



January 2019

Dear Colleagues,

Spring term has launched!

I write to share a few thoughts and to update you on what is happening this spring in the academic realm. Academic excellence is the first pillar in our plans and it is a primary focus of our collective aspirations and efforts. The University is in a very good position to build on its momentum and the great work of faculty, staff, and students. What is taking place is broad-reaching and involves academic leadership, faculty development, curriculum, inclusive excellence, new initiatives, and how we can become a better intellectual community.

Academic Leadership

Two very important searches are underway. A committee was launched in November that is working quietly but diligently to find the next Dean of the Robins School of Business — a person who can build on the progress led by Dean Baganoff. We will know the results of that effort towards the end of the term. A second search, assisted by a faculty committee, is seeking to identify among our talented colleagues an Associate Provost for Academic Integration. Please do nominate those you consider to be well-suited for this role.

Faculty Development

Teaching and Scholarship Initiative – Crystal Hoyt is leading a faculty committee and working with Sandra Joireman to consider our faculty development program in teaching and scholarship. Look for a committee report in early February with discussion and implementation to follow.

Inclusive Pedagogy Initiative – The Inclusive Pedagogy Cohort led by Meredith Harbach has been meeting together this year sharing best practices for advanced university teaching — a key component of our thriving and inclusion work and general teaching excellence. The Cohort is working on a campus event in which the participants will share their training with the campus community. We will be sending out a call for the 2019/20 Inclusive Pedagogy Cohort later in the spring.

Program on Academic Leadership – We will be sending out the call for nominations and applications for the 2019/20 Program on Academic Leadership (PAL) next week. The program, led by Sandra Joireman, is designed to inform and equip faculty members for leadership at all levels of the University. The group has focused on internal University issues such as admissions, fundraising, and faculty equity. It has also discussed national concerns such as the future of liberal arts and challenges facing higher education. In the second semester PAL will be focused

on developing decision-making skills and doing a crisis simulation. If you want to know more about the program take a look at the [Provost's website](#) or talk to one of the participants.

Curriculum

First-year Experience and Richmond Endeavor – We have seen the successful kick-off of *The Richmond Endeavor* (a living-learning program for first-year students), with our first four Endeavor communities (91 applicants for 60 spots). With oversight from Steve Bisese and me, Scott Johnson and Andy Gurka are leading the effort to create what the strategic plan calls a *signature first-year experience*. They are supported by the First-Year Experience Advisory Committee — a group of about twenty faculty, staff, and students. They have begun re-envisioning the overall experience of our first-year students and enhancing programs like orientation, academic advising, and peer mentoring.

General Education Review – The Senate’s General Education Curriculum Review Committee, chaired by Eugene Wu, has been meeting over the past five months with academic departments and members of the faculty and staff affiliated with portions of the general education curriculum (e.g. First-Year Seminar, Wellness) in order to gain a holistic understanding of the current curriculum. The committee is expanding the review this spring by eliciting feedback from students and recent alumni. The University community can participate in the review process by attending an upcoming town hall (date TBA) with panelists from universities that have recently undergone curriculum review and revision. The committee is due to present a written report with its assessment on the fitness of the current curriculum to the Faculty Senate at its March 2019 meeting.

Inclusive Excellence

Central to our efforts on academic quality are the array of efforts on inclusion and thriving at UR being organized by President Crutcher’s Advisory Committee on Making Excellence Inclusive (I am a member) and the Interim Coordinating Committee (ICC)

— <https://president.richmond.edu/initiatives/thriving/index.html>. We will be engaged in work throughout the spring culminating in a report and action steps to implement beginning immediately (e.g., new multicultural space) and continuing into next academic year. Many thanks to the faculty, staff, and students who are contributing so much here.

Initiatives

Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship – The CIE committee, led by Beth Crawford, is [accepting proposals](#) (deadline 2/18) to support courses that will enhance the creative, innovative, and/or entrepreneurial abilities of our students. This is a great opportunity to try innovative approaches to collaborative teaching between UR faculty or between UR faculty and outside experts. Details are available on the Provost’s website and information sessions will be announced shortly. CIE is also creating a student Innovation Fellows program. Students will take part in Stanford University’s national University Innovation Fellows program and will serve as student advisors to the CIE committee next year.

Ethics – Renovations to create the new Ethics Suite in Jepson Hall are complete and faculty are teaching in the space, which will serve as a hub for ethics-related initiatives. Please visit! The University’s first Ethics Fellow, Jess Flanigan, is available to facilitate ethics discussions with

student, faculty and staff groups across campus. Faculty in the Ethics Working Group continue to examine new scholarship in the field. Discussions are underway for a 2020 conference, with all-school participation, on a broad ethics theme. Stay tuned for more information!

Data Science – Based on significant interest in each of our schools, we are exploring the curricular opportunities and staffing and equipment needs (e.g., high performance computing) of expanding our footprint in this important area. Look for updates.

Intellectual Community

Last term, and indeed the past six months, have seen much contentious debate on our campus. In many ways, that debate is welcome. We are a place where ideas matter: we should argue over important ideas and argue with conviction. That is what makes for a vibrant intellectual community and a thriving university. I have been approached, however, by many colleagues who feel that the tenor of some of those exchanges has impeded debate and undermined the trust and respect essential to learning from an opposing view. I have no easy solution to this — certainly it is not that we should avoid debating. I would ask, however, that in the coming months we focus hard on the substance of the arguments and avoid the labeling or caricature of people making them. We have an enviable community and we will gather this spring in a number of forums to discuss and consider important questions. At those occasions and in other areas of exchange, let us assume the best about, indeed be generous with respect for, our faculty and staff colleagues — even when we strenuously disagree with their positions. That would be a model for our students and a true learning community, one that will only get stronger if we are mindful.

I invite you to contact or meet with me regarding any of the above or with any other thoughts on how we can advance our academic aspirations.

Best wishes for spring 2019,

Jeff