

Policy Open Comment Period Interim Executive Summary

As of April 10, 2017

Overview As part of Virginia Commonwealth University's Tier III restructuring and based on employee feedback from the Great Place Initiative survey, HR Redesign committees — members of which are a diverse representation from both campuses and all levels of the university — developed a draft HR policy. Over the last several months, committee members researched best practices, compared the policies and procedures of peer universities and other large employers, and designed a new, comprehensive policy that modernizes VCU's human resource practices.

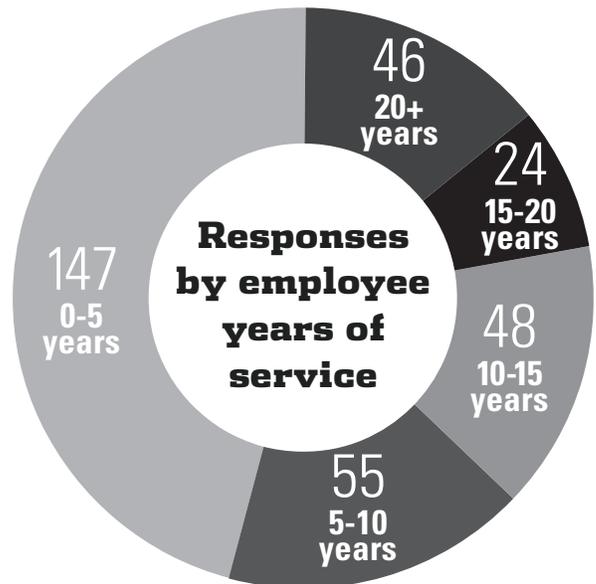
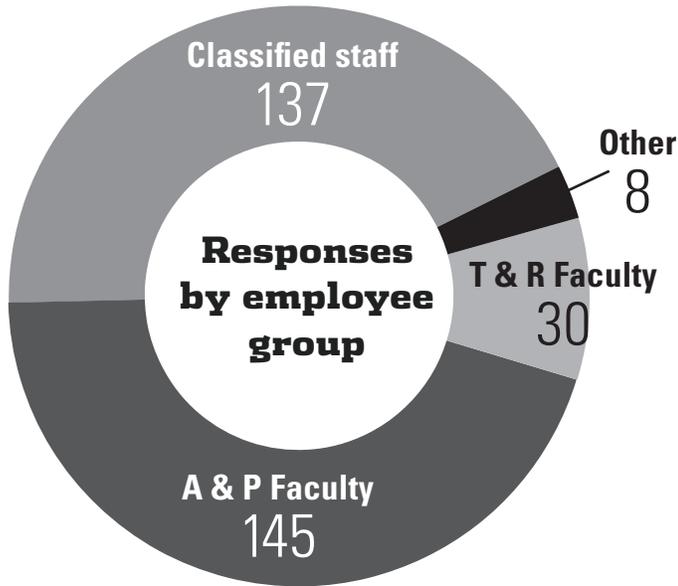
A public comment period to review and provide feedback on the proposed policy was held from February 17 to March 17, 2017. During this period, there were 5,472 total visits (sessions) to the Great Place website. About 48 percent of the traffic to the site was new traffic during this time frame. The policy page had the most visits (6,221 pageviews), followed by the FAQ page (1,735 pageviews).

Comments were submitted through a form on the Great Place website. There were 320 comment forms submitted, offering a total of 889 comments. In total, 5% of Classified Staff, 16% of A&P Faculty and 1% of T&R Faculty weighed in on the proposed policy. All comments were forwarded for review and consideration to the HR Redesign committee that drafted the initial proposal. A number of comments were duplicates, and some offered directly contradictory suggestions. To help manage the process, comments were grouped into themes and then the committees made recommendations on what changes should be incorporated into the proposed policy.

The Great Place website also featured a FAQ page where employees could read existing questions, as well as submit their own questions. If an email address was included, the employee received a direct response. If the submission was anonymous, the question and response was added to the page. In total, 96 questions were submitted via email; 80 were responded to directly.

Some comment form submissions also contained questions. If an email address was provided, those also received direct responses. Of the 320 forms submitted, 76 received direct responses from the project office.

General demographics of 320 comment form submissions



Of the 320 submissions, 140 included their department.

- Audit and Compliance Services
- College of Humanities and Sciences
- Division of Community Engagement
- Division of Strategic Enrollment Management
- Division of Student Affairs
- Equity and Access Services
- Massey Cancer Center
- Office of the Provost
- School of Allied Health Professions

- School of Business
- School of Dentistry
- School of Education
- School of Engineering
- School of Medicine
- School of Nursing
- School of Pharmacy
- School of Social Work
- School of the Arts
- The Honors College

- University College
- VCU Health
- VCU Libraries
- VP for Administration
- VP for Budget and Finance
- VP for Health Sciences
- VP for Research and Innovation
- VP for University Relations

Major themes from comments by policy section

Employee groups

- Support for one inclusive employee group
- Concern about moving A&P faculty into the new employee group

Employment

- Appreciation for one consistent process.

Compensation

- Concern about funding for merit-based pay increases and career path advancements

Performance management

- Questions about the calibration process.
- Concerns over the use of the “Developing” rating for both employees emerging in their career and those who need improvement

Career development

- Concerns about funding/resources for career development and overall manager support

Leadership development

- Support of leadership curriculum and competencies to hold managers accountable

Employee relations

- Questions about the panel hearing and the panel member selection process
- Confusion on the severance benefits

Alternative work arrangements

- Excitement over the enhancements but concerns that it will not be adopted by managers

Paid leave plan

- Many questions about individual employee’s leave accruals and carry-forward
- Disagreement with the two-year stipulation for the use of the parental leave benefit
- Concerns about funding for yearly leave payout
- Disagreement with the amount of leave used before being able to access caregiving leave

Disposition of 889 comments

Policy section	Committee agreed	Committee disagreed	Comments/ questions acknowledged	Total
Employee groups	19	14	86	119
Employment	18	3	50	71
Compensation	11	2	84	97
Performance management	27	5	54	86
Career development	39	2	39	80
Leadership development	2	0	52	54
Employee relations	17	1	38	56
Alternate work arrangements	9	6	46	61
Paid leave plan	42	11	131	184
General comments	6	0	75	81
Total	190	44	655	889

Sampling of comments in support of the policy

“All in all, this is an excellent plan that will really help VCU advance quickly as a “great place.” Glad to see all of this. Kudos to all of you.”

“Overall, I am very impressed with the proposed policy. Thank you to everyone for their work thus far.”

“I’ve been hearing a great deal of complaining about this change, but I welcome it and I’m A&P faculty. The complaints have been mostly around class with people saying now they will ‘be just like staff.’ Aren’t we trying to get away from that? Also, most of these positions are not faculty in the academic sense anyway; they were created to skirt existing hiring practices.”

“I feel really great about these policy changes. As a newer employee who started just over a year ago, I was less than thrilled about some of the HR policies when I started and I questioned my longevity here as a result. This plan, if implemented, absolutely motivates me to stay at VCU. I think the new incentives and flexible leave and work plans will allow me to grow and develop as a professional while leaving room for work/life balance and beginning a family. I am SO excited about this, please keep doing the hard work you are doing. This is absolutely heading in the right direction and I believe would serve as a model for universities who want to recruit top talent and retain great employees.”

Sampling of comments questioning the merits of the policy

“There is some concern that this policy will create some inequalities between current staff and faculty and incoming staff and faculty with too long of a gap in time to even that out. Those types of differences will be a severe hit to morale and make the option of leaving for somewhere with a more level compensation package across the university all the more enticing. I would hate to see this become something that creates revolving doors because the cost and time of hiring and training will impact and likely eclipse anything saved by these plans. This feels very corporate, and policies like that are why I left that world to work at an academic institution.”

“I think this policy is full of good ideas that will make VCU a more welcoming place to work. My two major concerns lie in losing my faculty status and in there not being funds to actually execute this policy with regards to merit-based raises and bringing current employees up to market-range salaries. It seems that salaries that do not even meet market-range are the norm here--I know my salary hardly even brushes the bottom of the range for my position with my qualifications at peer institutions. Finding funds to increase salaries is going to be important in retaining quality employees.”

“This is a huge effort and expense with very little return on the investment.”

Substantive policy changes based on university feedback

Policy name

- Change the name to Working @ VCU: "Great Place" HR Policies.

Employee groups

- Add a designation of academic professionals to identify those with specialized professional qualifications who provide direct support of academic programs to enhance the practice and quality of teaching and learning. This employee group is defined as those having advanced degrees, often terminal degrees, with 75 percent or more of their total assignment involving advising, curriculum development and instructional design.

Employment

- Clarify the language on posting, offer letter and reference-checking processes.
- Add an appeals process for employees dismissed by the university to petition for rehire.

Compensation

- Clarify the distinction between university job title and working titles.

Performance management

- Add a sixth performance rating to differentiate "Developing" and "Needs Improvement."

Employee Relations:

- Clarify the language on the relationship between the grievance process and other complaint procedures at the university; that classified staff retain the option of using the state grievance procedures; process on panel hearings; document signing and retention; and simplify the wording in workforce reduction, severance and WTA benefits.

Alternative work arrangements

- Clarify the difference between informal and formal circumstances, as well as core and standard work hours.

Paid leave plan

- Eliminate the yearly leave payout option. Leave balances above the maximum carry-forward will be forfeited. Postpone implementation of first carry-forward maximum to December 2019.
- Pay leave balances upon separation at 100 percent, and cover the cost from the fringe benefit pool.
- Change the leave service date to include years with a break in service.
- Include sick and personal/family leave balances into the new leave program upon conversion.
- Remove the two-year stipulation on the use of the parental leave benefit.
- Change the requirements for caregiving leave to a straight "match" providing 40 additional hours of caregiving leave after an employee uses 40 hours of accrued leave.
- Clarify language on use of banked traditional sick leave, four hour reporting increment for exempt employees, and affirming University service does not require use of leave time.

