

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission



Special Report: VCU Degree Award

Briefing to House Appropriations Committee

October 20, 2008



JLARC

Study Mandate

- In a September 9, 2008 letter to JLARC's Chairman, the House Appropriations Committee requested JLARC to review the improper award of an undergraduate degree at VCU

- Specifically, the letter requested JLARC to review
 - Decision to waive published graduation requirements
 - Conduct of the investigation
 - Consultant services provided
 - Recommendations to ensure future degrees not awarded improperly

Student Provided Preferential Treatment Throughout His Student Experience

- VCU administrators developed flawed curriculum plan and intentionally circumvented typical BIS program admissions process
- VCU dean approved graduation application even though student did not meet at least five separate graduation requirements

VCU Did Not Follow Typical BIS Admissions Process for This Student

Typical BIS Admissions Process

Student's BIS Admissions Process

Orientation meeting with BIS Coordinator

X

Curriculum plan developed

✓

Applicant participates in development of curriculum plan

X

Program goal statement developed

X

Applicant's materials presented to BIS Admissions Committee

X

BIS Admissions Committee approves applicant's admission to the program

X



Student Did Not Meet Key BIS Graduation Requirements

VCU Credits Required to Earn Degree	Percent of Requirement Fulfilled by Student
30 credits (25 percent rule)	20%
30 of last 45 credits	20%
24 BIS credits	25%
12 focus area credits	50%
21 upper level credits	29%



Student Obtained Degree Without Earning It Because Influence Was Exerted

- Influence exerted on BIS coordinator by University College dean
- Influence exerted on University College dean from higher level
- No evidence of influence by president

Investigation Appropriately Addressed Allegations of Improper Degree Award

- Strong basis for initiating investigation
- Board acted responsibly and diligently to address allegations
- Investigation conducted by Assurance Services was thorough and professional

Investigation Appropriately Addressed Allegations of Improper Degree Award (cont.)

- With one exception, concerns raised regarding investigation appear minor or lack merit
- Statement regarding tenure was inappropriate
- Use of consulting services to support investigation warranted and properly procured

Degree Revocation Decision Consistent With Policy

- Board's decision to allow student to keep unearned degree reasonable under current policy
 - Academic misconduct is current standard
- Broader revocation policy needed when degrees found not to have been earned
- Overall degree granting process works well but could be improved
- Additional changes to BIS program should be considered

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