

# COVID-19 Pandemic: “Pursuing Advocacy and Fairness During Challenging Times”



National Conflict Resolution Week  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Presenter: William E. King, University Ombudsperson



**VCU**

# *VCU's Ombudsperson*

- The ombudsperson provides confidential, neutral and informal assistance to administrators, faculty, staff, student and postdoctoral scholars who have concerns, conflicts, complaints or disputes arising from or affecting their work or the academic environment at VCU.
- The ombudsperson serves Monroe Park, MCV and Qatar campuses.
- The VCU ombudsperson's office is independent in structure, function and appearance.
- The goal of the office is to assist a visitor or caller in their ability to deal effectively with a concern and seek options for a timely, fair and equitable resolution.
- Services provided by the ombudsperson include; facilitation, mediation, communication coaching, workshop/training on conflict management and referrals .
- VCU's ombudsperson is a certified organizational ombudsman practitioner and reports to the Office of the Provost.

## *Presentation Objectives*

- *Share information how advocacy and fairness are defined by the individual or organizational needs*
- *Understanding how personal identifiers (i.e. race, gender, social economic status, sexual orientation, etc.) may impact one's perception of/or level of advocacy received*
- *Acknowledgement of various university resources for students, faculty and staff*

On March 11, 2020 the Novel Coronavirus Disease, COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

On March 13, 2020 a national emergency was declared in the United States concerning COVID-19 Outbreak.

# Artistic montage demonstrates peaceful protest in Huntington Beach

-newsflare.com



<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7u8tdu>

Following summer of COVID and protests, VCU freshman enrollment shrinks 14%

-Richmond.com

VCU Health confirms several COVID-19 cases at child care center

-8News, Richmond, VA

Fear of misuse overshadows VCU's COVID-19 student absence policy

-The Commonwealth Times

VCU students sign petition to reduce undergraduate tuition during pandemic

-WVIR

VCU Activists Claim Their School Prioritizes Profit Over Students

-The College Post

VCU professors speak out against administration's COVID-19 response

-The Commonwealth Times



Our lives  
*begin to end*  
the day we become  
**SILENT**  
about the things  
that matter.

Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

# Various Ombuds Issues During COVID-19

- Safety concerns (on campus and surrounding community)
- Institutional transparency
- Clearly defined grading criteria for Online Courses
- Physical and Mental Health Concerns
- Structural changes to facilities
- Unemployment and family illness concerns
- Access to PPE supplies
- Institutional policy on COVID-19 testing/quarantine
- Disproportionate health and financial tolls on racial minority and immigrant faculty, staff and students of color
- Fear vs. Productivity in a Telework culture
- Changes in teaching and grading procedures



## Continuation of Issues:

- Campus and community demonstrations/protest
- Lack of faculty, staff and student feedback in decision making
- Fear of job security
- Modification of job responsibilities
- Loss of employment
- Code of conduct policy
- Impact on personal and family financial resources

**I AM NO LONGER  
ACCEPTING THE  
THINGS I  
CANNOT  
CHANGE...  
I AM CHANGING  
THE THINGS I  
CANNOT ACCEPT**

Angela Y. Davis

# ADVOCACY

to change “what is “ into “what should be”

“an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions”

**Self-advocacy** means you know your rights and responsibilities, you speak-up for your rights, and you are able to make choices and decisions that affect your life... it is **important** to learn **self-advocacy** skills because it helps you decide what you want and what is possible for you to expect.

# Techniques for Effective Advocacy

- Collaborate with others when possible
- Approach others with a respectful, positive attitude
- Avoid feelings of entitlement
- Have willingness to be honest
- Evaluate your position
- Research and become well informed
- Formulate a tentative plan
- Request planned meeting with key decision makers
- Generate a paper trail
- Be patient

onevcu

RESPONSIBLE  
TOGETHER

## Resources provided by the university during COVID-19

- Supply kits for on-campus students and employees that include washable cloth face coverings, hand sanitizer and disinfectant spray
- Facilities cleaned at an increased schedule with focus on high-touch surfaces in common areas
- Cleaning supplies will be available in numerous locations
- Hands-free temperature screening stations
- Website and/or app for daily health monitoring
- Required training for students, employees and managers
- Communications campaign and signage with a focus on responsibility of students and employees
- Increased access to physical and mental health services

*The goals and objectives of advocacy are to facilitate change and the development of new areas of policy in order to address unmet needs or deal with emerging necessities in a given community.*



# Fairness

***Fairness is the concept** in sociology, law and generally in society that something should be equal and not be a contradiction to accepted standards. It's related to justice in both the legal and sociological sense. **Fairness** is also treating others equally or in a way that is considered right or reasonable.*

[simple.wikipedia.org>wiki>Fairness](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairness)

# *NEED ASSISTANCE?*

## *RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT VCU*

- University Counseling Services, [counseling.vcu.edu](https://counseling.vcu.edu)
- Health Promotion and Well-Being Center, [thewell.vcu.edu](https://thewell.vcu.edu)
- Division of Student Affairs (DSA), [students.vcu.edu](https://students.vcu.edu)
- Office of the Ombudsperson (OMBUDS), [ombudsperson.vcu.edu](https://ombudsperson.vcu.edu)
- Equity and Access Services (EAS), [equity.vcu.edu](https://equity.vcu.edu)
- Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (SAEO)- Monroe Park Campus, [saeo.vcu.edu](https://saeo.vcu.edu)
- Division of Academic Success, Disability Support- MCV Campus, [das.vcu.edu/students/disability-support](https://das.vcu.edu/students/disability-support)
- Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM), [sem.vcu.edu](https://sem.vcu.edu)
- Inclusive Excellence, [inclusive.vcu.edu](https://inclusive.vcu.edu)
- Human Resources, [hr.vcu.edu](https://hr.vcu.edu)
- Audit and Compliance Services, [acs.vcu.edu](https://acs.vcu.edu)
- VCU Police, [police.vcu.edu](https://police.vcu.edu)
- Office of the Provost, [provost.vcu.edu](https://provost.vcu.edu)

Thank You



<https://youtu.be/o5TmORitKk>