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Come 'RAP' With Us: Improving the Retention of Academically-Qualified Persons (RAP) with GPAs of 3.0 or Higher

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Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute Project Proposal – Interim Report

Come ‘RAP’ With Us: Improving the Retention of Academically-Qualified
Persons (RAP) with GPAs of 3.0 or Higher

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Retention is an important area of concern for Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). This project involves devising initiatives to identify and retain students with a high potential for academic success as outlined in the Strategic Plan for the Future of Virginia Commonwealth University, Phase II. It is theorized that by concentrating efforts on students (both in-state and out-of-state) with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher, an improvement in the six-year graduation and freshmen retention rates can be realized. This would serve to enhance VCU’s status in the academic community (moving from Tier 3 to Tier 2 status) since twenty percent of the determining ranking of the *U.S. News and World Report’s* rankings are derived from the category of retention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The most recent data reported by *U.S. News and World Report* indicates that VCU’s six-year graduation rate was 43% and the freshman retention rate was 77%. This compares to an average rating for Tier 2 institutions for six-year graduation of 60.1% (range, 51-71) and for freshman retention of 84.2% (range, 77-90). This project supports the Virginia Commonwealth University Strategic Initiative entitled, *Academic Excellence*. Presented below are the description and performance measures described in the University’s document.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

DESCRIPTION:

This initiative seeks support to enhance the overall quality of the undergraduate education experience and to improve student success. Strategies include implementation of a program review process, an increasing proportion of full-time faculty, and improvements in retention and graduation rates.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Performance measures for this initiative include freshmen retention and graduation rates, improved faculty mix and quality, and improved student quality and selectivity.

The University has studied retention for several years. During the fall 1999 semester, the University conducted a survey of undergraduate senior students who were academically eligible to enroll for

classes but who did not return for the fall 1999 term. In a similar manner, during the fall 1997 and 1998 semesters, the University conducted a survey of undergraduate freshmen students who were academically eligible (GPA 2.0 or higher) to enroll for classes but who did not return for the fall 1998 or 1999 term. The study, coordinated by the IR&E, is part of an on-going effort to gather information about former students' general satisfaction with their education at VCU, the reasons they did not return to the University, and what the University could do to convince the students to return to VCU.

Research Process

The fall non-returning senior student study used a telephone survey originally developed for an exploratory study in fall 1996 of all non-returning students and was later modified for the fall 1997 and fall 1998 studies (surveys of eligible non-returning freshman [GPA 2.0 or higher]). The population (N=240) of eligible non-returning senior students was identified by the University's Enrollment Services area. Only senior students that were eligible to enroll for classes at the end of the spring semester but chose not to enroll for the fall 1999 semester were included in the 1999 Fall Study. The questionnaire was administered to a sample (N=100) of academically eligible senior students (GPA 3.0 or higher) that did not return to the University for the fall 1999 semester.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs developed the questions, with support from the IR&E, and the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at VCU (SERL). The questionnaire includes items on employment and education after the respondents left VCU, the usefulness of the VCU course work in workplace performance, satisfaction with academic aspects of their university experience, and reasons for not returning to VCU. Particular care was taken to learn if financial and/or housing issues were important reasons for not returning to the university. The questionnaire also asked if the respondents might consider returning to VCU and what the university could do to help them decide to return.

The most important reasons identified by the seniors with a GPA of 3.0 or higher for not returning were financial/cost issues (36%), academic issues (18%), and personal issues (27%). About 78% said there were things that the University could do to help them decide to return – providing more aid/lowering cost was the most prevalent response given by 35% of the respondents. Interestingly, 84% of this group reported working full- or part-time.

The 1998 freshman survey (students with GPAs 2.0 or higher) reported similar findings with about one-third (30%) of students leaving VCU because of financial reasons and 15% leaving for personal issues. Of those who indicated that they might return to VCU, about 30% said that more financial aid or lower costs would be the most important thing that VCU could do to influence their decision to stay.

Current Study Population

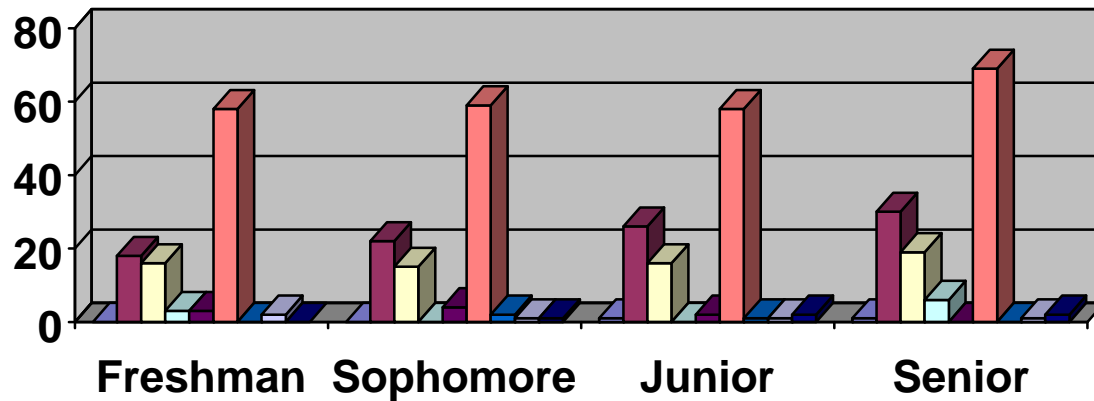
The most recent survey was conducted in Fall 2000 and Spring 2001. Only the population of eligible non-returning students with a GPA of 3.00 or higher as identified by the University's Enrollment Services area is included in the current study. The sample has been stratified according to academic levels, academic disciplines, and the number of instate versus out-of-state students. The current population consists of a total of 443 students that were not planning to register. The breakdown of the

population according to discipline and academic level is presented in the table below and is also depicted graphically by disciplines and academic level in the following two graphs. The group of numbers listed in the freshman column totaling 100 represents the number of academically qualified freshmen with a GPA of 3.0 or higher who chose not to return to VCU for the sophomore year. In a similar manner, the sophomore and junior columns represent the number of sophomore and juniors, totaling 104 and 109 respectively, who chose not to return to VCU for the junior and senior year. The Senior column totaling 130 represent those students who had earned enough credits to be classified as seniors but did not graduate and did not return to VCU to complete the fulfillments for graduation. Screening questions were asked at the beginning of the interview to confirm the accuracy of the selection process. Repeated efforts were made to contact and interview as many eligible students as possible within the 8-week study window.

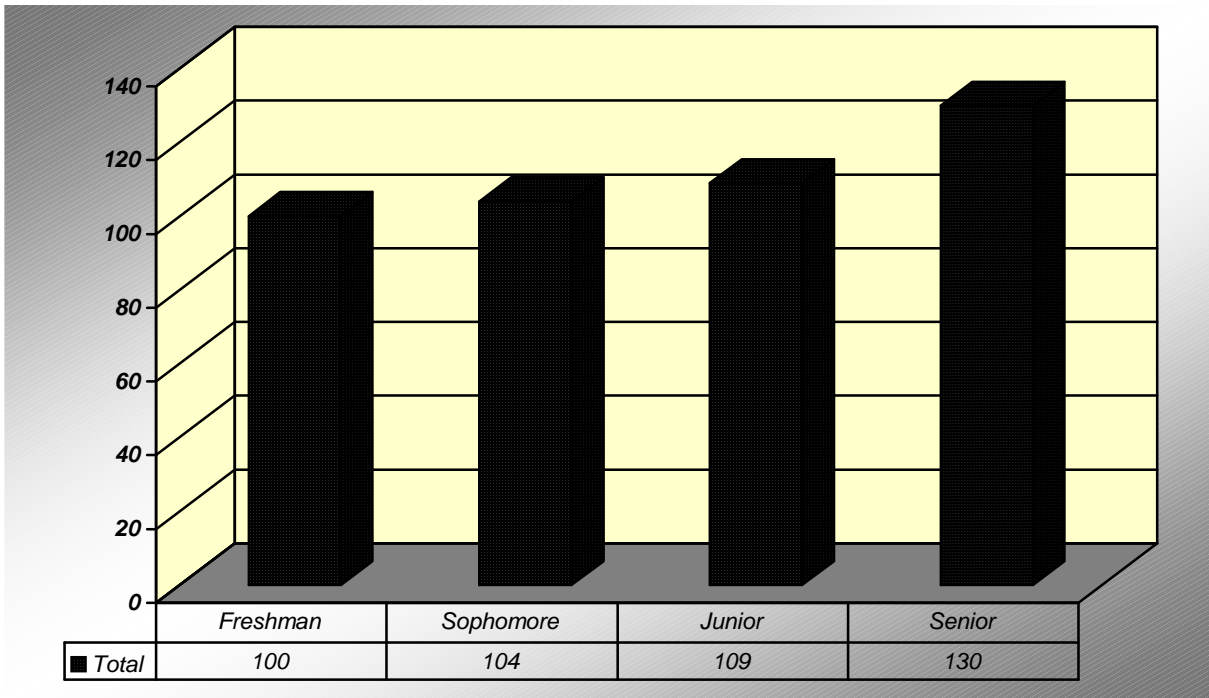
**Non-returning Undergraduates by College/School with a GPA 3.00 or Higher
(Fall 1999 to Fall 2000)**

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total
<i>College/school</i>					
Allied Health Professions	0	0	1	1	2
Arts	18	22	28	30	98
Business	16	15	16	19	66
Education	3	0	0	6	9
Engineering	3	4	2	0	9
Humanities and Sciences	58	59	58	69	244
Nursing	0	2	1	2	5
Social Work	2	1	1	1	5
University Outreach	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100	104	109	130	443

THE DISCIPLINE RAP
Non-returning Undergraduates by College/School
With a GPA 3.00 or Higher



RAPPING BY LEVELS



A total of 77 students (of the 443 students not planning to return to VCU) were surveyed. *Preliminary* results indicate the most important reason for not returning to VCU was finances (7%), academic issues (15%), and personal reasons (13%). Of the 65% that would or might return, 12% and 15% indicated that increasing financial aid/loans/grants/scholarships and improving academic issues, respectively, were the most important thing that VCU could do to help them finish their degree. In the total sample, one-third each indicated that more financial aid and more academic support services would influence their decision to finish their degree.

The Cost of “RAP”

Virginia Commonwealth University

Full-Time Undergraduate Per Semester Cost

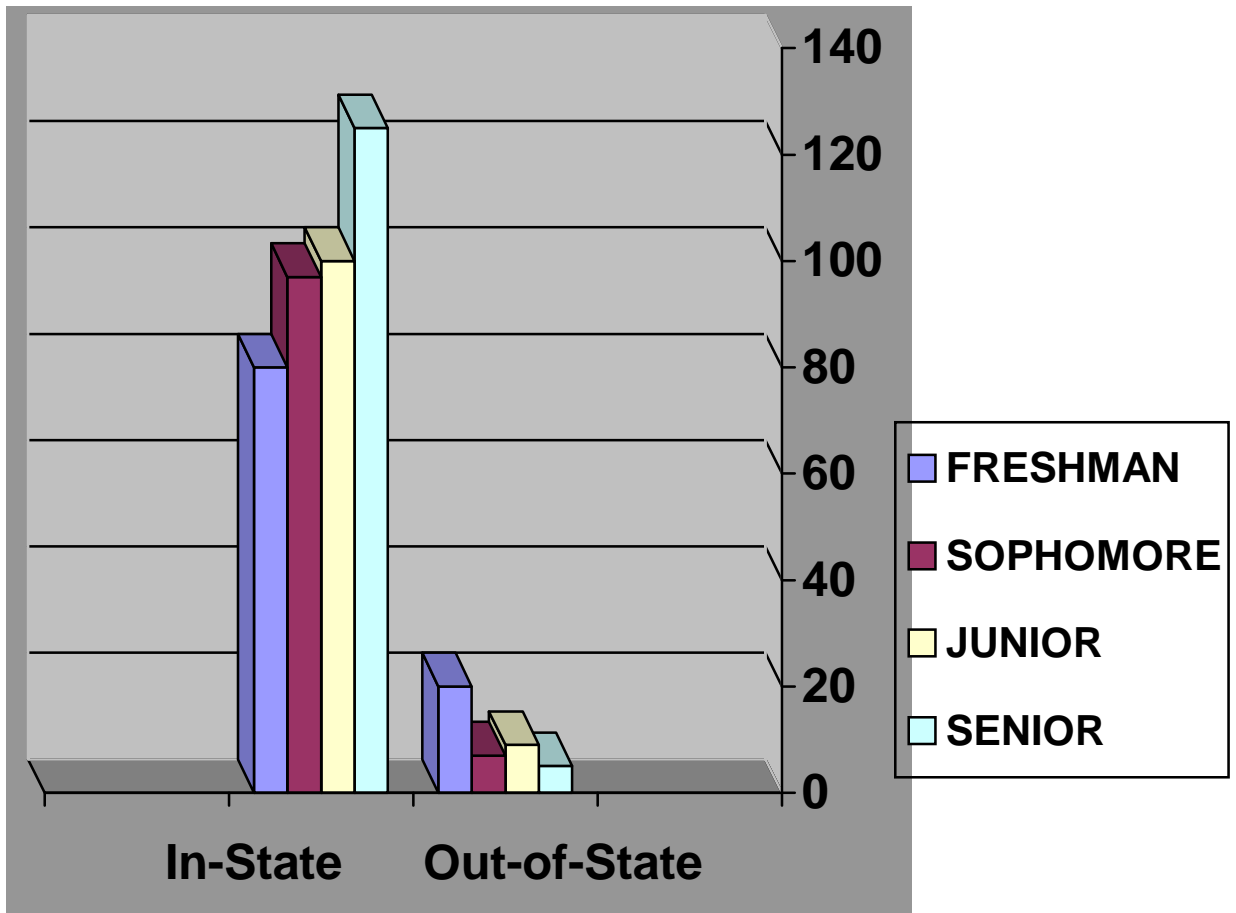
	Virginia Resident	Non-Virginia Resident
Tuition	\$1,246.00	\$6,336.00
Activity	22.00	22.00
University Fee	471.50	471.50
Technology Fee	20.50	20.50
Health Fee	77.50	77.50
Total	\$1,837.50	\$6,927.50

With an annual cost per full-time Virginia resident student of \$3,675.00, the total cost of 'RAP' for the period fall 1999 to fall 2000 amounts to **\$1,488,375.00**. The total cost of 'RAP' for the non-resident Virginia student (excluding room and board) amounts to **\$568,055.00** during the same time period.

The Grand Total Cost of 'RAP' for the period Fall 1999 to Fall 2000: \$2,056,430.00.

The chart below shows the actual number of instate versus out-of-state 'RAP' statistics at the various academic levels for the period fall 1999 to fall 2000.

In-State vs Out-of-State Non-returning Undergraduates With a GPA 3.00 or Higher (Fall 1999 to Fall 2000)



PROJECT DETAILS

Goals & Objectives

Listed below are the two major goals for the “Come ‘RAP’ With Us: Improving the Retention of Academically-Qualified Persons (RAP) with GPAs of 3.0 or Higher” Project. Specific objectives are listed under each goal.

Goal #1 - To improve the retention rate of students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher

Objective #1.1 – To provide each school with information on students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher who fail to preregister on a semester basis

Objective #1.2 – To require that students declare a major by a certain time to allow for advising by a specific school

Objective #1.3 – To fund focus groups of students who fail to preregister to provide qualitative data in addition to the survey results

Goal #2 – To develop strategies to retain the academically-qualified person with a GPA of 3.0 or higher

Objective #2.1 – To encourage a system of personal contact between the home group (administrators/faculty/peer-student) and students after preregistration fails to occur

Objective #2.2 – To better market the availability of financial aid packages and scholarships at both the University and school levels

Objective #2.3 – To better market the availability of internships and co-ops available in each department of each school

Target Population/Audience

Undergraduate freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior students.

Methods

The primary methods of accomplishing the goals and objectives of the project will be to establish an open line of communication between the University Enrollment Services and each school on a semester by semester basis. In addition, each school will develop a strategy for personal contact with students who fail to preregister. Both the University and each school will develop a plan to market the availability of financial aid packages, grants, scholarships, internships, and co-ops.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

VCU Leadership Team Members

Ruth Epps – data analysis, financial impact evaluation

Pamela Boston – present plan to Dr. Henry Rhone on retention

Cynthia Kirkwood – report writing, monitoring of school plans

John Ward – collect financial aid information, marketing monitoring

Mentors: Donna Katen-Bahensky, Steven Gottfredson – serve as consultants to the team

Other Resources Available to the Team

Chip Byrd, Office of Institutional Evaluation and Research - responsible for all surveys, provided survey results and will re-run the data based on questions that the team generates. Provided perspectives on the longitudinal findings of the data

Allan Sack, Director of Student Reporting and Analysis – provided information on the data set of the survey

Janelle Cassara, Office of Financial Aid – can provide information on the level of funding, perspectives on retention as it relates to financial aid

Henry Rhone, Vice Provost – provided information on Retention 2000 and perspectives on retention issues, responsible for academic affairs

University Enrollment Services

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Month 1

- ❖ Review strategic plan and determine project fit.

Months 2-3

- ❖ Meet with Dr. Henry Rhone to discuss the retention surveys
- ❖ Retrieve survey results from the VCU web site
- ❖ Discuss feasibility of the project within the study population
- ❖ Meet with Alan Sack to determine the size of the population
- ❖ Meet with the Associate Dean for Advising for Humanities and Sciences

Months 4-6

- ❖ Determine the size of the population and value relevance of the study population
- ❖ Attach dollar figure to the study population

Months 7-9

- ❖ Work with the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs to devise strategy for implementation of plan within each school for the next academic semester (spring or fall)
- ❖ Work with the Office of Financial Aid to devise strategies for financial aid marketing
- ❖ Secure funding for focus groups

Months 10-16

- ❖ Schools to implement their strategy for personal contact
- ❖ University and individual schools to implement marketing strategies for financial aid/scholarships

Months 17-18

- ❖ Review retention data for fall 2001 and spring 2002 for impact.

EVALUATION PLAN

The project evaluation will be performed by ongoing meetings of the project team.

Goal #1 - The retention rate for freshmen and the six-year graduation rate will be assessed at the end of the project. The goal is to be within the range of the Tier 2 schools – 77 to 90% and 51-71%, respectively.

(Objective #1.1) – Develop a system for University Enrollment Services to report to each school on students who fail to preregister for the upcoming semester.

(Objective #1.2) – Establish a policy for students declare a major by the end of their sophomore year

(Objective #1.3) – Design a study of focus groups of students who fail to preregister to provide qualitative data

Goal #2 – To develop strategies to retain academically-qualified persons with GPAs of 3.0 or higher

(Objective #2.1) – Document face to face contact between administrators/faculty/peer-students and non-returning students after preregistration fails to occur for each school, each semester

(Objective #2.2) – List the marketing tools used to advertise the availability of financial aid packages and scholarships at both the University and school levels

(Objective #2.3) –List the marketing the availability of internships and co-ops available in each department of each school

A report will be generated at the end of the 2001-2002 academic year.

APPENDIX A

PROJECT TEAM VITAE

RUTH W. EPPS

Professor and Chairman
Department of Accounting
Virginia Commonwealth University

Dr. Ruth W. Epps, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Accounting at Virginia Commonwealth University, is beginning her fourteenth year of service at the University and her seventh year as Chairman. She is a graduate of Virginia Union University with a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry and holds Masters degrees from the University of Pittsburgh (Chemistry) and Virginia Commonwealth University (Master of Accountancy), and a Ph.D. in Accounting from Virginia Commonwealth University. She joined the faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in 1987.

A significant portion of Dr. Epps' academic life has been spent coordinating accounting programs, modifying curriculum development, fundraising and various other activities including serving as the Accounting Faculty Advisor for Beta Alpha Psi. Dr. Epps is very active in the profession. Currently, she is Vice-President-Elect: American Accounting Association Southeast Region Accounting Programs Leadership Group. She is serving as Secretary/Treasurer of the Southeast Region of the American Accounting Association, a position which she has held since elected in April 1998. She is a member of the Executive Finance Committee of the American Accounting Association. She has served as a member of the Accounting Accreditation Committee of the American Accounting Association and volunteered in various other AAA endeavors.

The focus of Dr. Epps' research and teaching has been in Cost /Managerial Accounting and Governmental/Not-For-Profit Accounting, which also includes Regulatory Accounting. She is a certified public accountant and a member of American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the National Association of Black Accountants, and the Institute of Management Accountants. Her research work has been published in: Research on Accounting Regulations, Advances in International Accounting, The Government Accountants Journal, Critical Perspectives on Accounting, The CPA Journal, Journal of International Auditing, Accounting and Taxation and other academic and scholarly journals.

CYNTHIA K. KIRKWOOD

Associate Professor of Pharmacy
 Vice Chair for Education
 Department of Pharmacy
 School of Pharmacy
 Virginia Commonwealth University
 Richmond, VA 23298

Experience:Education:

Doctor of Pharmacy. 1985. Medical College of Virginia of Virginia Commonwealth University
 B.S., Pharmacy, Magna Cum Laude. 1982. Medical College of Virginia of Virginia Commonwealth University

Practice Experience:

July 2000 - present. Vice Chairman for Education, Department of Pharmacy, School of Pharmacy, VCU

July 1, 1999 - present. Associate Professor with Tenure, Department of Pharmacy, School of Pharmacy, VCU

September 1991 - June 1999. Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutics, School of Pharmacy, VCU

July 1992 - present. Consultant, Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (formerly Richmond Community Mental Health Center), 107 N. 5th Street, Richmond, VA

July 1987 - August 1991. Research Assistant Professor, School of Pharmacy, VCU

June 1985 - June 1987. Fellow in Psychiatric Pharmacotherapy/ Clinical Instructor, School of Pharmacy, VCU

May 1982 - August 1983. Director of Intravenous Admixture Program, Lewis-Gale Hospital, Salem, Virginia

Recent Publications:

Kirkwood CK. Treatment of Insomnia. Power_x-Pak CE. 2001;1-12. Also as an online publication at www.powerpak.com/CE/pharmacy.cfm. July 3, 2001.

Kirkwood CK. Management of Insomnia. *J Am Pharmaceutical Assoc* 1999;39:688-696.

Ghaemi SN, Kirkwood CK. Elevation of Nortriptyline Plasma Levels Following Cotreatment With Paroxetine and Thioridazine. *J Clin Psychopharmacol* 1998;18:342-3.

Melton ST, Kirkwood CK, Ghaemi SN. Pharmacotherapy of HIV Dementia. *Ann Pharmacotherapy* 1997;31:457-73.

Melton ST, Kirkwood CK, Farrar TW, Brink DD, Carroll NV. Economic Evaluation of Paroxetine and Imipramine in Depressed Patients. *Psychopharmacol Bull* 1997;1:93-100.

Gray ES, Tush GM, Kirkwood CK. Active Learning Strategies. Schwinghammer TL (ed). In: *Pharmacotherapy: A Patient-Focused Approach*; 2nd Edition. Stamford, Conn.: Appleton & Lange, 1999, pp.7-10.

Kirkwood CK. Anxiety Disorders. Dipiro JT, Talbert RL, Yee GC, et al (eds). In: *Pharmacotherapy: A Pathophysiologic Approach*. 4th Edition. Stamford, Conn.: Appleton & Lange, 1999, pp.1182-1196.

PAMELA FINLEY BOSTON
Associate General Counsel and Special Assistant
Attorney General
Office of the General Counsel
Virginia Commonwealth University

Experience:

Education:

J.D., College of William & Mary
Undergraduate Studies in Elementary Education, Bennett College

Practice:

She is responsible for a wide spectrum of legal services to Virginia Commonwealth University with primary focus on the defense of litigation involving VCU and its officials. She renders advice and provides consultation, reviews policies, practices, and procedures, provides in-house training and represents the university before administrative and judicial tribunals.

JOHN D. WARD

Professor

Vice Chair, Division of Neurosurgery

School of Medicine

Co-Director, Neurosurgical Center

Medical College Campus of VCU

Experience:

Education:

M.D., University of Cincinnati School of Medicine, Cincinnati, Ohio

B.S., Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

Practice:

He is responsible for the day to day management of the Division, tracking progress, developing new programs and assisting the Chairman in directional decisions. He is also involved in reorganizing the Neurosurgical Center into a program-oriented center.