



**SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES**

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April 28, 2010

Dr. Michael Rao
President
Virginia Commonwealth University
P.O. Box 842512
Richmond, VA 23284-2512

Dear Dr. Rao:

Thank you again for the hospitality and assistance extended to the Substantive Change Committee during its recent visit to Virginia Commonwealth University on April 14-15, 2010. Enclosed is the final report prepared by the Committee.

The report represents the professional judgment of the Substantive Change Committee made in accordance with *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* and subject to review by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its standing review committees – the Committees on Compliance and Reports. Some parts of the report are directly related to the requirements of the *Principles*, while others may represent advisory comments offered by the visiting committee in a spirit of helpfulness.

The Board of Trustees and its Committees on Compliance and Reports meet officially in June and in December. Final decisions on accreditation are made public following each meeting. The report of the committee which visited Virginia Commonwealth University will be reviewed in June.

An institution may release its visiting committee report; however, release of this report in its entirety or in part must be accompanied by the following statement: "The findings of this visiting committee represent a preliminary assessment of the institution at this time; final action on the report rests with the SACSCOC Board of Trustees." If the institution releases part of its report, that part must contain a note stating: "A copy of the entire report can be obtained from the institution."

Please express my sincere appreciation to all members of your faculty and staff for their cooperation and assistance during the review process. Feel free to call upon me if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donna", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Donna K. Wilkinson
Vice President
Commission on Colleges

DKW:rlb

cc: Dr. Laura J. Moriarty, SACS Liaison

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Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

**REPORT OF THE SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE COMMITTEE EXAMINING
OFF-CAMPUS SITES
AS PART OF A FIFTH-YEAR INTERIM REPORT**

Statement Regarding the Report

The Commission on Colleges will make its determination on the accreditation of an institution based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with the Commission on Colleges.

Name of the Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Date of the Review: April 14-15, 2010

COC Staff Member: Dr. Donna Wilkinson

Chair of the Committee: Dr. Evelyn M. White
Retired (Former Vice President of Academic
Affairs for Alabama State University)
Montgomery, Alabama

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Part I. Overview

In 2005, VCU notified the Commission of its intent to expand course offerings in masters and doctoral programs in education at public schools throughout the region. The purpose of this substantive change visit was to review those programs at a sample of sites where the program had been expanded to exceed more than fifty-percent of the credits required for the degree. The substantive change committee visited one middle school and one high school.

Hermitage High School is located at 8301 Hungary Spring Road in Henrico County. During the 2010 Spring semester, 166 students enrolled in 13 classes. Students attending these classes are pursuing the Master of Education degree, Post-Master's certificate in Educational Leadership or the Ph.D. in Education. Thompson Middle School, a Richmond City Public School at 7825 Forest Hill Avenue, is providing classrooms for 153 students, enrolled in 10 classes. In addition to the same courses taught at Hermitage, the Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction in Health and Physical Education is offered.

Both schools are approximately five miles from VCU's Monroe Park campus. Students taking classes at these off-campus sites are preparing to become teachers, administrators and counselors. Other professionals may enroll in open enrollment classes (undergraduate and graduate) to strengthen their skills and acquire new competencies. Internship coordination courses which are required for students involved in internships meet at both sites 3-5 times per semester. Instructional delivery methods at both off-campus sites include a classroom lecture/discussion mode and/or a classroom/web-based hybrid mode.

During the 2010 academic year, the School of Education offered courses at approximately twenty-four off-site locations.

Part II. Impact of the expansion on selected requirements in the *Principles of Accreditation*

1. Integrity:

The institution acts with integrity in its operation of the site(s) and reporting of compliance at the site(s). **(Standard 1.1)**

The institution appears to have provided materials and participated in interviews consistent with the commission's expectations for integrity.

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2. Faculty

Programs at the site(s) use faculty in appropriate numbers and competence to maintain the quality of the programs. (CR 2.8, CS 3.4.11, CS 3.7.1)

The number of faculty who teach at both Thompson Middle School (9) and Hermitage High School (12) are sufficient to serve the 153 students and 166 students respectively. Five of ten classes offered at Thompson Middle School in Spring 2010 are taught by full-time faculty as are four of thirteen classes at Hermitage High School. The Faculty Roster for the Fall 2009 - Spring 2010 indicates faculty with extensive experience and competency in appropriate fields for the courses being taught.

Program coordination is provided by the chair of the department which houses a specific program. Faculty from the sites participate in curriculum development and share a common syllabus for the courses. Both off-site and on-site adjunct and full-time faculty meet the same standards; regular evaluation of all faculty ensures that the quality of the program is maintained. The *Curriculum Vitae* of department chairpersons indicate highly qualified persons with appropriate qualifications to coordinate programs and develop curriculum for the specific programs offered at the Thompson Middle School and Hermitage High School sites.

3. Qualifications of Personnel

The administrative and academic officials leading activities and programs at the site(s) have appropriate qualifications. (CS 3.2.8)

The School of Education demonstrates capability in operating on and off-campus sites. The *Curriculum Vitae* of administrative and academic officials indicate highly qualified persons with appropriate qualifications to lead activities and programs at the Thompson Middle School and Hermitage High School sites.

Department chairs in the School of Education hold terminal degrees and have broad experience in their fields of study. They have credible publications and have served as presenters at professional conferences. Their involvement in a wide range of academic activities shows significant contributions to the knowledge base in education. The overseer of the off-campus sites has an Ed.D degree and has extensive work history in the K/12 school environment.

4. Student Services

Student services at the site(s) are appropriate for the programs offered and the student body served by the site. (CR 2.10, CS 3.4.9, CS 3.9.3)

All student services available to on-campus students are available to students at the Thompson Middle School and Hermitage High School sites due to the close proximity of the sites to the Monroe Park Campus. These services include off-campus housing

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assistance, transportation information, healthy life educational programs, and counseling and tutorial services. These services are provided by the same highly qualified individuals who administer those same services for students at the main campus.

5. Library/Learning Resources

Library/Learning resources that can be accessed by students enrolled in courses offered at the site(s) are sufficient and appropriate for the programs offered. This includes access, services, and facilities. (CR 2.9, CS 3.8.1, CS 3.8.2, CS 3.8.3)

All library and learning resources available to on-campus students are available to students at the Thompson Middle School and Hermitage High School sites due to the close proximity of the sites to the Monroe Park Campus. Additionally, students at these sites have access to sufficient and appropriate electronic resources to support learning and research including print collections, digital indexes, electronic databases and full-text digital periodicals. Support is also provided for instruction and reference consultation is provided via web-based services and sites. Demonstrations of web-based services indicate student-friendly interface of these resources. These services are provided by the same highly qualified librarians who administer those same services for students at the main campus library. The institution employs three librarian liaisons for the School of Education. Support for off-campus sites is provided via on-site instruction, streaming video, Jing, and Wimba Live classroom.

Because the technology available at the two sites vary from classroom to classroom, the technology needs of instructors and students at the sites are supplemented through equipment that can be checked out through the Office of Assessment and Technology. These services are provided by a highly qualified technology staff who provide various services for students.

6. Physical Facilities

The institution operates and maintains physical facilities at the site(s) that appropriately serve the needs of the programs and activities at the site(s). (CS 3.11.3)

The schools provide standard classroom facilities that accommodate the lectures and small group activities typical of face-to-face instruction. The off-campus sites are operated and maintained by the public school divisions. The Media Center at Hermitage High School is also available by reservation for activities that require students to have access to computers.

On-site visits confirmed that the classrooms are well-lighted, clean, and handicapped assessable with no safety violations readily discernable. Adequate parking is available for the number of students and faculty served at each site.

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Part III. Observations and Comments
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Site visits and student interviews provided strong evidence of a commitment by faculty and the School of Education to provide the necessary resources, tutorials, and communication for students to be successful in their programs.

The University has functional levels of governance and adequate resources to execute its mission as an institution of higher education at off-site locations.

Curricula, qualified faculty, support services for the targeted audience, and adequate physical facilities are appropriate for achieving the desired learning outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

Roster of the Substantive Change Committee

Dr. Evelyn M. White - **CHAIR**

Retired (Former Vice President of Academic Affairs for Alabama State University)
Montgomery, Alabama

Dr. Martha M. Hocutt
Dean, Division of Online Programs
The University of West Alabama
Livingston, AL

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APPENDIX B

List of Recommendations Cited in the Report

No recommendations.