



VCU

Career Services

Strategic Enrollment Management
and Student Success



VCU Career Services Strategic Plan 2022-2026

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2022-2026 Strategic Goals

- 1. IDENTITY & CAREER** - Honor the intersections between identity and career through engaging, data-driven programs and services.
- 2. CAREER READINESS & STUDENT SUCCESS** - Champion career readiness and student success through education and outreach to faculty, staff, students, and families.
- 3. COLLABORATION & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY** - Increase access to experiential learning opportunities and career development resources through collaboration with employer, community, and campus partners.
- 4. SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT & INTENTIONAL GROWTH** - Boost capacity for sustainably supporting students and stakeholders through an intentional focus on staff retention, professional development, and team growth.

Message from the Director

To the VCU community and our partners:

It is my distinct pleasure to share with you the VCU Career Services Strategic Plan, which outlines our team's primary goals and the strategies by which we aim to achieve them over the next four academic years — Fall 2022 through Spring 2026.

This is the second Strategic Plan I have had the opportunity to craft in collaboration with the VCU Career Services team. We both learned and accomplished a great deal in our Fall 2019-Spring 2022 cycle, and we were able to utilize that information when dreaming of possibilities for our department's next chapter. As outlined in our outcomes summary document for the previous Strategic Plan, we knew we wanted to prioritize scalability and sustainability as we looked toward the future and further organizational evolution. We also wanted to make our team's deep, genuine commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all areas of our work more evident in our new plan, weaving this value throughout our process and documentation. This new plan both builds on our team's progress during the last few years, and also aims to be bold and creative in piloting new initiatives and continuing our quest to meet students where they are — in their career development process and where they spend their time while enrolled at VCU.

We were able to utilize VCU's recalibrated Quest 2028 Strategic Plan language and ideals in our new plan, with the intention to continue supporting Student Success, Research and Innovation, and Thriving Communities for All People, knowing that Diversity Driving Excellence is the foundation for all that we do. Since writing our last plan, we also became part of the new Division of Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success (SEMSS), which has provided us with new direction and purpose as we engage in student-centered, inclusive programs and services that engage individuals from their time as a prospective student, through graduation, and into their life as an alumnus of VCU.

A particularly meaningful part of this planning process for me was collaboratively rewriting the VCU Career Services mission statement and affirming updated departmental values, making sure each was reflective of this team that has grown and changed so much since I first took on the role of Director in 2018. It was also wonderful to see staff members step up into new leadership roles as part of our process, facilitating discussions, raising important questions, and investing to move us forward toward our intended launch date in October. It was also impactful to involve our graduate student staff in the building of our plan and to collect feedback from students across campus as we defined which efforts to focus our energy on and any gaps we need to address. Thank you to the VCU Career Services team members who helped this Strategic Plan come to life, bringing enthusiasm, critical thinking, teamwork, and an unwavering commitment to student success.

We appreciate the continued support of SEMSS leadership, our campus colleagues, and our external partners as we work to realize the goals set forth in this plan. We welcome your input and collaboration as we and our planning document continue to evolve. As always, we see our Strategic Plan as a dynamic, living document, and we will have the ability to make adjustments and adaptations based on student needs, university resources, external partner contributions, and team member experiences. Our plan will be shaped by our collective efforts in the months and years ahead, and I believe now more than ever that there is no limit to what we can accomplish together.

Sincerely,



Samara L. Reynolds, M.Ed.
Director of VCU Career Services



About Us

VCU Career Services is the centralized career center for Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), serving approximately 30,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, as well as post-docs, non-degree students, and alumni one year after graduation. Professional development on campus is also championed by separate career services offices in the College of Engineering and the School of Business, serving students and alumni specifically from majors within those units.

VCU Career Services supports students and recent graduates through individualized advising focused on career and major exploration; job, internship, and experiential learning search processes and interviews; graduate school application and interviews; and career decision making. Existing services and events offered by our office include one-on-one career counseling appointments, drop-in career advising sessions, mock interviews (in-person and virtual), career assessment interpretation, industry-specific programs and events, career fairs, and online resources for every stage of the career development process.

Students and alumni also have indefinite access to the VCU Handshake system (shared between all three Career Services offices) where a diverse array of opportunities are posted, including Federal Work-Study jobs, undergraduate research opportunities, part-time jobs, internships, and full-time roles. We aim to engage with VCU students early and often, helping them connect with employers, understand potential career options, and both develop and articulate skills necessary to succeed in their life after VCU.

VCU Career Services currently has 18 professional staff members, along with multiple graduate and undergraduate student staff members. Our student to professional career counselor ratio is approximately 2,500:1.

Mission:

VCU Career Services empowers undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, alumni, employers and community partners to explore, learn and reach goals that fit their distinct definitions of success. Through purposeful partnerships, innovative interdisciplinary programming, consistent advocacy and providing an inclusive, supportive environment, we aim to:

- reduce barriers to career and experiential opportunities,
- promote the development of career readiness skills,
- provide access to resources, knowledge and connections, and
- equip individuals and organizations to contribute to the current and future world of work, their communities and the broader world.

Core Values:

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice
- Collaboration and Teamwork
- Growth, Development and Continuous Improvement
- Compassion, Care and Helping Others

Diversity Statement:

At VCU Career Services, we affirm and celebrate the diversity of the VCU community. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where all are welcomed, respected, and supported as they contribute their unique and important ideas, skills, and perspectives to the world. We actively promote and are deeply invested in the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, multicultural competence, and constant learning.

As a team of individuals representing a diverse set of intersecting identities, we will continue to advocate and make positive change that helps open new doors to professional connections for VCU students, alumni, employer partners, and community members. Our staff is dedicated to providing equitable access to services and resources for VCU students and alumni as they consider career options, engage in experiential learning, apply for employment and volunteer positions, and pursue graduate/professional education.

Long-Term Vision Statements

Advising - We will be a diverse team of intentional and collaborative industry advisors with expertise to help all VCU students and recent alumni identify and pursue their chosen purpose and pathway. We will meet students where they are by providing a variety of accessible and relevant services, programs and resources.

Programming & Campus Partnerships - We will deliver meaningful and accessible programming to students and alumni that increases exposure and access to career options and information. Our relationships with campus partners will serve as a conduit to remove barriers and create opportunities to develop REAL career knowledge and experiences.

Employer Development - We will be a change agent and strategic partner by using data to offer educational opportunities that connect employers, students, and alumni to benefit our local community as well as the regional and global economy. Employers will feel connected to VCU through customized engagement and will contribute to our student and alumni development through program partnerships, experiential learning opportunities and the recruiting process.

Marketing & Branding - We will be a leader in student, alumni, and employer engagement through both digital and in-person mediums, offering employers and campus partners the opportunity to seek out VCU talent and for students to navigate and achieve their goals through experiential opportunities. We will tell the stories of students, alumni, and employers in authentic, powerful ways that highlight the diversity of student success.

Technology & Resources - We will be the Career Services model for utilizing innovative technology when providing effective and accessible career advising, programming, and engagement with campus and community partners. We will offer resources that aim to remove barriers and provide VCU students and alumni with equitable access to REAL experiences and support throughout their career development.

Professional Staff Development - We will be known regionally and nationally as both an excellent training ground and a great professional space for talented, inclusive, innovative career development leaders. We will establish the following as the cornerstones of a cohesive, thriving team: intentional and individualized professional development, internal and external best practice sharing, and incorporating diversity of thought and experience.

Student Staff Hiring & Development - We value diversity, inclusivity, and equity when strategically serving the hiring and development needs of student staff. Our student team members will strive to serve the unique needs of the VCU community.

Learn about Our Approach

**July 2022
Team Retreat**

**July/August 2022
Working Groups**

**August 2022
Refine Strategies
and Action Steps**

**September 2022
Collect Stakeholder
Feedback**

**October 2022
Launch Plan**

Having just concluded the process of collecting, analyzing, and reporting on outcomes data from our Fall 2019-Spring 2022 Strategic Plan in June 2022, the VCU Career Services team launched immediately into the process of preparing to write our next vision for the future. After reviewing foundational documents and sharing individual feedback via survey responses focused on the mission statement and team values, our team held our first in-person, full-team retreat since the COVID-19 global pandemic began. We came together in Cabell Library in early July, and within one day of robust discussion, we were able to write the first draft of our new mission statement, affirm our team core values, and find commonalities between individual, small group, and team priorities that would later become our four strategic goals for 2022-2026.

We refined the mission statement and goal language in subsequent meetings and via virtual exchange, and you will see the final versions of each reflected in this document. Working Groups of 3-4 team members for each goal were brought together based on interest and facilitated by appointed Assistant and Senior Assistant Directors. These groups met to draft strategies, action steps, timelines, and metrics for each goal, with opportunities for team, Director, and SEMSS leadership feedback to ensure we were on the right track with our plans, priorities, and language along the way. Team members reviewed strategies and action steps and decided where they wanted to commit their time in the years ahead, and Goal Implementation Leads were assigned at the Director, Associate Director, and Senior Assistant Director level to oversee progress once the plan launched. Though we had some team member transitions during the planning process, the direction remained clear, and we moved forward with the help of individual and staff-wide investment.

As we moved toward plan finalization in September, we collected student feedback and made a collective decision, with support from Division leadership, to extend this new plan from three years—like the previous cycle—to a more realistic four-year plan. This helps to set us up for success for an ambitious plan during what continues to be a turbulent time in the field of higher education, especially regarding resource allocation and staff retention.

As was true in our last planning cycle, this has been an intense-yet-collaborative process of sharing ideas, dreaming big, asking critical questions, and considering how VCU Career Services fits into the big picture at VCU. Dissimilar from last cycle, this team has seen the mountains we can move through collaboration and dedication, as well as where we need to set reasonable limits and stay flexible to ensure our success. Team members that were new last time were leaders in the process this time, facilitating discussions, asking the hard questions, and bringing even more authenticity and innovation to the process. We look forward to turning our ideas into realities once again, opening doors to opportunities and promoting both positive experiences and outcomes for VCU students, alumni, staff, faculty, employer and community partners, families, and beyond.

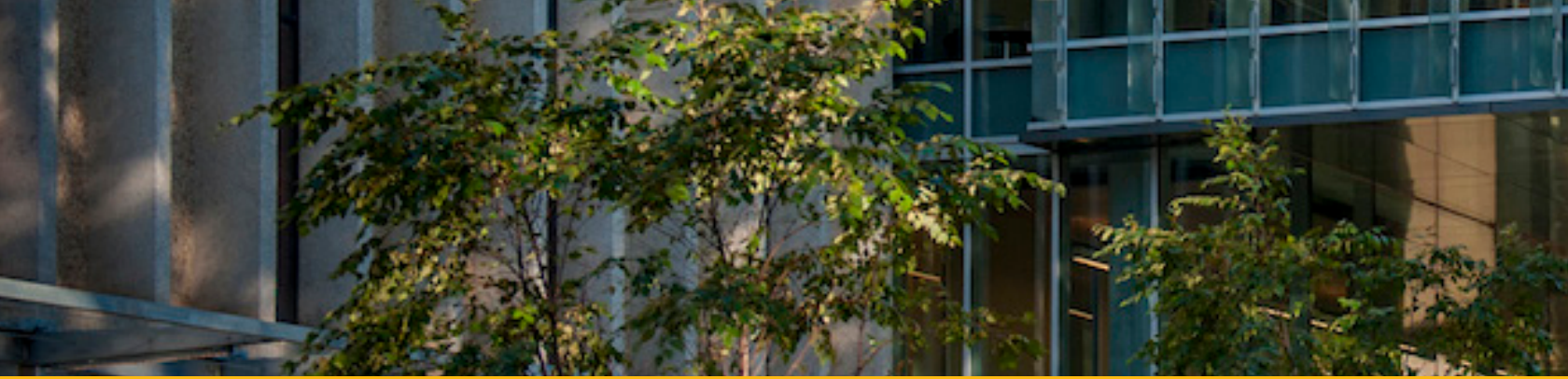
Strategic Goal Alignment

VCU Strategic Plan: Quest 2028

VCU Career Services Strategic Goals (2022-2026)	Diversity Driving Excellence	Student Success	Research and Innovation	Thriving Communities for All People
Goal 1: Identity & Career	X	X		X
Goal 2: Career Readiness & Student Success	X	X		X
Goal 3: Collaboration & Access to Opportunity	X	X	X	X
Goal 4: Sustainable Support & Intentional Growth	X	X	X	X

SEMSS Division Goals & Priorities

VCU Career Services Strategic Goals (2022-2026)	Student-Centered	Enrollment	National Prominence	Culture of Appreciation
Goal 1: Identity & Career	X	X	X	X
Goal 2: Career Readiness & Student Success	X	X	X	
Goal 3: Collaboration & Access to Opportunity	X	X	X	
Goal 4: Sustainable Support & Intentional Growth	X	X	X	X



Goal 1:

Honor the intersections between identity and career through engaging, data-driven programs and services.

As students, alumni, and professionals engage in career development experiences, everything from the goals they set and refine, to the mentors and advisors they seek counsel from, to how they present themselves in applications and interviews, to the opportunities they are presented with and decisions they make is impacted by the salient identities they hold. We know that a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice requires constant dedication, evolution, and humility, and our team will be working to meet students where they are in every sense of the phrase. Through new and expanded services, resources, programs, events, experiential learning, and employment opportunities, VCU Career Services wants to support individuals holistically as they move through the career development process, providing opportunities for them to feel seen, heard, connected, and empowered as they work to achieve their own unique vision of success at graduation and well beyond.

Strategy 1: Refine program and service feedback and evaluation process to amplify student participation and representation, including increased support for underserved student populations.

- 1.1.1 - Identify and report on which student groups have a gap in service, participation, or satisfaction, and where the greatest areas of need exist for each population.
- 1.1.2 - Regularly collect and utilize direct student feedback through multiple mediums to determine impact and effectiveness.
- 1.1.3 - Review current learning outcomes through an equity lens to streamline program and service evaluation.

Strategy 2: Meet student needs through identity-focused programming and resources with deliberate support from on-campus partners.

- 1.2.1 - Begin updating materials across mediums and languages, striving toward language justice, reducing barriers and increasing accessibility.
- 1.2.2 - Collaborate to develop, implement, and evaluate programs focused on identity and career intersections.

Strategy 3: Utilize marketing and communications to effectively reach and connect with students, with intentional focus on underserved populations.

- 1.3.1 - Create targeted outreach campaigns and resources for specific underserved populations.
- 1.3.2 - Update website and external communications to more comprehensively display commitment to, and thought leadership on, identity and career intersections.



Goal 2:

Champion career readiness and student success through education and outreach to faculty, staff, students, and families.

Building upon the many ways we were able to infuse career development into the campus community conversation over the last few years, our team wants to take VCU's investment in career readiness to the next level, supporting strategic student success initiatives and creating shared language and processes to bolster individual and institutional confidence in career development concepts and competencies. We want to make sure that the definition of career readiness we utilize at VCU matches the distinction of our students and academic programs, and that we can flex to meet the needs of students and graduates, as well as employers across a variety of sectors that seek to hire them. Not only will we be finding ways to make meaningful connections to career readiness skills for students, but we will also intentionally involve faculty, staff, families, and other stakeholders in the process, knowing that student success is the goal and responsibility of everyone involved and engaged in the college experience.

Strategy 1: Assess and evaluate the climate of career readiness at VCU.

- 2.1.1 - Benchmark peer institution best practices for incorporating career readiness into their campus culture.
- 2.1.2 - Solicit Employer Advisory Board feedback on career readiness priorities and hiring needs.
- 2.1.3 - Define VCU-specific career readiness competencies that take into account the distinct needs and experiences of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.
- 2.1.4 - Survey VCU faculty to measure current inclusion of career readiness content within course syllabi.
- 2.1.5 - Assess VCU students regarding career readiness.

Strategy 2: Develop and design a career readiness initiative to engage and educate VCU students, strengthening the links between academic disciplines and career pathways.

- 2.2.1 - Create career readiness blueprints for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.
- 2.2.2 - Develop specific programming and resources to address student career readiness gaps.
- 2.2.3 - Deliver and assess career readiness programming in both synchronous and asynchronous formats to support students and course instructors.

Strategy 3: Build and share a career readiness initiative to engage and educate VCU faculty, staff, families, and other stakeholders.

- 2.3.1 - Collaborate faculty and staff to implement a new College-to-Career Blueprint across the College of Humanities and Sciences.
- 2.3.2 - Revise and relaunch the VCU Career Champions Program for faculty and staff with a focus on career readiness and scalability.
- 2.3.3 - Infuse career readiness concepts into family-focused programs, services, and resources.

Goal 3:

Increase access to experiential learning opportunities and career development resources through collaboration with employer, community, and campus partners.

Opening doors for students and alumni to new and exciting professional opportunities can only happen in sustainable ways through intentional collaboration and strategic partnerships that help all parties move towards their goals. VCU is a major hub in the region, and increasingly the nation, for talented students and graduates that are ready to serve as innovators, thought leaders, and contributors within a diverse array of industries and sectors. VCU Career Services is uniquely positioned to serve as the critical link between students, alumni, employers, community partners, and various departments on campus, especially when it comes to bolstering experiential learning and career development opportunities. In the years ahead, we will work to further solidify key partnerships, better educate the campus and broader community on VCU student and graduate employment outcomes and ways they can support success for all students, and expand means of funding student experiences to provide access and equity for as many students as possible.

Strategy 1: Reinforce VCU as a talent resource for local and regional organizations.

- 3.1.1 - Develop a method for tracking student and alumni hiring/retention data with a key list of employer partners.
- 3.1.2 - Host an alumni-specific career fair in partnership with Alumni Relations.
- 3.1.3 - Strategically share information about VCU graduate and intern common destinations with campus community and regional employers.

Strategy 2: Build and leverage partnerships to amplify experiential learning opportunities.

- 3.2.1 - Enhance relationships and collaborations related to the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership, ChamberRVA, and other regional workforce development initiatives/organizations.
- 3.2.2 - Deepen relationship and collaboration with VCU REAL, including preparing staff to advise students on meeting established REAL graduation requirement.
- 3.2.3 - Expand relationships with VCU Transfer Center, Virginia Community College System, and other higher education institutions in the Richmond region.
- 3.2.4 - Increase access for graduate students to experiential learning, including a specific focus on funded/paid opportunities.

Strategy 3: Analyze impact and expand reach of initiatives that fund student experiential learning.

- 3.3.1 - Assess and sustainably expand the VCU Career Services Employer Partner Program.
- 3.3.2 - Assess and sustainably expand the VCU Internship Funding Program.
- 3.3.3 - Refine the Federal Work-Study program's student and employer training and expectations to provide robust experiences that standardize mentorship and reflection.
- 3.3.4 - Expand impact of and publicly-available information about the Job Location & Development (JLD) program.
- 3.3.5 - Pursue grants or other revenue sources to support student experiential learning and programs.

Strategy 4: Intentionally inform and involve campus colleagues and key stakeholders in employer and experiential development initiatives.

- 3.4.1 - Obtain feedback from campus colleagues regarding key employer and experiential development data and success metrics.
- 3.4.2 - Develop and implement a communication plan with campus colleagues and key stakeholders to amplify VCS employer engagement efforts and opportunities.
- 3.4.3 - Create and share Employer and Experiential Development-specific website content to streamline and support faculty and staff engaging with employers and developing experiential programs.
- 3.4.4 - Host events bringing together faculty and staff across campus with key employer partners, promoting connection, collaboration, and understanding.

Goal 4:

Boost capacity for sustainably supporting students and stakeholders through an intentional focus on staff retention, professional development, and team growth.

As we dream big regarding what is necessary and possible in terms of supporting VCU students, recent graduates, and campus and employer/community partners, we acknowledge that accomplishing our goals requires people power. Growing and retaining talented team members is vital to our stakeholders feeling supported and our services having a sense of continuity as our organization changes. We want staff members at VCU Career Services to feel prepared, supported, and like there is room to develop and advance from day one, and we intend to grow our team strategically in the direction of student needs, now and well into the future. From onboarding and professional development to managing transitions and showing up authentically at work every day, we are proud of the work environment we have already built within VCU Career Services. We are also dedicated to continuous improvement and our long-term visions for professional and student staff development that will ensure we never stop evolving and working hard to keep great people here at VCU.

Strategy 1: Evaluate and explore potential staffing structures and resources to grow the team.

- 4.1.1 - Benchmark and compile a report regarding staff structures and salaries, utilizing national and both peer and aspirational institution comparative data.
- 4.1.2 - Inventory current and potential revenue streams and funding models to fund future staff positions.
- 4.1.3 - Conduct internal role audit and survey VCS advisory boards to identify gaps and opportunities related to staffing that best reflects VCU student and stakeholder needs.
- 4.1.4 - Propose updated 5-year staffing plan based on comprehensive data collection.

Strategy 2: Develop a structured and personalized learning and core skill development plan for staff members during their first twelve months in their role.

- 4.2.1 - Inventory current team onboarding resources, trainings, and timelines.
- 4.2.2 - Develop self-paced onboarding checklist specific to each staff role.

Strategy 3: Create sustainably-paced career and professional development plans for staff beyond their first year with VCU Career Services to promote individual growth and retention.

- 4.3.1 - Conduct an internal audit and gap analysis for all staff positions to determine key skills and experiences required to be eligible for advancement.
- 4.3.2 - Design and implement a professional development menu for staff members based on role and/or experience level.

Strategy 4: Develop standardized, comprehensive succession plan to anticipate and inform team transitions.

- 4.4.1 - Update position descriptions and document evergreen partnerships and programs for each professional staff role.
- 4.4.2 - Develop standardized team-based transition checklist and timeline for use across the department.

Strategy 5: Encourage staff members to engage across their own intersections of identity and career, while also challenging themselves to learn and grow as leaders who value diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

- 4.5.1 - Create an internal Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee to coordinate and promote training and development in this area.
- 4.5.2 - Set annual team and individual goals related to fostering new knowledge and finding University and community involvement opportunities related to identity and DEI.
- 4.5.3 - Enhance staff member engagement in social justice advocacy related to their current professional role and/or personal interests.



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