



ATTN:

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Belle Wheelan - President, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Virginia Delegation - the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

28th July, 2023

Dear Colleagues:

On Wednesday, July 26th Virginia Commonwealth University's executive administration announced a significant delay to the implementation of a university-wide general education requirement on race and racism. The decision, [announced via email to the University's Undergraduate Curriculum Committee](#) by Interim senior vice provost for academic affairs Andrew Arroyo, constitutes an unprecedented violation of shared governance and faculty control over university curriculum. It does so in a moment when faculty who commit to the work of fighting for racial justice in higher education are under attack.

[The adoption of this curriculum was a student-led project](#) designed to meet the needs of VCU's diverse student body and to introduce all students at VCU to basic principles of various levels of racism and the work of building a more just society. The initiative was led with the support of VCU's Student Government Association and Graduate Student Association, and—like all general education requirements—were reviewed and approved by the VCU Faculty Senate, General Education Curriculum Committee, University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and University Council. The inclusion of racial literacy as one of three components of our general education foundational curriculum was finally approved by VCU's Board of Visitors on June 24, 2022 as part of their [Quest 2028 plan](#) (p.5) to strengthen student success. Despite winning the support of students, faculty, and faculty-led curriculum oversight committees, the rollout of the racial literacy requirement has been delayed indefinitely by a unilateral administrative action without any consultation with faculty, staff, or students and the same administration has revised the public bulletin (catalog) just weeks before the beginning of the fall semester. The rationale for the indefinite delay provided by the VCU Office of the Provost is due to too few seats available to accommodate incoming students and additional data to assess the effectiveness of the literacy. The reasons provided are both flawed and discriminatory. Many

faculty have offered to teach this literacy and no other literacies or courses in the general education have required the same repeated pilot testing and assessments prior to being instituted. In brief, the actions on the part of the administration are emblematic of blatant institutional racism.

Wednesday's announcement of an indefinite delay is the most recent and most egregious stage in a pattern of administrative chaos designed to kill a student-led, faculty approved curricular requirement. A refusal to expand instructional capacity coupled with [mass layoffs of general education faculty](#), many of whom have requested to teach racial literacy in response to a survey seeking faculty willing to teach the requirement that was administered to them on October 2020, have left the full adoption of a planned 2023-2024 rollout in a state of late-July chaos. For the past week advisors, faculty, and staff have scrambled to adjust degree paths and bulletin language for the August semester launch. Students from all backgrounds, but particularly those who are first-generation college students, are also deeply impacted by the confusion resulting from abrupt changes in their degree requirements.

The sudden change proposed by VCU's executive administration has consequences that reach much farther than administrative chaos. This directive represents a direct threat to faculty governance of curriculum and a profoundly chilling message to educators about both, their freedom to teach course content deemed relevant to their disciplines and the role of racial justice content in Virginia college classrooms. In a political moment where we have seen a national concerted effort to censor course content, blatant historical oppression, and attempts to subvert multiracial solidarity, the actions of VCU's top-level administrators represents a broader pattern of silencing and retaliation against those faculty who would commit their classes to the truthful teaching of our shared history of the United States.

In 2022, [Virginia Commonwealth University achieved the status of Minority Serving Institution \(MSI\)](#) and was designated by the U.S. Department of Education as eligible for the federal Title III and Title V MSI and Strengthening Institutions Programs (SIP) for having met rigorous standards in the service of minority students, low-income students, and student success. The establishment of foundational education in racial literacy was identified as a need for not only students of color, but also students who do not belong to minoritized groups. As 21st Century educators, we recognize the intrinsic value to every student of learning the full scope of human history—both the systemic violations of human rights that shape our world today and the brave work done by those who have fought for justice for all of us. VCU educates a uniquely diverse body of students in the heart of a majority-Black city whose elite once governed on a basis of apartheid and systemic violence. Nowhere is it more essential to teach the history of the forces that built and maintain structural, systemic and institutional racism. Nowhere is it more necessary to tell the stories of those who have fought back against various levels of racism with the faith that we can build a better world.

VCU faculty are united in their demand that faculty retain democratic control over course content and the structure of our campus's curriculum. We remain committed to building a curriculum that is relevant and responsive to our student body. Whether you support the teaching of racial literacy in college classrooms or not, we call upon our colleagues in Virginia's higher education system and nationally to hold VCU's top-level administration accountable to upholding higher education's commitment to shared governance and faculty-led oversight of curriculum at all levels. As this, colleagues, is what is at stake for all of us.

Signed,

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Add your name here

Questions? Email us at ucw.vcu@gmail.com

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