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VCU Center for Research Excellence

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VCU Center for Research Excellence

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Team Sponsor: Mr. Paul Timmreck

Project Description: We propose the creation of a Center for Research Excellence that will focus on fostering excellence in research and scholarly activity for all faculty and aspiring faculty at VCU. Research excellence is important to maintaining VCU's Carnegie Research Extensive rating and as described in VCU 2020 goal to "assuring continued international recognition in research, scholarship, and creative expression", and "ensuring... the highest level of university efficiency and infrastructure support required to achieve our strategic vision".

Project Goals:

1. Given the importance of research at VCU, determine what can be done to improve the research quality and productivity at VCU.
2. Determine how VCU can help faculty build successful careers as researchers and scholars.

Strategies:

1. Assess current resources for research support at VCU, including offerings at the School or College and University level.
2. Survey the faculty to determine faculty need and desire for a Center for Research Excellence.
3. Develop a proposal for a Center based on our research.

Action Steps:

1. Survey VCU Schools and Colleges to determine current support for research and scholarship activities, including mentoring; summarize Office of Research resources. (See Appendix I)
2. Survey VCU peer institutions to determine research and scholarship support as well as mentoring programs. (See Appendix I)
3. Survey all VCU faculty to determine their experiences with departmental and institutional support of research and scholarship activities as well as the need for and faculty support for a Center for Research Excellence. (See Appendices II and III)

Outcomes:

1. **Current Resources:** VCU does not have a cohesive systematic program of informing new, continuing, and tenured faculty, graduate assistants, and

administrative staff of available resources and specific training in the basics of research, i.e. how to find funding sources, how to write proposals, how to submit to the Office of Sponsored Programs, how to write protocols, how to submit to the Office of Research Subjects Protection, etc. Many resources are on the web but require some knowledge in order to proceed. Most of the Schools within VCU rely on the mentoring process. (Appendix I)

2. Peer Institution Resources: An investigation into programs at other universities confirmed that most programs utilize the ad hoc mentoring process as well. With the rare exception, other institutions do not have comprehensive programs supporting research. (Appendix I)
3. Expressed VCU Faculty Needs: A vast majority of the faculty (80%) expressed overwhelming support for creation of the Center in the on-line survey conducted in July and September 2005. Their comments also reflected several other themes, including a) demands on time severely impacts their ability to be successful researchers and scholars; b) the research infrastructure at VCU needs improvement; c) faculty desire mentors for their research. The survey also indicated the following services were most desired by respondents: grantsmanship, identifying funding approaches and sources, the University research "system," and compliance with regulations. (Appendices II and III)

Recommendations: Establish a Center for Research Excellence

When comparing available resources versus the faculty needs survey, four main themes emerge as themes for the Center: a) funding, b) compliance, c) quality improvement, and d) professional advancement. As a response to these findings, we recommend the establishment of Center for Research Excellence. As a starting point, the Center should have a small staff of one director and a support person (housed in the current Office of Research), and have limited goals the first year. These goals should include consolidation of current resources on the Center website, and 2-3 new programs the first year, including possibly a grant writing course available to all faculty, and/or a mentorship program. After year one, the Center should improve and expand programs based on feedback from the users. In the long term, we envision combining the Center for Teaching Excellence and Center for Research Excellence to create a Faculty Development Center. Possible functions and programs for the Center are listed in Appendix IV.

Conclusions: A new Center for Research Excellence will allow VCU to enhance current and develop new resources to empower the faculty to achieve the research priorities outlined in the VCU 2020 Strategic Plan.



Center for Research Excellence

GEHLI Team Project -Fall 2005

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Sponsor: Mr. Paul Timmreck



Project Goal

- ✦ Foster excellence in research, scholarship, and creative expression in all disciplines at VCU

Importance of Research at VCU

- ✿ Carnegie status – Research Extensive
- ✿ VCU 2020 – Strategic Plan for VCU
 - <http://www.vcu.edu/vcu2020/>

VCU 2020
Vision for Excellence



VCU 2020: Theme III

- ✿ Assuring continued international recognition for our research, scholarship and creative expression
 - Initiative 9: Enhance **strong faculty development and mentoring programs** intended to increase and sustain **faculty excellence in research, scholarship, and creative expression**, building upon the successful model exemplified by VCU's Center for Teaching Excellence.



VCU 2020, Theme I

- ✦ Ensuring and Maintaining the Highest Levels of University **Efficiency**, **Accountability**, and **Infrastructure** Support Required to Achieve our Strategic Vision

● Perceived Need for Improved Infrastructure

- ✖ “Core facilities – insufficient support
- ✖ GTA, GRAs - too few
- ✖ Out of state tuition for graduate students
- ✖ Insufficient training and development
- ✖ Contract Research - full overhead
- ✖ Overhead money – too little returns to units
- ✖ And others.....”



Guiding Questions

- ✦ Given the importance of research at VCU, what can be done to improve the research quality and productivity at VCU?
- ✦ How can VCU help faculty build successful careers as researchers and scholars?



GEHLI Team Proposal

✦ Center for Research Excellence

- Promotes research and scholarship
- In combination with CTE, consider creation of a Faculty Development Center
- For new, continuing and aspiring faculty
- Act as a liaison to regulatory offices and support for compliance
- **Improve research infrastructure**



GEHLI Team Method

1. Examine internal resources
2. Examine external resources and peer institutions
3. Survey faculty to determine need/desire for Center for Research Excellence
4. Develop proposal for Center for Research Excellence



Examine Current Resources

- ✦ Surveyed units at VCU
 - CTE
 - Each School and College
 - Office of Research
 - Human Resources
- ✦ Peer Institutions
- ✦ Outside Resources



Current Resources - Findings

✦ Resources in Units

- Development occurs locally
- Duplication exists
- Availability and quality varies widely

✦ Office of Research

- High quality

✦ CTE

- Scholarship and mentorship of teaching



Current Resources - Findings

✦ Peer Institutions

- 14 institutions contacted
- Mentoring was ad hoc and varying in quality
- Nine had Centers for Teaching Excellence
- Five expect researchers to “hit the ground running”
- Three had more training than VCU



Current Resources - Findings

✦ Outside Resources

- Limited
- Examples
 - WVU
 - New England Faculty Development
 - POD Network
 - Center for Critical Thinking



Summary - Resources

- ✿ Current VCU research-related resources are uneven in availability, cost and quality
- ✿ VCU is similar to peer institutions
- ✿ Lots of room for improvement!

Methods: Needs Assessment

- ✿ Online survey (Survey Monkey)
- ✿ Availability and desirability of resources
- ✿ Invitation sent to all faculty in July 2005 and September 2005

Needs Assessment - Results

- ✦ 575 respondents - 27% response rate
- ✦ Overwhelming support for Center (80%)
 - **35% VERY LIKELY to use center**
 - **24% LIKELY**
 - **21% SOMEWHAT LIKELY**

Needs Assessment- Results Respondent Profile

- ✦ Fifty-seven percent had less than 10 years at VCU
- ✦ Collateral: 33%; Tenure-eligible: 15%; Tenured: 41%; Other 11%
- ✦ School/College: 32% Medicine; 21% Humanities and Sciences



Needs Assessment - Results

✱ What should be available:

Resources to assist with –

Grantsmanship

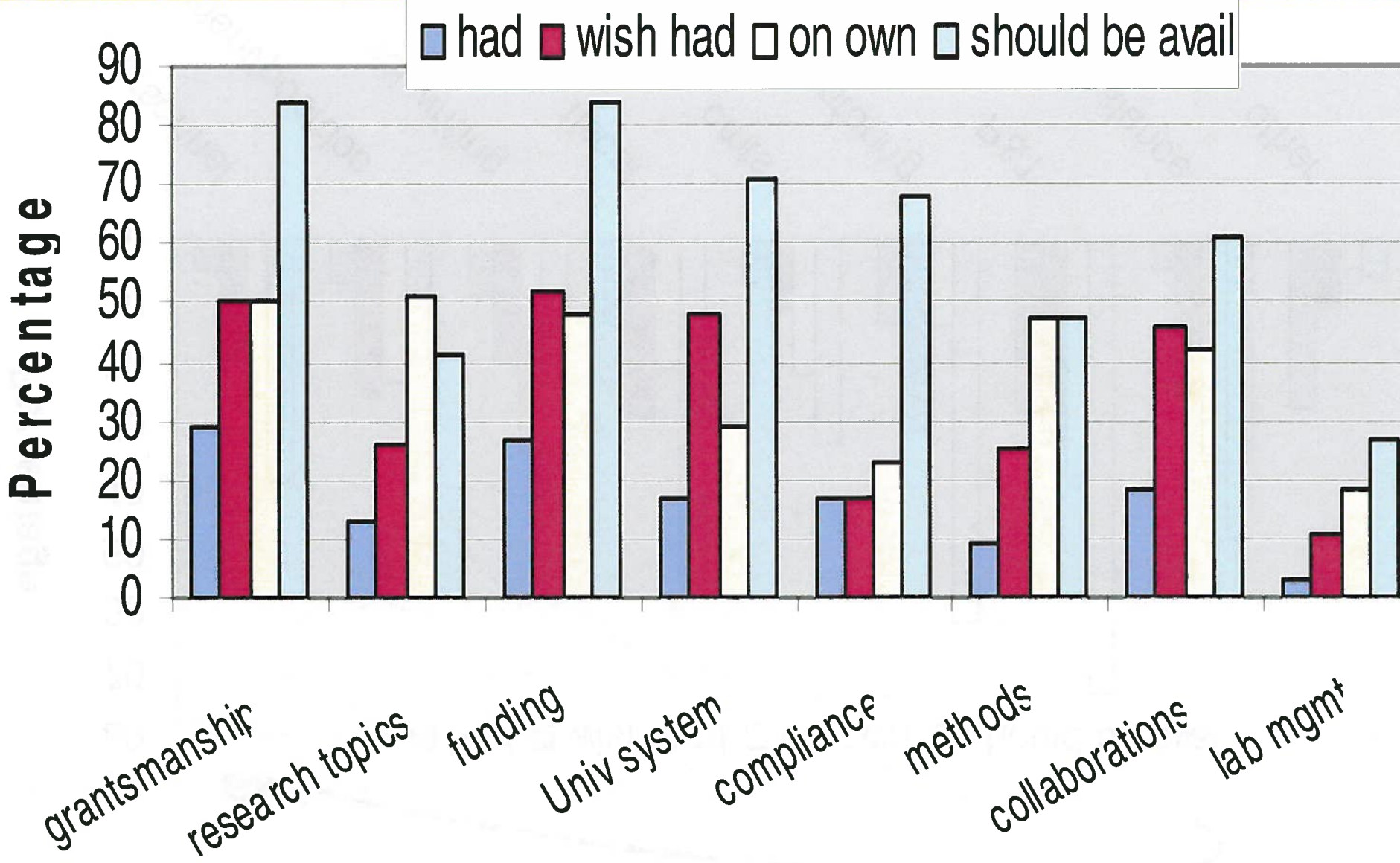
Funding

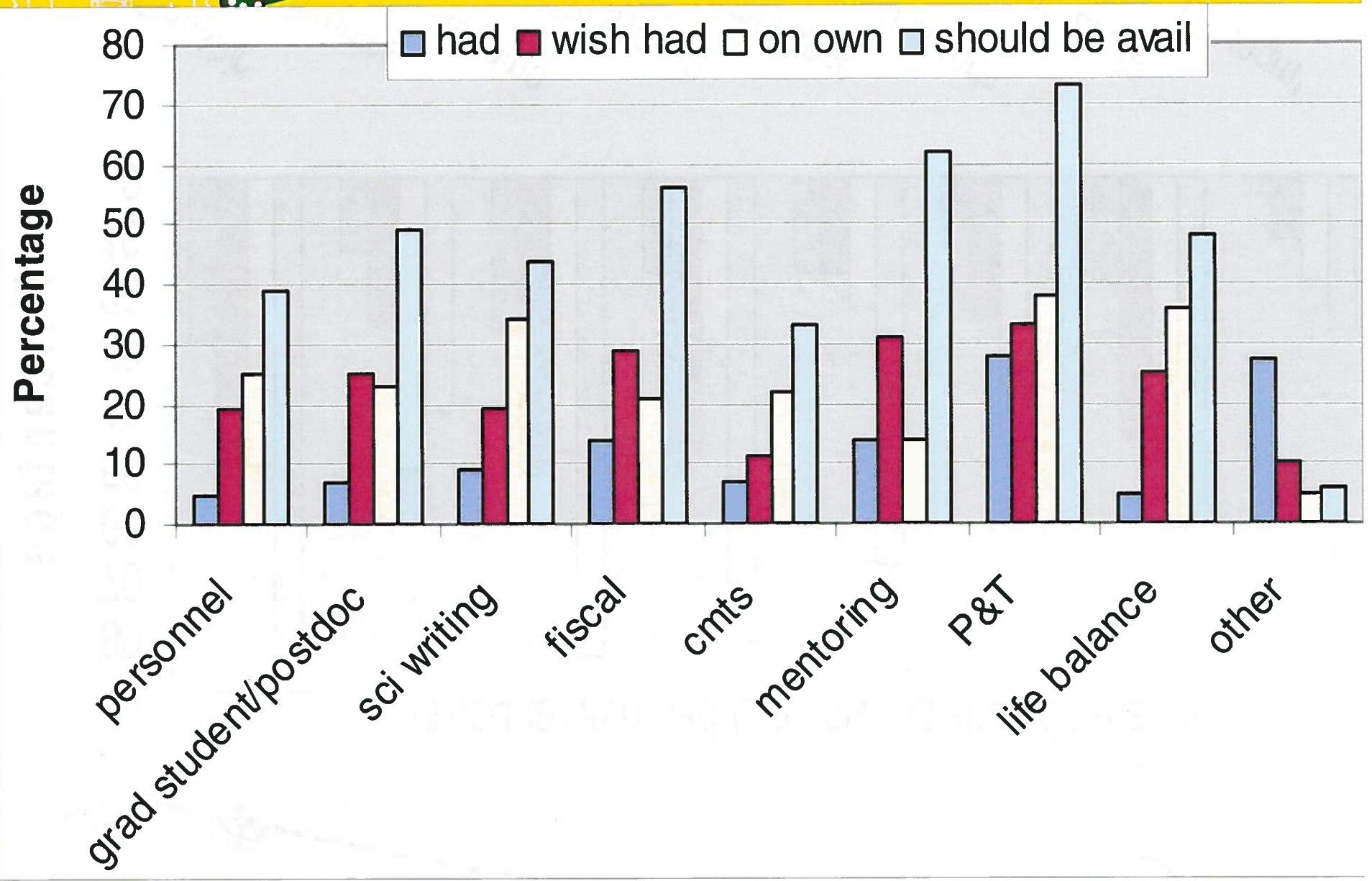
Promotion and Tenure

VCU “system”

Mentoring

Compliance







Themes

💡 Support for creation of Center

- *“I would be pleased, honored and very anxious to participate in such an endeavor”;*
- *“Fantastic idea”*
- *“This is an excellent idea that ties in with some of the goals of the 2020”*

💡 Time

- *“It is difficult to focus on research projects when teaching and service loads are high.”*
- *“The biggest impediment to productive research comes from relentless demands on my time... Reducing demands on time that aren't really essential is the single most important thing that could be done to foster research”*



Themes

- ✦ Improve VCU research infrastructure
 - *“VCU researchers have outgrown the university’s research infrastructure.”*
 - *“Institutional support .. is not readily available”*
 - *“We need more hands-on help”*
 - *“We do not have the resources to fully support a research intensive institution”*
- ✦ Desire for research mentorships
 - *“A must”*
 - *“Research maze is overwhelming”*

A Minority Are Not in Favor of CRE

- ✦ Despite support for creation of a center, a minority of the respondents (23 out of 181 open-ended comments) were not in support of a center.
- ✦ Two comments repeated:
 - Spend the money on something else
 - Faculty in H&S- felt their research was not valued



“Have” vs. “Need” = Opportunity

✦ Center for Research Excellence

✦ Rationale

- Variable and duplicative resources
- Faculty expressed need and desire
- Can make better use of current resources, including faculty
- Follow model of Center for Teaching Excellence

CRE Proposal – Year 1

- ✦ Personnel - Director + support person
- ✦ Location and oversight
 - Office of Research, Biotech Park with easy parking
- ✦ Objectives
 - Coordinate existing resources
 - Website
 - Office
 - Fill “gaps”
 - New faculty - Mentorship program, pilot grants
 - “Money” classes – proposal, identifying funding



CRE Proposal– Year 2

- ✦ Evaluate success of previous year's programs – improve based on feedback
- ✦ Expand on successful programs with aim of accommodating influx of new faculty and their research needs
- ✦ Hire additional staff as needed

Proposal for Center – Long Term

- ✿ Research and **scholarship** in all disciplines

CLASSES / WORKSHOPS

- New, continuing and aspiring faculty
- Liaise with CTE, Grad School (PFFP), (Office of Research, Environmental Health and Sciences, etc.)
- ✿ Types of classes
 - Grantsmanship/Funding
 - Compliance
 - Quality improvement – research, management, grad/postdoc mentoring
 - Professional development – P&T, networking, interdisciplinary research



Proposal for Center – Long Term

- ✿ **PROGRAMS – liaise with existing efforts**
 - Small transitional or starter grants
 - Expand mentor program
 - Forums for collaboration or new research
 - New faculty training
 - Special Interest Groups (SIG) – list serves, socials, discussion groups, speakers

Proposal for Center – Long Term

☀️ CONSULTANTS

- Grants editor
- Grantsmanship
- Personnel management
- Compliance with IRB, IACUC, environmental safety, etc. (with respective Offices)
- ☀️ Faculty ombudsman - with regulatory offices
- ☀️ Faculty Development Center
 - space for classrooms, poster sessions, lounge, information



Faculty Development Center

- ✦ Combination of Center of Teaching Excellence and Center for Research Excellence
- ✦ Could consider global issues such as faculty workload issues and balance
- ✦ Not presently available at VCU as a distinct entity



Group Process

☀ Challenges

- Diversity in position at VCU
- Time constraints
- Complex project; defining project boundaries

☀ What worked

- Diversity in background, style
- Desire for outstanding product



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