intends to be the primary coordinator of career services at VCU and provide expertise on career and professional development for undergraduates, graduate and professional school students and alumni.

Goal I – Career Curriculum

Goal I sought to establish a career curriculum to foster learning by emphasizing self-directed resources and on-demand services resulting in increased access to and utilization of VCU Career Services. Our success measures were to increase access to and utilization of VCU Career Services and to create measurable learning outcomes of the career curriculum. We met both of those outcomes.

We researched, benchmarked, and developed a learning-centered career curriculum. We tied all of our advising offerings to this curriculum. It drove what we agreed to offer or participate in and the intensity with which we pursued our work. We established using a pre- and post-assessment of learning outcomes when appropriate, as well as a program evaluation for each program. We examined our current drop-ins, advising appointments, and programs use and effectiveness through student surveys and peer benchmarking, which resulted in us offering more appointment offerings, programs, and drop-ins. We started having staff members host drop-in hours so if a student had a career question that was beyond the training of a student Career Ambassador’s expertise, their needs could still be met in that format. Drop-in attendance skyrocketed. Finally, we developed a new web site featuring key resources and content for on-demand career and professional development for all populations.

Our data in the baseline year of 13-14 was not completely accurate as we did not have a daily updated feed from Banner, which houses our student data. As we compare year 15-16 to year 14-15 alone, advising is up 30% through appointments and drop-ins. Programming attendance is up by 7%. Our web traffic is up 43% and unique traffic is up by 36%. Our bounce rate dropped from 81% to 8%. Our duration is up by two minutes with visitors spending an average of 4 minutes on our site. The blog and social media are growing at the same rate as expected.

We stuck fairly closely to the original goal and are impressed with what it produced. In the future, we advise that we revisit what we want to learn next and continue to examine our offerings’ use and effectiveness.

Goal II – Employer Engagement

The purpose of Goal II was to enhance and increase the level of existing employer engagement and develop new partnerships with local, regional, national and international employers. First, we defined employer engagement at VCU Career Services including engagement levels (see appendix A). Then, we assessed all current employers and assessed their engagement levels at key intervals throughout the plan in Spring 2014, Spring 2015 and Spring 2016 (see appendix B). After that, we created the VCU Engagement/Employer Guide, both in print and online, to include enrollment data not used before in recruitment conversations impacting regional relationships (see appendix C).
Next, we launched and integrated a University-wide platform (CSO/HireVCURams) for tracking employer engagement through career services functions across campus, which is used by three career centers, BEST program, Wilder School, National Scholarship Office, and more to come. We developed an industry-specific career fair model including Part-Time Job Fairs which brought a total of 24 fairs with 799 (T)/ 535 (U) employers and 4,942 unique students to our office’s career fairs from Fall 2013-Spring 2016. Additionally, we expanded the Table in the Commons program (50+) to be more customer service focused.

Through partnership with VCU Globe, we became a Peace Corps Prep Program university in 2014. The first graduate of the program is joining the Peace Corps in Summer 2016. Finally, we hosted a number of employer information sessions outside of the Career Services Office and/or Commons spaces to involve spaces and colleagues in the academic units that the employers are targeting such as Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs, School of Nursing, and School of the Arts.

In summary, we had an impact on regional employer development through both VCU Employer Guide and Internship Bootcamps with Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce and ConnectVA. We held employer meetings regularly with all three career center employer teams present and collaborated on engagement opportunities for employers and increased employer connections across VCU departments and offices, which resulted in a less siloed approach to relationship management and development. We also eliminated a Recruitment Coordinator position in the office due to a realignment and understanding of Employer Development purpose.

In the future, we suggest that we maintain the current level of responsiveness, collaboration, and entrepreneurial spirit to pivot our approach as necessary and that we broaden our work with VCU alumni as employers seeking great talent.

**Goal III – Health Science Careers**

Goal III was to increase the number and effectiveness of initiatives that prepare students and connect members of the VCU communities with the healthcare sector. This also connects with Quest III.A, to increase the number and quality of initiatives that prepare students for careers that advance health care, improve health status and contribute to STEM-related fields. In the first year, the team invested in establishing an understanding of the existing services and needs of students interested in healthcare careers. In the second year, the Associate Director of Health Sciences Career and Professional Development was hired and the team ran a number of pilot programs to assess student interest and engagement. In the third year, the team focused on strengthening external relationships to expand programs and services that expose undergraduates interested in healthcare, who may not pursue graduate education, to realistic career options by gaining experience and exposure to health career paths beyond medical school.

Initially, this goal was very focused on “pre-med” students. Along the way, the data showed us that the students who actually go to medical school are a very small minority, and there is huge need to expose the rest of the “pre-health” students to the wide variety of career options in healthcare besides medical school. Additionally, an internal team member became the Director of Pre-Professional Advising, greatly increasing our ability to work collaboratively with this office to reduce duplication of efforts and better serve this population. Realigning staff efforts to focus on the students with greatest need and employers who hire this population, led to large increases in services. In the baseline year, there were 43 programs offered related to this goal; in the third year, there were 107. This included presentations to classes, targeted career fairs, employer visits and information sessions, and educational programs helping students explore a wider variety of options in healthcare.

Our recommendations for future action are to continue partnerships with academic units, particularly Biology, Chemistry and Kinesiology & Health Sciences, to support the experiential learning requirement; continue to develop educational programming to strengthen student preparation; further develop employment opportunities within the
healthcare sector, particularly at the experiential and entry level Bachelor’s level (not clinical); and refine our relationship with Pre-Professional Advising to maximize our ability to serve students interested in pursuing healthcare careers.

Goal IV – Experiential Learning

Developing UCC experiential learning standards, structure, and guidelines to create an enriched educational experience and to provide direction and professional success strategies was the fourth goal in our strategic plan. First, we created an inventory of experiential learning courses across VCU’s curriculum. Then, we presented the HireVCURams technology to a variety of academic and student-serving offices at VCU and have added partners into the system as they have been open and willing: Federal Work-Study, Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs, National Scholarship Office, Robertson School of Media and Culture, etc.

We wrote a VCU definition of Experiential Learning in partnership with the VCU Career Council members including a Glossary of Experiential Learning Terms in Summer 2014 (see appendix D). We continued the Internship Bootcamp series for employers across various industries in the Richmond region serving 300 organizations and created web content for both students and employers related to internship resources. Finally, we increased the number of internship postings in HireVCURams by 142% since 2013-2014 academic year.

In the future, we suggest continued expansion of HireVCURams as a resource for academic units including School of Dentistry and Vice President for Health Sciences Office and that we remain plugged into the campus conversations about actualizing President Rao’s Jan 2016 announcement of “Real World Experiences” for all VCU students.

Goal V – Alumni Career Services

Goal V aspired to provide alumni with sustainable career services and with student engagement opportunities to develop a career and professional network and to encourage VCU involvement. First, we clarified and promoted career development resources for all alumni: http://www.careers.vcu.edu/alumni/ and https://www.vcualumni.org/Benefits/Benefits-for-all-alumni/Careers/. Then, we implemented the HireVCURams (HVR) database to include alumni users at no cost to them for life. We worked with the Development and Alumni Relations (DAR) team to build a nightly feed of VCU Alumni On-line accounts into HireVCURams creating a “single sign-on” for alumni users in HVR. Next, we encouraged and promoted “experienced hire” postings in HireVCURams to target alumni users of the system and started tracking the number of Alumni Employer Contacts and Alumni-Contact opportunity postings in HireVCURams.

We collaborated with the Office of Planning and Decision Support (OPDS) to launch the inaugural VCU-wide Outcomes/Graduation Survey in May 2015. Additionally, we worked with VCU’s social media coordination team to expand the usage of VCU’s LinkedIn presence to engage alumni with current students through the platform. We engaged active participants in the Development and Alumni Relations (DAR) Regional Planning task force designed to coordinate alumni engagement travel in the region and across the country and developed an initial list of career development-focused volunteer opportunities for VCU alumni interested in volunteer engagement.

As a result, we gained deeper connections, partnerships, and intentional planning with colleagues in the Division of Development and Alumni Relations, we served as a referral contact office for Development Officers needing to connect potential donors with volunteer and recruiting resources, and we began tracking alumni usage of and recruiting engagement with the HireVCURams database.

In the future, we would like to repair the alumni “single sign-on” experience for HVR as it has not worked since the RADAR database implementation in December 2015. We suggest that we continue to develop and engage alumni
volunteers with career development programming and continue to seek funding for an Alumni Career Services specific position in the office.

**Goal VI – Student Identity Populations**

Goal VI sought to evaluate and increase career center staff knowledge of the unique needs of identity student populations. We identified two groups of unique student populations per year over the course of the three year plan to focus staff research, training, and attention. First, we conducted a staff inventory to determine the baseline knowledge on the student populations and potential career-related issues facing the identity student group. Next, we developed continuous staff training through research and guest speakers to keep skills sharp and current for various identity groups. We pursued expert advice to enhance our understanding of these populations, as well as how their unique career needs may be different. Experts also identified key resources we could utilize to better serve students in these populations. We created a repository of educational information on various identity groups that is accessible by staff members. Finally, we established strategic partnerships with offices and staff members who serve the identified student populations.

Originally, we wanted to establish a point person within the office for each identity group to be responsible for the educational content and training and while those people served as the lead for the course of this goal, we soon realized that keeping everyone updated on the ever-changing needs of multiple student populations was a burden for only two people to carry. We shifted our approach to more of a collective model where each of us is responsible for our own continuing education and sharing of resources, as one can never truly stop learning about others.

Moving forward we recommend reaching out to student organizations to partner with and to offer tailored programs and services for these student populations.
Appendix A

Employer Development & Engagement at the University Career Center
2013 – 2016

UCC Strategic Plan Goal #2: Enhance and increase the level of existing employer engagement and develop new partnerships with local, regional, national and international employers.

As part of the University Career Center Strategic Plan: Redefining Career Services at VCU, a reframing and refocusing of employer development and outreach is taking place. The University Career Center staff, led by the Associate Director for Employer and Experiential Development, is charting a course for collaborative, intentional, and proactive partnerships across campus to support the holistic relationship development approach detailed below.

Employers seek out career centers across the country to assist them with targeting and building significant talent pools at a specific campus. In order to most effectively assist the employers who engage with VCU, Employer Development and Engagement begins with understanding VCU students:

- What populations and concentrations of academic and career interests are present in the VCU talent pool of current students?
- What industries, employers, and types of career paths are targeted or desired by the current VCU student talent pool? What options are students aware of? Which are they not?
- Where do VCU students want to work, live and learn upon completion of their time at VCU?
- What are the varieties of physical locations, times of year, and virtual opportunities where/when students seek and engage with career opportunity information? What media are used by students?
- Who are the key contacts across VCU who partner with employers seeking VCU talent?

Employer Development and Engagement, at its core, is built on education:

- Educating employers about how to connect with, recruit at, and build a brand across VCU.
- Interpreting all of the knowledge gained in the process of student interest, demographic, and academic discovery detailed above for the individual employer contacts.
- Educating students about the employers and organizations who recruit and hire within specific industries of interest, trends in hiring practices, and timelines for hiring.
- Educating the VCU career center professionals about the employer needs, trends, and techniques in hiring across industries.
- Partnering with all employer engagement professionals across VCU to share the knowledge gained from employer engagement across spheres of responsibility, and to ensure the timely and seamless transition of recruiting professionals to the most appropriate contact and office.
- Serve as the starting point of contact for all employers seeking talent at VCU, and help connect employers to the best partners across campus once the recruiting goals and needs are discussed.
Appendix B

Goal 2: Employer Engagement Levels

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
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<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1479</strong></td>
<td><strong>2304</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

See employer brochure booklet
Goal IV: Develop UCC experiential learning standards, structure, and guidelines to create an enriched educational experience and to provide direction and professional success strategies.

For year one, of the strategic plan: Redefining Career Services, the Goal IV committee worked to inventory experiential learning (EL) opportunities at VCU, propose a definition of EL for VCU, begin to understand the role of co-op both historically and currently at VCU, and to begin to establish partnerships across campus for future frameworks for EL at VCU.

Proposed VCU Definition – created by VCU Career Council Work Group, Spring 2014

“A meaningful, hands on experience in a diverse, real world setting with regular constructive feedback from identified mentor that builds individual identity and confidence to pursue career goals.”

Experiential Learning Glossary

Clinical Experience
Obtaining clinical experience involves spending time with health care professionals in a hospital, clinic, VA medical center, or private practice facility. The experiences range from shadowing to basic tasks to the supervised delivery of healthcare procedures. Experiences can be entitled Clinical, Practicum, Internship, or Preceptorship.

Cooperative Education (Co-op)
A structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. A cooperative education experience, commonly known as a "co-op", provides academic credit for structured job experience. Typically, co-op programs alternate a semester of academic coursework with a semester of time in the work placement. The co-op also ties directly to coursework completed by the student before and/or during the time in the workplace.

Externship
Job shadow – typically with a respected professional within an industry or workplace a student has interest in pursuing. Externships are typically held for short time period lasting anywhere from a single day to eight weeks and are often held over a student’s winter, spring or summer break. Most often unpaid and (depending on the field) not attached to course credit. Used mainly to explore interests and curiosities.

Internship
Acts as the bridge from student life to professional life. A form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.

Example of the Internship vs. Externship Difference
For example, a finance student desperate for real world experience within the industry would most likely hold a fall or summer finance internship for a well-known finance company such as Sequoia Capital. On the other side, a finance
student who only had a single week free in summer might hold an externship with the CFO of Kiva, still gaining valuable experience but holding it for a shorter duration and mainly for observational purposes.

**Independent Study & Class Projects**
Opportunity for students to connect with clients in the community for a project-based experience connecting classroom learning with real-world business challenges. Often found in Brandcenter and daVinci Center coursework.

**Practicum**
A course of study designed especially for the preparation of teachers and clinicians that involves the supervised practical application of previously studied theory.

**Service-Learning**
Service-learning at VCU is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs. Students reflect on the service activity to increase understanding and application of course content, and to enhance a sense of civic responsibility. Service-learning designation is reserved for those credit-bearing academic experiences that involve each enrolled student in a minimum of 20 hours of service per semester, as well as in planned reflection activities.

**Shadowing**
The experience of observing the daily life of a doctor and obtain insight from professionals about their experiences and how they view their field. Required/highly recommended component for medical, dental, pharmacy, and physical & occupational therapy school applications.

**Research**
Scholarly research is defined as investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws. Research and creative scholarship happens in every department at VCU, from the School of the Arts to the Department of History to the School of Medicine and at every level of study from undergraduate to graduate and first professional students.

**Work-Study**
The Federal Work Study Program helps students earn financial funding through a part-time work program. There are many different types of jobs that qualify for the program including VCU campus offices, VCU’s America Reads Program, and a variety of nonprofit and government opportunities off campus.