

**JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMISSION  
OF THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

***Special Report:*  
VCU Degree Award**

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## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

*Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission  
Suite 1100, General Assembly Building, Capitol Square  
Richmond, Virginia 23219*

*Philip A. Leone  
Director*

*(804) 786-1258*

October 20, 2008

The Honorable Lacey E. Putney  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Committee  
9th Floor, General Assembly Building  
Capitol Square  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Delegate Putney:

On September 9, 2008, you requested that the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission complete a review of several issues related to the award of a degree by Virginia Commonwealth University to the former chief of police for the City of Richmond. Staff have completed the review, and this special report contains our findings and conclusion.

I wish to express our appreciation to the Rector, President, and Provost of Virginia Commonwealth University for their cooperation during this review. Their response to our findings and conclusions are in Appendix C. I would also like to thank the university's Director of Assurance Services and the Chief Information Officer and his staff for their cooperation and assistance. Finally, I wish to thank the Director of the Department of Forensic Science and his staff for their assistance in this review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Philip A. Leone'.

Philip A. Leone  
Director

PAL/gst



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## Special Report: VCU Degree Award

### In Summary

In May 2007, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) awarded a bachelors degree to the then police chief for the City of Richmond. VCU administrators intentionally circumvented established policies and requirements in awarding the degree and, in doing so, afforded the student preferential treatment. Pressure appears to have been exerted on the coordinator of the program from which the student received his degree by the dean who served as her supervisor, and this dean appears to have been pressured by someone at a higher level within the university. The Board of Visitors acted responsibly and diligently to address allegations of preferential treatment and improper influence, and the investigation conducted by VCU's Department of Assurance Services was thorough and professional. Concerns raised about the investigation are minor or lack merit with one exception. Finally, the Board of Visitors' decision not to revoke the student's degree was a reasonable one even though the student had not earned it. However, the university needs to adopt a less restrictive policy that will enable it to revoke degrees that have been improperly awarded.

On September 9, 2008, the House Appropriations Committee of the Virginia General Assembly directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to undertake an examination of the events leading up to and following the awarding of an undergraduate degree to the former City of Richmond police chief by Virginia Commonwealth University (Appendix A). The Committee requested that JLARC address the following issues:

- the award by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) of an undergraduate degree to a student who did not meet the requirement that at least 25 percent of his coursework be completed at VCU,
- the decision to specifically waive published graduation requirements,
- the conduct of the investigation by VCU's Board of Visitors and Department of Assurance Services,
- services VCU received from the consulting firm of Deloitte Financial Advisory Services, and
- the role of the Board of Visitors in ensuring that degrees are not improperly awarded.

To complete this review, JLARC staff reviewed the work papers, including all investigative notes, of the investigation conducted by VCU's Department of Assurance Services. In addition, JLARC staff conducted 34 interviews and reviewed 24 email accounts. (See Appendix B for a list of the individuals who were interviewed.) JLARC staff also reviewed relevant statutes, by-laws, and university policies and procedures.

### **VCU ADMINISTRATORS AND FACULTY PROVIDED PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO THE STUDENT THROUGHOUT HIS VCU EXPERIENCE**

The student in question enrolled in and graduated from VCU during the spring 2007 semester. The evidence indicates that the student was provided preferential treatment by VCU administrators and faculty throughout his student experience. A VCU faculty member served as the student's point of contact in all administrative matters even though she was not employed by the college the student was enrolled in and was not authorized by VCU to serve as an official advisor. VCU administrators in the student's college developed a flawed curriculum plan for the student and circumvented the normal program admissions processes. One of these VCU administrators later approved the award of a degree to the student even though the student did not meet several graduation requirements, at least two of which the administrator did not have the authority to waive. Several errors or oversights were also made by the offices responsible for processing the student's university undergraduate admission application as well as his graduation application.

#### **University College (UC)**

The UC was established at VCU in 2006 as a home for university-wide programs and services. The college's mission is to help all incoming freshmen and transfer students with their transition to VCU. As part of this mission, the college has advising responsibilities for students who have not declared a major. It houses only one degree-granting program (the BIS program). Prior to the creation of UC, the BIS program was housed under CHS.

#### **VCU Administrators Developed Flawed Curriculum Plan and Circumvented Typical BIS Program Admissions Processes**

In November 2006, the student who is the subject of this review met with a member of the faculty in the College of Humanities and Sciences (CHS). The student, who had a pre-existing professional relationship with the faculty member, indicated his interest in attending VCU and provided the faculty member with a copy of his unofficial transcripts. The faculty member then discussed the student's possible admission to VCU with the CHS dean. The CHS dean indicated that the student should enroll in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) program housed in the University College (UC). The CHS dean immediately arranged for the faculty member to meet with the UC dean to discuss the student's admission to that program.

The BIS program is designed to allow adult professionals who have earned some college credit to return to school and earn a college degree. BIS candidates are drawn from a variety of professions and



academic backgrounds and have unique educational goals. Consequently, the program is highly flexible regarding what credits can be counted towards the degree as well as what transfer credits it accepts. The flexibility of the program means that it is unique among VCU's degree-granting programs in a number of ways. Foremost, applicants to the program must be approved through a program-specific admissions process in addition to the university's general undergraduate admissions process.

Under the typical BIS program admissions process, a student would contact the BIS coordinator and arrange an orientation meeting. At this meeting, the student would review his or her academic history and goals with the BIS coordinator. The student would then work with the BIS coordinator to develop a BIS application or "curriculum plan." This curriculum plan would incorporate a student's past coursework and planned coursework, all of which would be linked together in a clearly-defined focus area (the BIS equivalent to a major). The student's proposed curriculum plan and a short goal statement would then be presented to the BIS Admissions Committee. This committee includes faculty representatives from across the university's many disciplines. The committee would decide to approve the student's proposed curriculum plan, approve the plan but require changes, or deny the plan. Following the committee's decision, the student would be formally notified of whether or not he or she had been accepted into the BIS program.

The student who is the subject of this review did not participate in the typical BIS admissions processes described above. Specifically, the student did not participate in the required orientation meeting with the BIS coordinator (or have any other contact with the BIS coordinator during the admissions process), had no involvement in the development of his own curriculum plan, did not develop a written goal statement, and was not approved for admission into the program through the BIS Admissions Committee. The student's admission to the BIS program therefore deviated substantially from the normal process in almost every significant aspect (Table 1).

Evidence indicates that VCU did not follow the typical BIS admissions process for this student because of improper actions taken by the UC dean and the BIS coordinator. In interviews with both JLARC staff and VCU's Department of Assurance Services, the BIS coordinator said that the UC dean provided her with copies of the student's unofficial transcripts. In interviews with Assurance Services, the UC dean consistently denied ever having possession of the student's transcripts. However, an analysis performed at JLARC's request by the Virginia Department of Forensic Science

**Table 1: VCU Did Not Follow Typical BIS Admissions Process**

Typical BIS Admissions Process	Typical Applicant	Student in Question
Orientation meeting held with BIS coordinator	✓	X
Curriculum plan developed	✓	✓
Student involved in development of curriculum plan	✓	X
Goal statement prepared	✓	X
Curriculum plan and goal statement presented to BIS Admissions Committee	✓	X
BIS Admissions Committee accepts or denies applicant	✓	X
Notification letter of acceptance or denial sent to applicant	✓	? <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> It could not be conclusively determined whether or not the student received this letter.

Source: JLARC staff analysis based on document reviews and personnel interviews, 2008.

found that handwriting on the student’s unofficial transcript matched that of the UC dean. A note attached to the student’s unofficial transcript, also identified as being written by the UC dean, indicated that the UC dean had some knowledge of the student’s academic history.

After providing copies of the student’s unofficial transcripts to the BIS coordinator, the UC dean requested that the BIS coordinator develop a curriculum plan for the student. The BIS coordinator then developed a plan requiring that the student earn only six credit hours at VCU. The BIS coordinator said that she then presented this six-credit hour curriculum plan for the student to the UC dean. The UC dean has both affirmed and denied that he received the plan in interviews with Assurance Services. The BIS coordinator said the six-credit hour plan was developed under pressure by the UC dean. The UC dean has both affirmed and denied this allegation.

A six-credit hour plan fails to meet at least five separate graduation requirements, all of which were clearly listed in the *2006-2007 Undergraduate Bulletin*. Both the UC dean and the BIS coordinator were familiar with these requirements as they were responsible for assuring students met requirements, had advised students about requirements, and had served on the university’s Academic Regulations Appeals Committee (ARAC), a committee charged with reviewing appeals to graduation requirements. Both employees also had experience reviewing BIS curriculum plans. However, no changes to the curriculum plan were made.

The student was enrolled in VCU in the spring 2007 semester. At the time the student was enrolled at VCU there was no written policy stating that a BIS student's curriculum plan must be approved by the BIS Admissions Committee. However, instructions for the BIS curriculum plan in use in spring 2007 state that the plan must be approved by the "BIS Faculty," and all BIS Admissions Committee members interviewed by JLARC staff said that that committee's approval was necessary before a student could be admitted into the program. Both the UC dean and the BIS coordinator were familiar with this step in the BIS admissions process. However, the student's plan was never presented to the BIS Admissions Committee. Committee members interviewed by JLARC staff said that the committee would not have approved a six-credit hour curriculum plan because it would not have allowed the student to meet minimum graduation requirements.

### **No Evidence That Student's Undergraduate Admission to the University Was Unreasonable**

To be enrolled as an undergraduate student at VCU, an applicant must be officially admitted to the university through the Undergraduate Admissions Office. The university's general undergraduate admissions process may sometimes occur alongside the process for admitting a student into a specific college or program. In this case, the student in question was admitted into the university after he had been accepted into the BIS program. This does not appear to be an unusual occurrence. The BIS program accepts course credits that are not typically accepted by other university programs, and each BIS applicant's curriculum is unique. As a result, it is not unusual for a student applying to BIS from outside of the university to seek approval for admission into BIS before being formally admitted to the university.

There is no evidence that indicates the student did not meet the academic requirements necessary to be admitted into the university. However, there were several information management problems relating to the student's university admission, including delays and failures in updating the student's information in the university's electronic data management system as well as the loss of key records. The student's \$35 application fee was also waived – a waiver usually only granted in cases of financial hardship. Some of these errors may be attributable to the fact that the Undergraduate Admissions Office was switching to a new electronic data management system at the same time the student's application was being processed.

### **CHS Faculty Member Acted as Student's Unofficial Advisor Throughout the Student's VCU Experience**

In the course of the student's admissions and graduation experiences he had direct contact with only one VCU employee—the CHS faculty member with whom he first discussed applying to VCU. The student had a pre-existing professional relationship with this faculty member, so it is not unusual that she served as the student's initial contact with the university. However, it is unusual that the faculty member continued to act as the sole connection between the university and the student in almost all administrative matters. These matters are usually handled by the student or the student's advisor.

For most BIS students, the BIS coordinator also serves as their advisor. The BIS coordinator meets with the student to discuss curriculum issues and assists the student in processing paperwork. In contrast, the student in question had no direct communications with the BIS coordinator at any point in his experience. The BIS coordinator's typical role in interacting with the student was filled by the CHS faculty member, even though the faculty member stated she was not authorized to serve as an official advisor.

The faculty member executed several tasks that were typically carried out by the BIS coordinator. The faculty member communicated the student's curriculum requirements to him and played an active role in handling and processing the student's paperwork. All materials the student provided to the university were provided through this faculty member, including the student's university admissions application and copies of both his official and unofficial transcripts. The faculty member also helped complete the student's graduation application.

In addition to executing the above tasks, the faculty member was made aware of the details of the student's curriculum plan. In December 2006, the BIS coordinator informed the faculty member that the student would need six credit hours to graduate but might have to go to ARAC for approval (the BIS coordinator also offered to provide a copy of the student's curriculum plan, but there is no evidence this was in fact shared at this time). The BIS coordinator stated that she never followed up with ARAC. In February 2007 the faculty member was provided with a copy of the student's six-credit hour curriculum plan. At this time the faculty member communicated to the BIS coordinator that "I am good with the plan." The faculty member also assisted the student in course enrollment by creating an independent study course for the student and serving as the instructor for that course. The faculty member said she took this action because other upper level courses of interest to the student were full at the time of his enrollment, and she

said that it was not unusual for a faculty member to take such action under these circumstances.

The faculty member said that she did not have knowledge of BIS program requirements or student graduation requirements. However, as the university's sole point of contact with the student, the faculty member was the only VCU employee in a position to ensure that this basic information was relayed to the student. An interview by Assurance Services with the student and an interview by JLARC staff with the faculty member indicate that this information was not relayed. The faculty member said that she only relayed the information that had been conveyed to her by the BIS coordinator and that the coordinator only provided the six-hour plan.

### **VCU Dean Approved Graduation Application Even Though Student Did Not Meet at Least Five Separate Graduation Requirements**

Students seeking to graduate from VCU must submit a graduation application. Under the process in place for the BIS program in spring 2007, the student would complete an application and submit it to the BIS coordinator. The BIS coordinator would then sign her approval and forward the application to the CHS Office of Student Services. This arrangement was in place because, prior to 2006, the BIS program was housed under CHS. The Office of Student Services would then stamp the application as approved by the UC dean – who at the time was also the associate CHS dean. The UC dean would not typically review the BIS graduation applications.

In February 2007, the CHS faculty member who had been serving as the student's unofficial advisor partially completed the student's graduation application. The faculty member then faxed the partially completed application to the BIS coordinator, noting "I am not quite sure though how to fill out the middle section." The BIS coordinator completed the application but refused to sign it. She said she refused to sign because the student did not meet minimum graduation requirements.

The VCU *2006-2007 Undergraduate Bulletin* lists several institutional and programmatic graduation requirements for BIS students. By taking only six credit hours at VCU, the student in question did not meet at least five of these requirements (Table 2). Two of these requirements are referred to as "residency" requirements. The first requirement is based on one of the comprehensive standards for accreditation set by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The requirement states that a student must earn at least 25 percent of his or her credit hours at the institution

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**Table 2: Student Did Not Meet at Least Five VCU Graduation Requirements**

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Graduation Requirement for BIS Degree	Actual VCU Credits Earned by Student	Percent of Requirement Fulfilled by Student
Complete at least <b>25 percent</b> of credits at VCU	5% of credits	20%
Complete at least <b>30 of the last 45</b> credits at VCU	6 of last 45 credits	20%
Complete at least 24 credits after acceptance into the BIS program	6 credits	25%
Complete at least 12 credits in focus area after acceptance into the BIS program	6 credits	50%
Complete 21 junior- or senior-level credits at VCU.	6 credits	29%

Source: JLARC staff analysis of *2006-2007 Undergraduate Bulletin*, 2008.

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awarding the degree. The student in question earned only five percent of his credit hours at VCU. The second requirement is VCU's institutional policy that a student must complete 30 of his or her last 45 credit hours at the university to be eligible for a VCU degree. The student in question completed only six of his last 30 credit hours at VCU, or 20 percent of what was required. Additionally, it appears that the student did not meet several other academic requirements necessary to complete the BIS program.

University deans are allowed to grant exceptions to many programmatic and institutional requirements but are not allowed to grant exceptions to rules that fall under the authority of ARAC. For example, ARAC is the sole entity with the authority to waive VCU's "25 percent" and "30 of the last 45" rules. However, waivers for the "25 percent" rule are rare as this requirement is based on a SACS comprehensive standard for accreditation. An Assurance Services review of past ARAC decisions from December 2001 to December 2006 found that no waiver to this rule had been granted. Given that the student was 24 credit hours short of satisfying the "25 percent" rule, and that exceptions to this rule were rarely granted, it is highly unlikely that ARAC would have waived the residency requirements for the student to graduate from VCU in spring 2007.

In early March 2007, the UC dean met with the BIS coordinator to discuss the student's unsigned graduation application. At this meeting the BIS coordinator refused to sign the application. The UC dean then signed his approval of the application even though he did not have the authority to waive either the SACS "25 percent" rule or VCU's "30 of the last 45" rule. As noted above, the UC dean was responsible for ensuring students met requirements, had advised students about requirements, and had served on ARAC. He was therefore familiar with these requirements and the role of

ARAC. This was the only BIS graduation application actually signed by the UC dean in spring 2007. All other BIS graduation applications from that semester were stamped, indicating that they were approved through the Office of Student Services.

### **Checks Performed by Student Services and the Graduation Office Did Not Flag the Student as Ineligible to Graduate**

After the student's graduation application was signed by the UC dean, it was given to the CHS Office of Students Services. Officials from this office said that they do not routinely perform any checks on BIS graduation applications aside from confirmation of signatures. For BIS graduation applications in spring 2007, the BIS coordinator's signature should have appeared in two of the application's three signature spaces. The employee who processed the student in question's application said that even though the application had not been signed by the BIS coordinator, the UC dean appeared to be familiar with the application and had signed it. For these reasons, the employee assumed that the student must have met graduation requirements.

After being processed by the CHS Office of Student Services, the student's graduation application was sent to the Graduation Office in University Records and Registration. This office processes all of the university's undergraduate graduation applications. The university registrar said that individual colleges bear chief responsibility for assuring that their graduating students meet minimum academic requirements. She said that University Records and Registration is primarily an archival unit, and the Graduation Office performs only basic checks of the submitted graduation applications.

At the time the student's application was received, the Graduation Office director said her office would typically verify that signatures were in place and that the student had the minimum 120 credit hours and at least a 2.0 GPA. The director said these latter checks were performed by verifying student records in the university's electronic data management system, not by verifying the figures entered on the graduation application itself. In this case, the Graduation Office did not flag the student in question's graduation application as incomplete despite the absence of the BIS coordinator's signature. Another error relating to the student's academic standing was also made and then later corrected. Despite these failures, there is no evidence that the student's application was purposefully mishandled by University Records and Registration. The Graduation Office now performs automated checks to ensure each applicant is in compliance with residency requirements.

## **STUDENT OBTAINED BIS DEGREE WITHOUT EARNING IT BECAUSE INFLUENCE WAS EXERTED**

The substantial number of deviations from the standard process and requirements involving the student's admission to and graduation from the BIS program resulted from intentional decisions by VCU administrators to disregard university policies and procedures and afford the student preferential treatment. These decisions to circumvent policies and procedures appear to have resulted from pressure exerted on two individuals – the BIS coordinator and the dean of the University College.

### **Influence Exerted on BIS Coordinator by University College Dean**

The UC dean appears to have exerted pressure directly on the BIS coordinator to participate in the preferential treatment afforded the student. The BIS coordinator, who reported directly to the UC dean, states that she was pressured by him to develop a plan that would allow the student to receive a degree by May 2007. This pressure led her to develop a curriculum plan requiring the student to earn only six credit hours from VCU. In his initial interview with Assurance Services, the UC dean indicated that he had no involvement in the development of the student's curriculum plan. In subsequent interviews he stated that he directed the BIS coordinator to develop a plan and that he subsequently saw and approved the six-hour plan developed by the BIS coordinator. In a later interview he stated that he did exert pressure on the BIS coordinator to develop the six-hour plan.

In addition to the statements described above, other factors also indicate that the BIS coordinator was pressured. There was no evidence of any other student being inappropriately admitted into the BIS program, or of the BIS coordinator developing a curriculum plan that did not meet the 30-hour graduation requirement. Also, there was no evidence of the BIS coordinator approving any graduation application that did not demonstrate completion of all the requirements needed to graduate. Furthermore, the BIS coordinator had no apparent reason to provide preferential treatment to the student because she did not have a relationship with the student, had never met him, and did not appear to have had anything to gain from circumventing university processes and policies. Therefore, it is not reasonable to conclude that she decided to afford the student preferential treatment unless pressured to do so.

### **Influence Exerted on University College Dean from Higher Level**

Pressure also appears to have been exerted on the UC dean by someone at a higher level within the university to ensure that the student was able to obtain a VCU degree in one semester. The UC



dean indicated several times in interviews with Assurance Services that he felt implied pressure from the VCU president's office, and in one account indicated that he felt pressure from someone above him but could not tell Assurance Services who exactly was actually pressuring him. There is no evidence that the UC dean had ever previously granted an exception to the residency requirements or otherwise authorized substantial deviations from the BIS requirements for other BIS students. Moreover, emails from the UC dean to other students indicate his understanding of the 30 of the last 45 hours residency requirement and that only ARAC could grant an exception to it.

Like the BIS coordinator, the UC dean had no apparent reason to afford the student preferential treatment absent pressure because he did not have a relationship with the student, had never met him, and did not appear to have had anything to gain from circumventing university processes and policies. Therefore, it also would be unreasonable to conclude that the UC dean would have provided preferential treatment to the student in violation of university and SACS requirements unless he was pressured to do so.

With the conflicting and changing statements of the former deans of the UC and CHS and the lack of written documentation as to what actually happened, it is difficult to determine the extent and exact nature of the pressure exerted on the UC dean or to definitively determine who exerted it. However, JLARC staff identified certain facts relevant to this issue. The UC dean, who also served as associate dean of the CHS, reported directly to two individuals. In his role as UC dean, he reported to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (provost). As associate dean of the CHS, he reported to the CHS dean. Based on the JLARC staff review and the review by Assurance Services, there is no evidence that the provost had any involvement with regard to the student's pursuit of his undergraduate degree.

In contrast, the CHS dean did have involvement. He recommended to the UC dean that the student pursue his degree through the BIS program in the University College. He also arranged a meeting between the UC dean and the student's unofficial advisor to discuss the student's admission to the BIS program. Additionally, after the student was admitted to the BIS program at VCU, the CHS dean initiated at least two communications with the UC dean regarding the progress of the student in seeking his degree. Finally, the CHS dean had a relationship with the student which he described as professional and social.

### **No Evidence of Influence by VCU President**

There is no evidence that the president actively influenced the process in this matter. The president of the university stated on at least one occasion that he thought it would be a “good idea” for the student to obtain his degree from VCU, and the UC dean stated that he felt implied pressure from the president’s office to assist the student in obtaining his degree. However, there is no further evidence of involvement by the president in this matter, and the UC dean stated that he had no direct contact with the president’s office regarding this matter.

### **INVESTIGATION APPROPRIATELY ADDRESSED ALLEGATIONS OF IMPROPER AWARDING OF DEGREE**

On May 18, 2008, the rector of the VCU Board of Visitors retrieved an anonymous email with an attachment alleging that a BIS degree conferred in May 2007 was in violation of university and academic requirements and was awarded as a result of influence by university officials and the mayor of the City of Richmond. The rector then ordered a preliminary investigation, which was followed by a complete investigation of the allegations by Assurance Services. Concerns have been raised about the investigation by VCU personnel who were interviewed as part of it as well as by other VCU faculty members, and the General Assembly requested that JLARC staff review the conduct of the investigation. The JLARC staff review found that the investigation was conducted professionally, and, with one exception, concerns regarding the investigation are minor or lack merit.

### **Strong Basis for Initiating Investigation**

On May 18, 2008, the rector of the VCU Board of Visitors retrieved the anonymous email and contacted the university general counsel and the executive director of the Department of Assurance Services. Assurance Services serves as the university’s internal audit unit and is responsible for independent reviews of the university’s financial, operational, and information systems to evaluate whether resources are utilized in accordance with the institutional mission, goals, and strategies.

On May 19, 2008, at the direction of the rector of the VCU Board of Visitors, Assurance Services conducted a preliminary review of the allegations relating to academic requirements outlined in the email. The rector acted judiciously in limiting the initial inquiry to the facts surrounding whether the degree had met academic standards set forth in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* and other policies. Accordingly, the preliminary review focused on the veracity of the

academic allegations contained in the email. An analysis of documents and records substantiated the academic allegations.

On May 20, 2008, the director of Assurance Services met with the provost and informed him of the allegations contained in the email. The provost asked the deans of the College of Humanities and Sciences and the University College, who were both identified in the anonymous allegation, to report to his office where he discussed the allegations with them in the presence of the director of Assurance Services. The responses of the two deans at this meeting, as described by both the director of Assurance Services and the provost, suggested that allegations of inappropriate influence might have merit and needed to be further investigated.

Therefore, both the decision to conduct a full investigation as well as the scope of the investigation were based primarily on the facts confirmed and information gathered by Assurance Services in the two days following receipt of the anonymous email and not based merely on the allegations contained in the email.

### **Board Acted Responsibly and Diligently to Address Allegations**

When the allegation was received, the rector acted in a timely manner by immediately contacting the university's legal counsel and the Department of Assurance Services. The rector also requested that Assurance Services conduct a preliminary review as discussed above. Once Assurance Services had determined that the academic allegations were supported by documents and records, the rector called an executive committee meeting of the Board to consider the matter. After discussion with other Board members, the rector determined that the president could not be involved in the investigation because of the allegations made and his potential conflict of interest. All of these actions by the rector appear to have been responsible and appropriate.

Section 2.2-2105 of the *Code of Virginia* provides that any university board of visitors can investigate the management or the conduct of any of its officers or employees. On May 22, 2008, the executive committee of the Board met and assigned responsibility for investigating the allegations to the Department of Assurance Services, and required that the director of Assurance Services report solely to the Board during the conduct of the review. The Board's Academic and Health Affairs Policy Committee (committee) was assigned responsibility for overseeing the investigation instead of the Audit Committee which typically oversees the work of Assurance Services. This appears to have been a reasonable assignment given the responsibility of the committee for academic affairs and the academic nature of the allegations.

Since the university president was named in the allegations and in order to avoid a potential conflict during this review, the Board affirmatively changed the reporting relationship of the director of Assurance Services from a position with dual reporting responsibilities (to the Board and president) to one in which the director would reported solely to the Board. This action also appears to have been reasonable given the nature of the allegations.

The level of involvement of the Board in overseeing this review was much greater than is for typical audits or investigations conducted by Assurance Services. During the period between May 22, 2008, and June 27, 2008, there were five special meetings of the full Board or committee regarding this investigation, which was unprecedented. In addition, the chair of the committee requested daily updates from the director of the Department of Assurance Services and met with him twice weekly.

While the Board appears to have acted in a timely and appropriate manner, less day-to-day involvement in the investigation may have been preferable. There is no evidence that the Board's level of involvement compromised the quality or integrity of the investigation, and the nature and seriousness of the allegations may have warranted a greater level of involvement than usual. However, the level of involvement appears to have contributed to Assurance Services making an inappropriate statement to one of the individuals being interviewed (discussed in more detail later in this report). In addition, while there is no evidence to support claims that the Board improperly influenced the investigation or that Assurance Services' independence was compromised, its level of involvement left the Board and Assurance Services susceptible to such claims. In the future, the Board should continue to give clear direction as well as take an active role in overseeing sensitive investigations involving serious allegations but maintain more separation from the Department of Assurance Services as it conducts its investigations and avoid any role in the day-to-day decisions.

### **Investigation Conducted by VCU Department of Assurance Services Was Thorough and Professional**

Overall, the review conducted by the staff of Assurance Services was thorough and conformed to general norms of professional practice. The staff followed procedures that were developed in a workplan which was reviewed by both the Board's Academic Affairs and Health Policy Committee and by an outside consultant. The work papers prepared by Assurance Services are well organized and comprehensive in documenting the information collected. In addition, Assurance Services was thorough in collecting relevant and appropriate documents and interviewing individuals with relevant expertise or who would likely have had knowledge regard-

ing the student's experience. Finally, the findings and conclusions set forth in the Assurance Services' report to the Board of Visitors were supported by the research conducted. The major research activities conducted by Assurance Services are summarized in Exhibit 1.

Staff from Deloitte Financial Advisory Services (Deloitte), an independent consulting firm contracted by VCU to provide advice and counsel during the review, told JLARC staff that Assurance Services was professional in conducting its work and that interview summaries as well as other analyses prepared by Assurance Services were thorough and accurate. Deloitte routinely conducts internal audits of government agencies and corporations, including fraud investigations. Deloitte staff stated that the overall approach and tone of this investigation was no different than any other audit or fraud investigation in which they have been involved.

Similarly, the consensus of the Board's Academic and Health Affairs Policy Committee was that Assurance Services' review was thorough and complete, and the findings and conclusions were appropriate. The committee raised no concerns regarding the report and forwarded it to the full Board the day after receiving it (June 27, 2007).

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#### **Exhibit 1: Research Activities of VCU's Department of Assurance Services**

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- Conducted 38 interviews of 24 individuals
- Reviewed university email accounts for 13 employees and the former student
- Obtained and evaluated the BIS student files for students who graduated from the program from August 2006 to May 2008;
- Researched university and BIS admission policies and procedures including requirements contained in the *2006-2007 Undergraduate Bulletin*;
- Obtained and analyzed various reports from the university's student systems and related databases, including transfer credits, academic coursework, and degrees conferred;
- Analyzed information contained in the ARAC database; and
- Hired a consultant to review its workplan, procedures performed, and conclusions for reasonableness and completeness.

Source: Assurance Services Report to Board of Visitors dated June 27, 2008.

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During or prior to the meeting of the full Board on June 27, 2008, the Board received a copy of an email written by the dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences expressing concerns about the investigation. His specific concerns included the investigatory techniques and his perception that conclusions seemed to be preordained. In response to the concerns outlined in the dean's letter, the Board requested that the provost review the report developed by Assurance Services. The provost was selected to conduct the review because the president had been recused from activities related to the investigation.

After conducting his own review of the investigation, the provost reported to the Board on July 3, 2008, that "the report provided to the Board by VCU Assurance Services does not contain material errors of fact or of conclusion." In addition, the provost stated that "the investigation appears to have been conducted with professionalism, with only one possible exception. This professionalism is in accord with my experience with Assurance Services over the past 11 years in a variety of difficult circumstances." The one exception referred to the use of a statement about tenure to a non-tenured faculty member (discussed in more detail later in this report).

### **With One Exception, Concerns Raised Regarding the Investigation Appear Minor or Lack Merit**

Most of the faculty and staff members interviewed by JLARC staff described Assurance Services staff as professional and expressed no concerns about their interviews with them or the overall investigation. Those individuals who had routinely participated in reviews by Assurance Services explained to JLARC staff that they understood the audit process. As a result, they were less likely to have had any concerns about the investigation. However, some individuals, generally persons who were more central to the investigation, expressed concerns or criticisms about the investigation. With one exception, the concerns raised do not appear to have merit.

One of the allegations made by some interviewees was that Assurance Services did not always capture statements accurately in interview summaries. According to the Deloitte consultants, however, Assurance Services' interview summaries for interviews that they attended were thorough and accurate. In addition, the interview summaries prepared by Assurance Services generally were consistent with accounts provided to JLARC staff in their interviews with the same individuals. The provost also reviewed the investigative notes and found concerns about inaccuracies to be invalid.

Concerns have also been raised about the alleged lack of resources being devoted to investigating the motives or actions of the author of the anonymous email who some have speculated stole the student's records. JLARC staff found that the actions of Assurance Services in turning over the review of the stolen student documents to the VCU Police Department were appropriate because the stolen records were a criminal matter. JLARC staff also found it reasonable not to focus on the motives of the author of the email given their minimal relevance to the issues surrounding the award of the unearned degree.

Another concern raised was that Assurance Services reached the preordained conclusion that there was a conspiracy and was looking for evidence to support that theory during the investigation. As discussed above, the primary basis for the decision to proceed with the investigation and the investigation's scope was the facts confirmed and information gathered during a preliminary investigation conducted by Assurance Services in the first two days after the anonymous email was received.

Another concern raised was that the interview techniques employed by Assurance Services were inappropriate. Individuals expressed concerns about being interviewed multiple times or being asked the same questions repeatedly. Multiple interviews appear to have been conducted appropriately when new information was obtained or interviewees made conflicting statements that needed to be reconciled. Interviewees were asked questions more than once because they were not fully forthcoming or their accounts conflicted with those of others. JLARC staff encountered the same challenge of conflicting statements by interviewees in some interviews. In addition, the review of Assurance Services' investigative notes confirmed that the department was encountering changing accounts, conflicting statements, lack of responsiveness, and the discovery of new information, which necessitated multiple interviews and repeating questions.

According to Deloitte, conducting additional interviews when new information is obtained or asking questions more than once because interviewees are not forthcoming, or providing conflicting or changing accounts are standard investigative techniques in this type of investigation. Deloitte noted that the individuals being interviewed were understandably sensitive because they were being asked difficult questions and being made aware of inconsistencies in their accounts. The provost reached a similar conclusion. He reported that "[the three persons] whom I interviewed expressed discomfort with the investigation and with some investigatory methods. In my view, however, the investigation appears to have been conducted with professionalism..." Deloitte further indicated that the approach used in this investigation did not resemble the more

intense approach that would typically be used in a criminal investigation.

Concern was also raised regarding the lack of consideration demonstrated by Assurance Services in arranging and conducting the interviews. While JLARC staff found that staff from Assurance Services generally identified themselves, made appointments or offered to meet individuals at alternate or more convenient times, discussed the reason for the interview, and provided those interviewed with contact information, it appears that on a few occasions protocols might not have been strictly adhered to and some inaptly worded questions might have been asked. However, there is no evidence of behavior that would be considered improper or unprofessional. The provost told JLARC staff that he saw no evidence (in person or in the notes) that Assurance Services was unprofessional and that his experience with Assurance Services is that they are “unfailingly polite” even when they know people are not being truthful.

Aside from the inappropriate statement regarding tenure discussed below, the suggestions made that the investigation was unprofessional appear to be unfounded, and there do not appear to be any allegations that the findings or conclusions of the investigation were not supported. JLARC staff and the provost found nothing unprofessional about the investigation other than the statement regarding tenure. In addition, the rector of the Board of Visitors told JLARC staff that he was “absolutely confident that the investigation was done fairly and appropriately.” Moreover, the director of Assurance Services has served in his position for 18 years and enjoys a strong professional reputation in the VCU community. When asked whether there had ever been any suggestion or allegation prior to this investigation that the director had been unprofessional, the three Board members interviewed, the president, and the provost all indicated that they could not recall any such instance and attested to his professionalism.

### **Statement Regarding Tenure Was Inappropriate**

One concern raised regarding the investigation is valid. At the direction of the Board of Visitors, the investigators read the following statement to a faculty member who was being interviewed: “The Board is aware that you are seeking tenure and will consider your full cooperation in this matter as a part of that process.” While the Board contends that this statement was appropriate and meant to encourage the individual to be forthcoming and to provide assurances to the individual that doing so would not negatively impact the individual’s career at VCU, the statement had the opposite effect. The individual reported concerns about the use of this statement to her direct supervisors and to the provost. The



provost viewed this action as clearly inappropriate and reported this as an error to the Board and acknowledged it as an error in the SACS report. The provost also apologized to the individual in question.

Linking cooperation in an internal investigation to a faculty member's prospect for tenure is inappropriate and problematic. The tenure decision is based on academic performance, and there was no basis for linking it to this investigation. Moreover, in presenting such a statement to someone in an untenured status, the investigators ran the risk of the interviewee feeling pressure to provide the response that she perceived was being sought by the interviewer regardless of whether it was the truth.

### **Use of Consulting Services to Support the Investigation Was Warranted and Contract was Properly Procured**

At its May 22, 2008, meeting, the executive committee of the Board requested that Assurance Services complete its report by July 6, 2008. In most university reviews, Assurance Services has the benefit of exposing its report to multiple levels of management within the university from department heads to vice presidents. As this review was unique, normal channels for quality control procedures performed by university staff were not available to Assurance Services. Further, Assurance Services and the Board of Visitors were cognizant of the sensitive nature of this investigation, including allegations involving high-level VCU officials, and determined that counsel and review from an outside independent entity were needed.

Consequently, Assurance Services sought the expertise of external consultants, and the Board supported the decision to obtain such services. The approach taken by Assurance Services in seeking independent advice and counsel from a reputable, nationally recognized consulting firm, particularly in light of the sensitivities surrounding this investigation, appears reasonable.

Assurance Services made attempts to competitively procure services for this engagement, but the reporting deadline precluded obtaining consulting services for this review through the routine request for proposal process. To address the need for consultant services, Assurance Services contacted Deloitte and found that it had consultants available on short notice and would be willing to assist in the review. Assurance Services decided to hire Deloitte because they wanted a respected outside group that had professionals with both academic and investigative experience.

Deloitte's standard billing rate of \$400 to \$500 per hour is comparable to that of other major consulting firms. For this emergency

procurement, Assurance Services negotiated a lower rate (\$300 per hour) with Deloitte, inclusive of all fees and travel expenses. Assurance Services issued a purchase order to Deloitte for 45 hours at \$300 per hour, or a total of \$13,500.

JLARC staff's review found that Deloitte met the terms outlined in the letter of engagement. In the letter, Deloitte agreed to provide assistance to the university in its internal investigation, which included consideration of information and other data relevant to the matter. The letter also stated that the specific procedures to be performed were to be established based on discussions with Assurance Services as the engagement progressed and as additional information was obtained during the course of the engagement. Per the terms of the engagement, Deloitte would provide advice and recommendations concerning the specific procedures that they performed. In addition, the letter of engagement clearly specified that Deloitte would not be providing distinct reports or deliverables to the university.

Both the rector and the director of Assurance Services expressed to JLARC staff during interviews that their decision not to require a written deliverable was based on the desire to control the costs associated with this procurement. However, the rector also noted that in hindsight it might have been worth paying more to have received a written product from Deloitte.

The partner at Deloitte responsible for the engagement, however, explained to JLARC staff that obtaining a written product would have increased both the number of hours required and the cost of the engagement dramatically. The short timeframe in which the investigation was being conducted precluded the opportunity to undertake extensive negotiations concerning the potential terms and conditions of such a contract. In addition, the chairman of the Academic and Health Affairs Committee indicated that a formal written report was not necessary because the essential services required from the consultants were oversight, advice, and counsel. While a formal written document from Deloitte might not have been practicable in this case, greater effort should have been made by Assurance Services to document the services provided.

#### **DEGREE REVOCATION DECISION CONSISTENT WITH POLICY, BUT POLICY NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED**

On June 27, 2008, the Board of Visitors met to discuss whether the student's degree should be revoked. After considering several options, the Board decided that it had no other option but to allow the student to keep his degree. However, the Board determined that the current policy on degree revocation is too restrictive and

that changes should be made to ensure the integrity of the degree-granting process in the future.

### **Board's Decision to Allow Student to Keep Unearned Degree Appears Reasonable but Current Policy Is Too Restrictive**

The current degree revocation policy outlined in the *2008-2009 Undergraduate Bulletin* states that the only basis for revoking a degree is academic misconduct. The policy is as follows:

At any time following the award of a degree, certificate or other university recognition, the university reserves the right to take appropriate action, including, but not limited to, the revocation of such degree, certificate or other university recognition, *on the basis of academic misconduct discovered subsequent to, but which occurred prior to, the awarding of the degree, certificate or other university recognition.* [Emphasis added.] More specifically, when an action that constitutes a violation of the VCU Honor System leads to a finding that invalidates a major piece of work required for a degree, certificate or other university recognition so that the validity of the degree, certificate or other university recognition is jeopardized, the student or former student will be subject to a sanction that may include (a) rejection of a thesis, dissertation or other work, (b) revocation of a certification or other university recognition or (c) revocation of a degree.

Under this policy establishing the standard for degree revocation, the university has no basis for revoking a student's degree unless there is academic misconduct. For example, the university would not have the ability to revoke a degree that the university awarded in error to the wrong person. The policy does not define academic misconduct. However, the VCU Honor System states that a degree can be revoked for academic dishonesty, which includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing, or helping or soliciting another person to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Under the current university policy, there appears to be no basis for revoking the student's degree even though he did not earn it. Neither Assurance Services nor JLARC staff found evidence that the student was involved in academic misconduct while he was a student at VCU. The rector stated on June 27, 2008, that "the investigation found no evidence that the student... had any role in requesting an exception to this residency rule, or even was aware that the rule existed, or that an exception was granted."

JLARC staff also found no evidence that the student asked for the graduation requirements to be waived for him or understood that

requirements were being waived. In addition, the university bears responsibility for the issuance of the degree because VCU faculty and staff gave the student erroneous advice about the requirements needed to receive a degree from VCU.

Although the student's actions or inactions may not have constituted academic misconduct, he did not meet his responsibility as a student if he was not aware of VCU's graduation requirements. The *Undergraduate Bulletin* states that:

Students are responsible for knowing and fulfilling all general and specific degree requirements as described in this section. It is the responsibility of all undergraduate students to be familiar with the Undergraduate Bulletin of record (the bulletin in effect at the time of official admission), as well as the academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program Web sites.

This situation points to the need for a broader degree revocation policy that allows for degrees to be revoked for reasons other than academic misconduct when a degree is not properly earned. The university is currently revising its degree revocation policy as a result of this situation. The new policy, if approved, states that "the university reserves the right to revoke any degree, certificate or other university recognition for just cause." This policy is less restrictive than the current policy and would give the university the ability to revoke the degree of a student who was awarded one but who did not earn it. In addition, it would still protect the rights of students because it would place the burden of proof on the university to establish that a degree had not been earned.

### **Overall Degree-Granting Process Works Well, but Could Be Improved**

The current process to award degrees at VCU appears to work well in most cases based on a recent review by the Department of Assurance Services. The review by Assurance Services found only one other degree awarded to a student since January 2003 who did not complete at least 30 credit hours in residence at VCU without having an approved exception, and this degree was awarded posthumously. However, despite the processes and controls that were in place, the student in question was able to receive a degree without meeting university requirements because of malfeasance on the part of one or more individuals. In addition, there were other university staff who potentially could have raised questions about the awarding of this degree but did not for unknown reasons.

To prevent similar situations from occurring in the future, the SACS report includes several potential process and control

changes that the university is considering in addition to revising the degree revocation policy. These changes include

- strengthening the university's efforts to communicate students' responsibilities to understand and satisfy graduation requirements;
- revising the graduation application to include a certification that the student advisor, chair, and dean attest to the fulfillment of degree requirements;
- increasing the role of University Records and Registration by: (1) having University Records and Registration ensure that the section relative to the residency requirements is completed before the application is processed, and (2) running special automated reports to ensure that candidates have 120 credit hours and have satisfied the residency requirement;
- clearly articulating the policies and procedures concerning graduation requirements in the Faculty Handbook maintained by the Office of the Provost; and
- allowing the provost to hear appeals of ARAC decisions in certain situations.

According to the provost, specific policies and procedures to address these changes have been developed by the university and are in the process of being approved. The provost is planning to submit the proposed changes to the Board of Visitors in November.

In addition to these changes to policies and procedures, the provost has changed the reporting relationship of the dean of the University College, who previously had a dual reporting relationship. The dean of the University College will report only to the vice provost for instruction, which the SACS report states will eliminate any real or perceived conflicts in duties.

In addition to these changes described above, the university should ensure that all staff involved in the processing of graduation applications are aware that all signatures (advisor, chair, and dean) are required on the graduation application, and that the dean's signature alone is not sufficient for processing the application. It appears that the intent of the university is to have all signatures on the application, but some university staff indicated during interviews that an application could be processed without the advisor and chair signatures, as long as the dean had signed the application.

### **Additional Changes to the BIS Program Should Be Considered**

As discussed previously, the BIS program is a unique program within the university. It has been described as a program for non-traditional students, including students who may be older and/or have significant work experience, students who have transfer credits from multiple universities or programs, and students who have chosen a course of study that is different from other degree-granting programs within the university. The general education requirements for a BIS degree are different than the requirements for other colleges within VCU and BIS students are allowed to tailor a degree program that meets their educational and career needs.

The flexibility of this program is clearly beneficial for these non-traditional students. However, because of this flexibility and the unique requirements and characteristics of the BIS degree program and its students, the university may wish to consider additional changes to help prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future. A written policy statement should be developed that clearly describes the BIS program admissions process. This policy should explicitly state that all applicants must be reviewed and approved by the BIS Admissions Committee. A dated record of the committee's decision to accept or deny a student's admission into the program should be produced and signed by someone other than (or in addition to) the BIS coordinator. It may also be helpful to revise the *Undergraduate Bulletin* to clearly indicate that review and approval by the BIS Admissions Committee is a requirement for admission to the program.

In addition, while there is no indication that the BIS Admissions Committee could have prevented this situation from occurring given that the committee was bypassed, it may be useful for the committee to have written procedures for assessing BIS program candidates. (It was noted during an interview that the BIS committee has begun discussions to develop these procedures.) Finally, because of the unique nature of each BIS student's program, the graduation application for BIS students should be reviewed and signed (not stamped) by the dean of the University College, and not by a designee of the dean. This should be manageable for the UC dean given the relatively low number of BIS graduates each semester and that there are no other degree awarding programs in the University College.

# A

## Study Mandate

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This appendix contains the letter from the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee to the Chairman of JLARC requesting that JLARC staff conduct this review.







COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
RICHMOND

SEP 09 2008

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
9TH FLOOR, GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING  
CAPITOL SQUARE  
POST OFFICE BOX 406  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218  
804-698-1590

LACEY E. PUTNEY, CHAIRMAN  
ROBERT P. VAUGHN, STAFF DIRECTOR

September 9, 2008

The Honorable M. Kirkland Cox, Chairman  
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission  
Suite 1100, General Assembly Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219Insert address

Dear Kirk:

The House Appropriations Committee received a report on September 9, 2008, from Dr. Dan LaVista, Executive Director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, on degree conferral practices and policies at our public colleges and universities. The Committee continues to have many questions and concerns regarding the recent issue at Virginia Commonwealth University regarding the degree awarded to the former City of Richmond police chief Rodney Monroe.

Therefore, I am requesting that the Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) undertake an examination of the events leading up to and following the awarding of the degree to Mr. Monroe. In particular, the Committee would like JLARC staff to address:

- (1) How a degree could be awarded under the existing policies and procedures at VCU which call for a student-initiated request for waiver of the 25% rule and a review by an academic committee of such requests and who specifically waived the published policy requirements;
- (2) The conduct of the investigation conducted by the Board of Visitors and the VCU Department of Assurance Services;
- (3) What services the Commonwealth received from the firm of Deloitte and Touche for the \$14,000 emergency contract for which a written report from the firm was not produced; and,

(4) Recommendations on actions that can be taken to enhance the Boards of Visitors' role in granting exceptions to policies and procedures that are required to earn a degree.

It is my firm expectation that Virginia Commonwealth University's administrators, faculty and employees will fully cooperate with JLARC's investigation. The Committee would like JLARC staff to submit their findings at its October 20, 2008 meeting. Please have Phil Leone coordinate this presentation with Robert Vaughn, the Committee's Staff Director.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lacey".

Lacey E. Putney  
Chairman

cc: Members, House Appropriations Committee  
Mr. Phil Leone  
Mr. Thomas G. Rosenthal, Rector, VCU Board of Visitors  
Dr. Eugene P. Trani, President, Virginia Commonwealth University

Appendix **B**

# List of Individuals Interviewed by JLARC Staff

Name	Title	Number of Interviews
Craig Anderson	Deputy Director, University Audit and Management Services	1
David Baldacci	Member, Board of Visitors	1
Rhonda Bishop	University Compliance Officer	1
Richard Bunce	Executive Director, Department of Assurance Services	3
Jean Clark	Coordinator, Student Services	1
Kelly Coldiron	Assistant to the Dean, University College	1
James Cottrell	Partner, Deloitte Financial Advisory Services	1
Steve Doka	Senior Manager, Deloitte Financial Advisory Services	1
Roberta Fife	Director, Student Accounting	1
Stephen Gottfredson	Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs	2
Martha Lou Greene	Associate Dean, University College	1
Sybil Halloran	Director, Undergraduate Admissions	1
Anjour Harris	University Registrar	1
Robert Holsworth	Special Assistant to the Provost (former Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences)	1
Jill Kramer	Member, BIS Admissions Committee	1
Robyn Lacks	Assistant Professor, Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs	1
Deborah Love	Senior Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General	1
D'Arcy Mays	Associate Professor, Statistical Sciences and Operations Research, and Chairman, Academic Regulation Appeals Committee	1
Sue Ann Messmer	Chief of Staff (Office of the President) and Vice President for University Relations	1
Rodney Monroe	Former Chief of Police, City of Richmond	0*
Laura Moriarty	Vice Provost, Academic and Faculty Affairs	1
Julia Norman	Lead Processor, Undergraduate Admissions	1
Latoya Robinson	Graduation Coordinator, University Records and Registration	1
Thomas Rosenthal	Rector, VCU Board of Visitors	1
Diane Simon	Associate Dean, School of Education, and Member, BIS Admissions Committee	1
Thomas Snead	Chairman, Board of Visitors' Academic and Health Affairs Policy Committee	1
Linda Spinelli	Former BIS Coordinator (now retired)	1
Suzanne Spivey	Former Student Services Specialist	1
Jon Steingass	Former Dean of the University College and Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences	1**
Alexander Tartaglia	Associate Dean, School of Allied Health Professions and Member, BIS Admissions Committee	1
Eugene Trani	President, Virginia Commonwealth University	2
L. Douglas Wilder	Mayor, City of Richmond	1

\*JLARC staff attempted to contact Mr. Monroe on two occasions but Mr. Monroe did not return our calls.

\*\*At the request of Dr. Steingass, this interview was conducted via email. JLARC staff emailed Dr. Steingass the interview questions, and Dr. Steingass submitted his responses to the questions in writing.

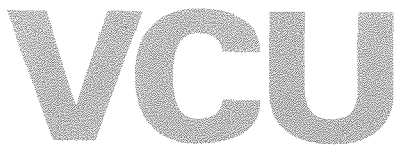


## Agency Response

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As a part of the validation process, State agencies and other entities involved in a JLARC assessment are given the opportunity to comment on an exposure draft of the report. Appropriate technical corrections resulting from comments provided by these entities have been made in this version of the report. This appendix includes the written response from Virginia Commonwealth University.





OCT 17 2008

Office of the Rector

V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

October 17, 2008

Mr. Philip A. Leone  
Director  
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee  
Commonwealth of Virginia  
Suite 1100, General Assembly Building  
Richmond, VA 23219

President's House  
910 West Franklin Street  
P.O. Box 842512  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2512

804 828-1200  
Fax: 804 828-7532  
TDD: 1-800-828-1200  
vcurector@vcu.edu

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Thomas G. Rosenthal

Dear Mr. Leone:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report "Special Report: VCU Degree Award." We greatly appreciate the careful nature of the JLARC review and the comprehensiveness and quality of its report, and we write to inform you that the Board of Visitors, the President, and the Provost of Virginia Commonwealth University accept your report and recommendations, and will work diligently on their implementation.

We are pleased that you found Virginia Commonwealth University to have taken this matter very seriously, that we acted with care and vigor to investigate the allegations made concerning the improper awarding of a degree, made the correct decision in allowing the degree to stand, and ultimately acted definitively to assure that the actions that resulted in the improper awarding of this degree will not recur.

Virginia Commonwealth University believes that its practices, policies and procedures relative to the awarding of undergraduate degrees have been sound, have safeguarded the integrity of our degrees, and have assured compliance with SACS accreditation guidelines. Despite the uniqueness of the case under consideration (it having occurred once during a period in which over 15,000 degrees were awarded properly), additional procedural safeguards will be employed that will reduce the chances of a recurrence even further. You have enumerated these safeguards in your report, and I am pleased to inform you that as of yesterday, all of these changes to policy and procedure have been approved through the University's governance process (including our policy concerning the revocation of degrees), and will be presented to the full Board of Visitors for approval at its November meeting.

Finally, we want to inform you that the dean of University College resigned his employment with VCU, and that the dean of the College of

Humanities and Sciences resigned from that administrative position, and he has advised us that he will be retiring from university service in January.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Thomas G. Rosenthal in black ink.

Thomas G. Rosenthal  
Rector, Board of Visitors

Handwritten signature of Eugene P. Trani in black ink.

Eugene P. Trani, Ph.D.  
President

Handwritten signature of Stephen D. Gottfredson in black ink.

Stephen D. Gottfredson, Ph.D.  
Provost





# JLARC Staff

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## Executive Staff

Philip A. Leone, Director  
Glen S. Tittermary, Deputy Director

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## Division Chiefs

Robert B. Rotz, Senior Division Chief  
Harold E. Greer III, Division Chief

---

## Section Managers

Patricia S. Bishop, Fiscal & Administrative Services  
Gregory J. Rest, Research Methods  
Walter L. Smiley, Fiscal Analysis

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Justin C. Brown	Nathalie Molliet-Ribet
Ashley S. Colvin	Kimberly A. Sarte
Martha L. Erwin	

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Jamie S. Bitz	David A. Reynolds
Jennifer K. Breidenbaugh	Tracey R. Smith
Mark R. Gribbin	Shannon M. White
Paula C. Lambert	Massey S. J. Whorley
Bradley B. Marsh	Christine D. Wolfe
Ellen J. Miller	

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## Administrative and Research Support Staff

Joan M. Irby	Betsy M. Jackson
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# Recent JLARC Reports

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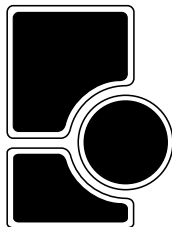
## **2008 Reports**

- 366. Virginia Compared to the Other States: National Rankings on Taxes, Budgetary Components, and Other Indicators (January 2008)*
- 367. Special Report: Review of Selected Issues in the Virginia Election and Registration Information System*
- 368. Semi-Annual VRS Investment Report No. 30*
- 369. Evaluation of House Bill 667: Mandated Coverage of Alternatives to Surgery*
- 370. Evaluation of House Bill 615 and House Bill 669: Mandated Coverage of Amino Acid-Based Formulas*
- 371. Evaluation of House Bill 83: Mandated Coverage of Autism Spectrum Disorders*
- 372. Mitigating the Costs of Substance Abuse in Virginia*
- 373. Special Report: VCU Degree Award*

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**These reports are available on the JLARC website at <http://jlarc.state.va.us>**





**Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission**  
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