

Michael Rao, Ph.D.  
President, Virginia Commonwealth University

October 24, 2022

President Rao,

We are extremely disappointed that you recently chose to disregard the unanimous vote of a VCU University Council committee and change long-standing VCU policy to allow the university to collaborate with a local brewery to launch a VCU-branded beer this week. In addition to ignoring shared governance, this decision seems incredibly insensitive and disrespectful considering recent alcohol-related tragedies.

The original VCU University Trademarks and Licensing Policy dates to at least 2013 and restricts usage of university licensing and branding of products such as alcohol, among many others; the current version approved in May 2022 states the same. In May 2022, you enacted a temporary revision of this policy allowing for the vice president of university relations in consultation with the senior vice president/CFO to make exceptions to the usage restrictions. As per the policy on creating and maintaining policies and procedures, the policy was introduced to the University Council – Academic Affairs and University Policies committee to make the interim changes permanent, but the proposed changes were voted down unanimously and the changes were, therefore, not brought to the full Council. The interim policy status is to be used sparingly and only in the most urgent of situations to provide great deference to the process in support of shared governance. It was only after a general announcement by alumni relations that we were notified that you ignored the recommendation of the UC-AAUP and went ahead with branding a VCU beer. It is unclear how the branding of a VCU beer was of the most urgent situation.

This action violates the spirit of shared governance with your VCU colleagues. About half of VCU undergraduate students are under Virginia's legal drinking age of 21 years old. Allowing a VCU-branded alcoholic beverage is also inconsistent with VCU having an Institute for Drug and Alcohol Studies and Alcohol Research Center, in addition to the numerous education and outreach efforts by VCU groups such as Recreation and Well-Being.

It is true that the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech both have branded beers. But VCU is the "UNcommon" university, correct? The university that will "do things others can't. Or won't." Let us be UNafraid to stand up for our values and UNwilling to compromise them for something as trifling as the VCU logo on a beer bottle and the comparably insignificant branding profits.

With highest regards,



Everett Carpenter, Ph.D. M.B.A

President, VCU Chapter, American Association of University Professors

President-elect, Virginia Conference of the American Association of University Professors

