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VCU names dean for School of the Arts in Qatar

DOHA, Qatar — Akel I. Kahera, Ph.D., has been appointed dean of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUQatar), pending approval by the VCU Board of Visitors at its May 8 meeting.

Dr. Kahera succeeds Allyson Vanstone, who will leave VCUQatar in June after a successful eight-year tenure. Kahera joins from Clemson University, where he is associate dean in the College of Architecture, Arts & Humanities, capping a nearly 20-year career in public university teaching and administration. He also serves as director of Clemson’s Pennell Center for Research in Design and Building.

In addition to his academic background, Kahera sits on the editorial board of the International Journal of Islamic Architecture. Kahera’s research focuses on history and theory, culture and aesthetics, sustainable design, urbanism and the practices of culture and local knowledge. His seminal text, “Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space Gender & Aesthetics,” has substantially altered the view of the history and theory of Mosque architecture in the United States and the complex cultural patterns of diaspora.

“Throughout the search process, Kahera exhibited a sophisticated knowledge of the mission and strategic vision of VCUQatar,” said VCU President Michael Rao, Ph.D. “He not only impressed the faculty, staff and administrators who interviewed him, he inspired them. They learned that he is passionate and articulate, but respectful; affable, yet firm; pragmatic, but also visionary; steeped in the American university system, but committed to global engagement and collaboratively advancing the missions of VCUQatar, HBKU and Qatar National Vision 2030.”

School of the Arts Dean Joseph H. Seipel said VCUQatar is fortunate to have attracted such an accomplished visionary as its next dean.

“Kahera has significant experience living and working in the Middle East, having served as a consultant, architect and project manager on a variety of projects in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan,” Seipel said. “As an administrator, he has demonstrated a passion for advocacy, excellent management skills, a talent for building strong relationships, and a keen understanding of both the opportunities and challenges inherent in leadership within the academy.”

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Kahera is the 2013 recipient of the Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art travel fellowship and has lived and worked in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, allowing him to acquire firsthand knowledge and experience about global cultures, traditions, ancient places and distinctive environments.

“The position of dean at VCUQatar provides opportunities to strengthen faculty research and to further the educational mission of VCU,” Kahera said. “In particular, this position holds significant opportunities for interdisciplinary advances drawing upon the many strengths of the faculty. This is particularly compelling to me as an educator and as a trained architect in a field that embraces approaches from interior design and the fine arts.”

Prior to joining Clemson, Kahera taught at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas Tech University and Prairie View A&M University, where he was director of graduate studies. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University and degrees in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Pratt Institute.

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About Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar):

VCUQatar is the Qatar campus of the prestigious Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Established in 1998 through a partnership with Qatar Foundation, VCUQatar offers students the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fashion design, graphic design, interior design and painting & printmaking, a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history and a Master of Fine Arts degree in design.

In addition to a comprehensive annual public events program that includes a wide range of exhibitions, lectures and fashion events, the University hosts the biennial international design conference Tasmeeem and the biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Islamic Art Symposium, attracting

globally recognized designers, academics and thinkers while fostering sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of Qatar. For more information please visit www.qatar.vcu.edu

Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Amir, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

QF's work encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercializing solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community. For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>

About VCU and VCU Medical Center: *Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 226 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Sixty-seven of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 13 schools and one college. MCV Hospitals and the health sciences schools of Virginia Commonwealth University comprise VCU Medical Center, one of the nation's leading academic medical centers. For more, see www.vcu.edu.*

About the VCU School of the Arts: *With a distinguished faculty of professional artists and 16 departments, including Craft/Material Studies, Fashion Design and Merchandising, Dance and Choreography, Graphic Design, Music, Painting and Printmaking, Photography and Film, Sculpture + Extended Media and Theatre, VCU School of the Arts has been the top-ranked public university visual arts and design graduate program in the country for more than 10 years, according to U.S. News & World Report. Its campus in Qatar provides students and faculty with a direct tie to the Middle East, a region of increasing significance in the contemporary art world.*

