4:05pm--Call to Order (Holly Alford)

4:05pm--Nomination Committee Affirmation Vote (Holly Alford)

• Discussion topics: Alford asked for a motion to approve our Nomination Committee, which will consist of chair June Nicholson, Carmen Rodriguez, and Mary Secret.

4:05pm--Amendment to Resolution (Holly Alford)

• Discussion topics: Alford explained a small addition to the Faculty Senate resolution on President Trump’s executive order on immigration.

Guest

4:10pm--President of VCU (Michael Rao)

• Rao’s remarks: Rao sought to avoid repeating the comments he made during his State of the University address earlier this semester. Rao highlighted the importance of universities to American history, as centers of innovation as well as community centers. Rao mentioned a few areas in which VCU is focused on modernizing or improving its systems, such as Human Resources and the VCU budget. Rao indicated his continued support for experiential learning and its importance at VCU. In terms of funding, Rao highlighted that VCU’s future will not include substantial increases, but that the university will instead focus on reallocating funds and ensuring that spending priorities match the university’s core mission and values.
• Discussion topics: a member of the Wilder School asked about the dean’s search in that school, and President Rao announced that the process is moving forward after the interviews with the top 3 candidates, in consultation with the Provost.

• Discussion topics: a member of the CHS asked about funding and resources in the CHS, and Rao indicated that he is aware of the shortcoming of funding in the CHS and he recently increased funding for the CHS and will continue to focus on this issue in the future. Rao also indicated that he believes that VCU’s new budget model will help to alleviate the CHS’ budget shortcomings.

• Discussion topics: a member of the School of the Arts asked about potential ramifications from the new budget model on class size. Rao noted that VCU will need to incorporate flexibility within its new budget model so that it doesn’t negatively impact the academic standing of VCU programs.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member asked about VCU’s response to President Trump’s immigration policies. Rao indicated that VCU will do everything that it can to protect its faculty and students. VCU’s General Counsel noted that VCU has offered additional resources to individuals who may be affected, has taken additional steps to protect its faculty and students (including those linked to our campus in Qatar), and has supported challenges to the recent executive order.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member in Sociology asked about tuition reimbursement (and/or tuition support) for children of faculty on the Monroe Park campus versus the MCV campus. Rao responded that a single policy on this issue governs both campuses of the university, and although he supports tuition support, he indicated that this is a state government decision and that state leaders are quite hesitant to support this change.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member in the School of World Studies asked about pay for faculty members who are generating money for the university, but not seeing the financial benefits of their work. Rao responded that several years ago, VCU established a salary floor for full-time faculty, but that we need to work harder to address salary disparities. Rao noted that Virginia is ranked 44th of 50 states in its spending on higher education, which makes this issue more challenging, but that it is one of his top priorities.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member in the Wilder School asked about class sizes at VCU and how the new budget model may impact this issue in the future. Rao promised that his administration will keep an eye on this challenge as the new budget model takes effect, and that he hopes we have hit a ceiling on class sizes at VCU. Rao indicated that online education may provide a revenue stream which would allow us to address some of the revenue challenges facing VCU.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member in the English department raised concerns about online education as a model for VCU and as a revenue stream. Rao responded that mechanisms that he helped to create at Michigan State University required effective student engagement, and that it allowed the university to expand its curriculum and helped generate revenue. Rao indicated the some programs or subjects might be more suited for online education, and mentioned VCU’s search for a director of online education.

• Discussion topics: a faculty member asked how Rao feels about the current debate over science, and current criticisms of science and its findings. VCU’s
General Counsel distinguished between VCU communications and faculty members’ personal communications, and clarified that faculty members’ have the right to express their opinions, but that the university will regulate and limit access to official communications. VCU’s General Counsel also highlighted the importance of academic freedom and assured faculty that this is and will be protected. Rao highlighted the importance of free speech in these debates, and asked those present to respect the beliefs of others.

- Discussion topics: a faculty member in the Wilder School suggested that Faculty Senate and VCU administrators get together and provide some training to faculty on free speech issues, as well as official and personal communications.

- Discussion topics: a member of the Wilder School asked about VCU’s response to lies or mistruths that are being spread and perpetuated, particularly with regard to climate. Rao indicated that faculty can respond as they see fit, but that VCU will always respond in a deliberate manner.

- Discussion topics: a staff member who works in VCU policy asked how faculty and staff can respond to new government directives that may impact how they teach or work. Rao indicated that he believes that what we have seen thus far is only the beginning, that new initiatives and changes are coming, and that we as a university will respond as relevant.

- Discussion topics: a member of the Social Work program asked how faculty can help to forward the mission of VCU, and asked Rao to discuss the role of faculty who are concerned about social justice, and/or science. Rao responded that faculty should continue to speak the truth in their classrooms, and to highlight the role and value of diversity at VCU.