Dear VCU students, faculty and staff,

We are looking forward to welcoming you back for spring semester 2021. At the same time, our nation and region continue to face the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are in the third and most virulent surge of the COVID-19 virus. The COVID-19 infection rate is at its highest since the pandemic began. Models suggest the number of cases in Virginia will continue to rise into February. They already are four times higher than at the beginning of the fall semester. So, with your health and safety as a primary concern, we are adjusting how VCU will start the spring semester.

- All classes will begin virtually, except in instances where a student is involved in clinical and field placements, practica, co-ops, internships and other work-related experiential learning activities. This means that previously planned in-person classes and the in-person component of hybrid (blended) courses also will take place virtually.
- The semester start dates remain unchanged and can be found on the academic calendar.
- You can find updated information regarding your courses at https://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/scheduleofclasses.

As pandemic conditions improve, we have every intention to resume in-person instruction as originally planned. **We will evaluate the feasibility of moving forward with previously scheduled in-person classes and hybrid courses by mid-February, with the hope to resume them on or before March 8.**

A bright spot on the horizon is COVID-19 vaccinations. Students on both campuses who are designated for front-facing clinical placements and patient care will start receiving vaccinations as early as this week. The university and VCU Health System also are working on a vaccination plan for designated university employees whose work supports the needs of our patients and who are university health care providers. And, VCU is working with the Virginia Department of Health on the timeline for vaccine availability for all faculty and staff.

Vaccination distribution is based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Virginia Department of Health guidelines. For more information on vaccinations,
visit https://together.vcu.edu/faq/vaccine/. This site will be updated as more information is available.

We have prepared as a community throughout the pandemic to be flexible as we continue our missions in education, research, creativity and clinical care. With the growing availability of safe and effective vaccines, we are hopeful that this current surge is the last one and our planning soon can turn to a resumption of campus activities.

In the meantime, based on what we’ve learned about the virus and our experience last semester, we are taking additional measures to enhance how we address everyone’s health and safety as a community. These include mandatory asymptomatic surveillance testing, updated student and employee training and Entry Pass. Many of you already have received communications about these. I urge you to please continue to pay close attention to information that is important to your health and wellbeing.

A complete summary of Spring 2021 information is on the Together website at https://together.vcu.edu/spring-2021-info/. Additionally, the together.vcu.edu website is an excellent resource for up-to-date information on university operations and health and safety information.

Students, faculty, and staff proved last semester that VCU can meet these challenges better than nearly any community. You have held true as a community to support and care for each other so that we can fulfill our important mission. I am grateful for what you accomplished last semester and look forward to a successful spring semester as One VCU: Responsible Together. We’ve done this well before and we can succeed again.

Sincerely,

Michael Rao
President, VCU and VCU Health System