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Putting You First: First-Generation Student Perceptions, Needs, and Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Putting You First: First-Generation Student Perceptions, Needs, and Engagement
at Virginia Commonwealth University

A Capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth
University.

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Abstract

PUTTING YOU FIRST: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PERCEPTIONS, NEEDS, AND ENGAGEMENT AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

By Jennifer D. Adams, Brittany M. Gracik, Rochelle H. Jordan, and Yeimarie Lopez

A Capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Capstone Chair: Kimberly Bridges, Ed.L.D., Department of Educational Leadership

You First at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) submitted a Request for Assistance with the need for increased engagement with VCU first-generation (FG) students. To address this request, a doctoral Capstone team conducted problem and context analysis, a literature review, a mixed-methods study analyzing institutional data, a survey of current FG students at VCU, and focus group sessions with FG students at VCU. The goal was to identify FG student perceptions of their FG identities, determine the needs of FG students, and uncover factors that impact FG students' engagement with You First. Findings suggested that the underlying cause of minimal engagement with FG students is the lack of awareness of You First services and programs. The Capstone team identified key challenges for FG students and ways for You First to continue to improve its support of FG students. Recommendations focused on increasing awareness of You First, promoting FG student connections, providing more accessible information, formalizing partnerships across the institution, and cultivating inclusivity among FG students' families.

Keywords: first-generation college students, engagement, belonging, support, barriers

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Chapter I: Introduction

Pursuing higher education can be an exciting yet daunting experience, particularly for first-generation (FG) students whose parents did not graduate from college. Given the vast benefits of postsecondary education, creating supportive and inclusive experiences for FG students is an ethical imperative and should be an institutional goal. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) created You First to provide institutional support to FG students at VCU by helping these students develop a sense of belonging through participation in numerous events and programs. However, despite its commitment to supporting FG students in achieving their educational goals, You First has expressed concern about the number of FG students engaged with its services and events. You First staff submitted a Request for Assistance (RFA) to the VCU School of Education's Doctor of Education (EdD) program for consideration as a Capstone project. This Capstone team has partnered with You First to respond to its request.

This chapter frames the context of the You First problem of practice by exploring the value of postsecondary education, the factors that affect how some FG students experience higher education, and the importance of institutional support to FG students. We examine why You First was created, its services and programs, and You First's rationale for submitting an RFA. We conclude this chapter by detailing the Capstone team's analysis of the problem and context, the response to You First's RFA, and a plan of research to inform its organizational improvement.

Importance of Postsecondary Education

Earning a college degree can change a life. First, postsecondary education can increase earning potential, which supports upward mobility. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), individuals earning bachelor's degrees make approximately \$525 more per

week than those without a college degree. At an additional \$27,300 per year, this difference provides college graduates substantial opportunities to save, invest, or have more disposable income than individuals without college degrees.

Second, a positive relationship exists between higher education, higher wages, and job satisfaction. In its 2016 report, *The State of American Jobs*, the Pew Research Center (2016) found that highly educated workers were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Additionally, Pew researchers found that 59% of individuals with an annual family income of \$75,000 or higher were very satisfied with their current work. In contrast, only 39% of individuals making less than \$30,000 per year expressed the same level of satisfaction and were much more likely to express overall life dissatisfaction (Pew Research Center, 2016). Lower-wage earners are less likely to enjoy benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, and employer-sponsored retirement plans, which are more common for workers with college degrees (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Third, individuals without college degrees are more vulnerable to unemployment (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In 2020, the unemployment rate for individuals with only a high school diploma was 9.7%, versus 5.5% for individuals with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Furthermore, having a college degree may make it easier to get rehired after unemployment. Among workers who lost employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, re-entry into the workforce seemed more difficult for individuals without a college degree (Long, 2021).

Postsecondary education can increase earning potential, affect job and life satisfaction, increase the likelihood of employer-sponsored benefits, and reduce the possibility of unemployment. Just as an additional \$525 per week can add up to over \$27,000 per year, these

perks can significantly and positively shape one's quality of life. Given the importance of postsecondary education, it is even more critical for students and families for whom college is a first-ever opportunity.

FG Students

Of all undergraduate students in the U.S pursuing postsecondary education, 24%-56% were FG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019). The percentage of students identified as FG students varies due to the numerous ways the population is defined. The term "FG student" was first defined by Fuji Adachi in 1979 to identify students without at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Today, FG student definitions may include students with parents who have less than a high school diploma; parents who earned their high school diploma, but did not attend college; and parents who received some college education but did not earn their baccalaureate degrees (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

One common definition of FG students is that they are the first in their families to attend college (Hicks, 2003; McConnell, 2000; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). However, the most widely accepted definition of a FG student is an individual whose parents did not complete a college degree (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Petty, 2014; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Willett, 1989). This definition allows for a student with a parental figure who began but did not complete postsecondary education. Within these definitions, it is crucial to acknowledge varying family structures. Students may have one parent, guardian(s), family member(s), or caretaker(s) who fulfills the parental role referred to in FG student definitions.

FG students enter institutions of higher education (IHEs) with many strengths, including being highly motivated, self-sufficient (Evans et al., 2020), and resilient (Havlik et al., 2020; House et al., 2020). Their motivation is rooted in their connections to their families (Evans et al.,

2020; Havlik et al., 2020) and the pride of being the first in their families to attend college (Evans et al., 2020). Their self-efficacy helps them recognize their challenges and harness their many strengths to succeed (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020). Their assets are essential as they face the many internal and external challenges of being an FG student. Internal challenges may include imposter syndrome (Demetriou et al., 2017), internalized messages about not belonging (Means & Pyne, 2017), or feeling like an outsider or “othered” (Havlik et al., 2020). In comparison, external challenges may include limited financial resources (Evans et al., 2020), campus culture or climate (Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017), or limited access to necessary information (Evans et al., 2020; O’Neal et al., 2016). Overcoming these challenges is a critical component of FG student success toward degree completion; therefore, IHEs must seek ways to address them.

Virginia Commonwealth University Efforts to Support FG Students

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a “premier urban public research institution” located in Richmond, Virginia, that offers 238 undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs across two campuses (VCU Office of Institutional Research and Decision, 2021b, p.1). During the 2020-2021 academic year, the institution enrolled more than 29,000 students within its 11 schools and three colleges, 75.7% of which were undergraduate students (VCU Office of Institutional Research and Decision, 2021a).

A large part of the undergraduate student population at VCU is made up of FG students, which continues to grow both within postsecondary education and at VCU (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019a). VCU defines a FG student as an individual whose parents or guardians did not complete a four-year college degree (VCU, 2021f; VCU, 2021g). In Fall 2021, VCU enrolled 21,123 undergraduate students with 30.04% ($n = 6,345$) being FG

students. Approximately 29.3% ($n = 1,218$) of the total freshmen population were FG students, 38.8% ($n = 619$) of the total transfer population were FG students, and 29.3% ($n = 4,508$) of the total continuing student population were FG students (K. Smith, personal communication, January 13, 2022). Table 1 shows the Fall 2021 VCU undergraduate enrollment for FG students and continuing-generation (CG) students by their status (i.e., freshman, transfer, continuing student).

Table 1*VCU Undergraduate Enrollment by First-Generation Status*

	Fall 2021				
	First-Generation		Multi-Generation		Total
	#	% of category	#	% of category	#
Freshman	1,218	29.3%	2,933	70.7%	4,151
Transfers	619	38.8%	975	61.2%	1,594
Continuing	4,508	29.3%	10,870	70.7%	15,378
Undergraduate Total	6,345	30.0%	14,778	70.0%	21,123

The total number of FG incoming freshmen decreased by 3% ($n = 41$) from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021. The FG transfer student population increased by 3% ($n = 20$) and the continuing FG student population increased by 6% ($n = 250$), resulting in the total FG student undergraduate population increasing by 4% ($n = 229$) from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021.

An opportunity for tailored support of FG students arose in 2016 when VCU developed a corporate partnership with the Altria Group, Inc., a Fortune 200 company in Richmond, Virginia. The partnership created scholarships for FG students majoring in engineering and business fields

who faced financial barriers (D. Rankin, personal communication, July 19, 2021). The Altria Scholars Program aims to help FG students persist and graduate on time with reduced debt by extending progress coaching and tools for success coupled with intensive support (You First, 2021d). After the Altria Scholars Program was established, VCU realized several campus offices were offering fragmented services for FG students, independent of each other. To pull all these services under one comprehensive unit, You First was established in 2017 under the Summer Studies and Special Programs unit within the Division of Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success (SEMSS), to provide academic and social resources for FG students (D. Rankin, personal communication, July 19, 2021). You First is managed by the Student Engagement and Summer Studies administrator, whose responsibilities are to support all programs under the Summer Studies and Special Programs unit. This administrator shares an assistant with the TRIO program and occasionally employs a graduate student worker (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021).

You First Services and Programs

You First “is here to help you [FG students] get connected to other first-generation students, as well as the academic and social resources you need to help you achieve your goals” (VCU, 2021b, para. 1). You First hosts a variety of services and resources for FG students. Additionally, it connects FG students to other VCU programs and resources, such as VCU's TRIO Program, a federally funded program that supports low-income students, FG students, and students with disabilities. The TRIO program gives eligible students assistance with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), tutoring, advising, peer mentoring, and career counseling using a hands-on approach (VCU, 2021b).

The VCU Summer Scholars program, one of You First's programs, gives FG students a head start on their freshman year. The program enrolls participants in core curriculum coursework that counts toward their degrees while they live in the freshman residence halls and build relationships with each other and peer mentors. The program also introduces participants to the surrounding community by offering outings, including whitewater rafting, museum tours, and community service events (Summer Scholars, 2021). The Altria Scholars Program, mentioned previously, annually offers FG students enrolled in business and engineering majors intensive support to complete their degrees with reduced debt (VCU, 2021d).

The You First student organization, You First at VCU, gives FG students a platform through which to exercise their voices by sharing stories with each other, engaging with faculty and staff, hosting events, and providing resources to members. One resource that the student organization offers is assistance with registration to the annual Alliance for the Low-Income and First-Generation Narrative (ALIGN), which provides a forum for FG students to work together with faculty and staff to create applicable programming at their institutions (Alliance for the Low-Income & First-Generation Narrative, n.d.). The conference encourages FG students to exchange ideas, build relationships, and make impactful work toward improving their institutions' policies, programs, and experiences.

You First Mentors is a program that matches first-year FG students and sometimes second-year FG students with a mentor (VCU, 2021e). Mentees and mentors fill out questionnaires that facilitate matching based on characteristics, such as personality, interests, goals, identities, and languages. Mentors are sophomore, junior, or senior FG students who complete six weeks of training in the spring semester and an advanced peer mentoring course in the fall semester structured as a service-learning, counseling-styled practicum (E. Bambacus,

personal communication, June 22, 2021). New mentors must provide mentoring to mentees for 17 hours per semester, which averages to a little over one hour per week (E. Bambacus, personal communication, September 20, 2021). Returning mentors provide mentoring for 14 hours per week as part of the requirements of the stipend they receive (E. Bambacus, personal communication, September 20, 2021).

You First also engages FG students through various communications and events. You First conducts information sessions and events for FG students' parents and families, such as VCU Preview Days and Family Orientation, to provide additional support mechanisms (VCU, 2021b). You First communicates with students via a listserv by sending biweekly email newsletters and has recurring monthly events tailored to essential topics, such as academics, careers, financial matters, FG identity, and life skills (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021).

You First Partnerships

Recently, You First added training during new VCU faculty orientation focused on supporting FG students. Faculty members also receive information at departments' advisor meetings to help them support FG students (The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute et al., 2019). Furthermore, You First ensures that faculty know about ways to support FG students through mechanisms like holding weekly office hours and using online resources, such as Canvas, VCU's Learning Management System (VCU, 2021a). You First's website includes the names and contacts of self-identified FG VCU faculty and staff for FG students to reach out to for support (VCU, 2021c) and they include FG faculty and staff in communications, such as the newsletter, and at events (E. Bambacus, personal communication, September 20, 2021). You

First has appointed a faculty fellow, a FG VCU faculty member, to assist in expanding faculty support and education (E. Bambacus, personal communication, September 20, 2021).

You First's programs and services routinely operate in partnership with VCU's Academic Advising office, which assigns advisors to students to assist with choosing classes and staying on track with their plans of study. You First notifies the Academic Advising office of FG events to pass along to FG advisees and indicates the mentor or mentee status of FG students in the advising system. You First refers students to VCU's Campus Learning Center (CLC) for learning skills and strategies to succeed and tutoring support via peer-assisted study sessions and study groups. In addition, the CLC conducts targeted workshops and coaching for FG students participating in the Summer Scholars program (You First, 2021a; E. Bambacus, personal communication, September 20, 2021). Other mechanisms of support You First may connect FG students to are the Writing Center, where students receive assistance in developing writing assignments through one-on-one appointments and peer support groups; Student Financial Services, where students receive guidance on available financial aid and personalized counseling on managing debt, financial wellness, and budgeting; and Career Services, where students receive assistance with resume development, interviewing and networking, and career planning. These programs are under the SEMSS umbrella (VCU, 2021a).

You First's programs and services speak to its commitment to providing a supportive environment for FG students at VCU. In 2019, You First's collected efforts to offer support services to FG students earned VCU the designation of a First-Gen Forward Institution by NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education's (NASPA) Center for First-generation Student Success; You First is one of 80 inaugural institutions honored with this

designation for their commitment to FG student success (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021).

Request for Assistance

In recognizing the need for continued support for FG students, the You First and Student Engagement and Summer Studies administrator submitted a formal RFA to VCU's School of Education's Doctor of Education program's Capstone project process. As reported in this request, although You First and the FG student population at VCU continue to grow, engagement from FG students remains a challenge.

Minimal Engagement

With over 6,000 FG students at VCU, You First seeks to understand why engagement with FG students is minimal (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021). Although You First does not have a clear definition of engagement or a metric by which to measure the success of its services, it gave evidence to support its dissatisfaction with FG student engagement. When You First began working with the Capstone team in Fall 2020, the You First at VCU student organization had 359 members, which is only 5% of the total FG population of 6,116 students (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021). Additionally, just over 1,000 FG students have signed up for the You First listserv, with a 50% open rate of the biweekly newsletters and a 3% click-through rate of links included in the newsletters (Office of Summer Studies and Special Programs, 2021).

Event Attendance and Service Utilization

The gap between expectations for engagement and student involvement with You First and the large, growing FG population manifests in additional ways, such as with the You First Mentorship program and You First events. In general, students volunteer for leadership positions

at lower rates than they volunteer overall (Astin, 1984). You First is no exception to this trend of smaller numbers of student volunteers for leadership positions (Office of Summer Studies and Special Programs, 2021). Currently, only around 50 peer mentors serve approximately 200 first-year FG students. You First's concern with its mentoring program "is that, like overall engagement with You First, the mentors also have difficulty engaging the mentees" (Office of Summer Studies and Special Programs, 2021, para. 2).

Similarly, You First staff expressed concern that FG student participation was low at the 37 events offered during the 2020-2021 academic year. Even with increased marketing, more relevant topics, speakers who identify as FG students, and an entirely online format, the overall attendance represented 4% ($n = 316$) of the total FG student population (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021). It is unknown if the overall attendance at these events was a repeat or unique attendance.

Increased Belonging for Increased Retention

Many of the current You First programs were developed from FG students advocating for their needs. The FG students who utilize the provided resources report feeling more connected to VCU (Office of Summer Studies and Special Programs, 2021). A sense of belonging or feeling connected is known to improve retention rates of FG students (Pratt et al., 2019). Thousands more FG students at VCU could benefit from this connection via You First programming (Office of Summer Studies and Special Programs, 2021).

You First seeks to improve the retention rates of FG students at VCU by providing a sense of belonging to the FG student population. The current retention rates of FG students are lower than the multi-generation students, also identified as continuing-generation (CG) students, and the overall university retention rates (K. Smith, personal communication, July 9, 2021).

Table 2 shows the current retention rates for the populations mentioned above at VCU. FG students tend to feel less of a sense of belonging, which increases attrition rates (Pratt et al., 2019).

Table 2

Percentage of First-Year Students Retained by Cohort

First-Year Cohort Group Retained	2017	2018	2019	2020
First-Generation	81.4	79.8	80.2	78.8
Multi-Generation/Continuing-Generation	86.3	84.7	84.6	86.4
University Overall	84.7	83.1	83.2	83.9

Capstone Team’s Response to Request for Assistance

Problem and Context Analysis

To address the issues presented by You First, the team identified an actionable problem of practice by utilizing Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice (ISDiP) strategies (Perry et al., 2020). These strategies focus on issues perceived not only by leadership, but also by the institution and stakeholders as continuous and notable (Perry et al., 2020). The team utilized improvement science tools, such as the Five Whys protocol and Conceptual Framework for Narrowing Problems of Practice (also known as the Funnel), to look at the problem from a user-centered and systems-level perspective, assess possible root causes, and ensure that the improvement efforts align to the central challenge or problem (Perry et al., 2020; Serrat, 2017). Additionally, tools like the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework require examining different elements of an organization, such as the environment, resources,

stakeholders, culture, structures, and systems, to determine how they align with the theory of change or actionable problem of practice (Public Education Leadership Project, 2021).

In conjunction with these efforts, secondary data sources provided by You First were analyzed to develop a theory of change. Documentation supplied by You First included lists of services provided to FG students; listserv subscriptions; student organization participation; and attendance numbers for You First speaker events, Summer Scholars, and the You First Mentorship program. Additionally, previous evaluations of the Summer Scholars program and You First were considered when developing our problem of practice. Utilizing these tools and the data provided allowed the team to delve deeper into the challenge of low attendance rates. This contextual analysis allowed us to create the following student-centered theory of change: If You First identifies student perceptions of their first-generation identities, defines student engagement, increases awareness of You First, and determines the needs of FG students at VCU, then it will improve the academic outcomes and student experiences of FG students. This theory of change guided the team's literature review and the development of research questions.

Chapter Summary

Higher education is a significant experience that can be daunting for FG students as they are often the first in their families to attend college. Universities have developed support programs to help FG students navigate the college experience, and VCU is no exception. You First at VCU offers many support services, yet it identified three areas for improvement: minimal engagement with FG students, low event and service utilization rates, and the desire to increase FG student retention rates. To address the issues presented by You First, the team analyzed the problem and its unique context before turning its attention to a review of the literature to deepen

understanding and help determine how it would address the problem and identify potential solutions.

Chapter II: Literature Review

To help support You First in its challenge of engaging FG students, the Capstone team sought to understand better who these students are, what attributes lead them to succeed, and what challenges they face. Through a scholarly literature review, the team identified how FG students think about their identities as students, the factors that influence their persistence in higher education, and institutional support services and programming specifically designed to support FG students. The literature explores the definition of FG students, the challenges they may face, and how their identities shape their educational experiences. Furthermore, the literature examines persistence among FG students related to a sense of belonging and engagement and the institutional support services recommended for FG students that lead them to success.

Demographics

FG students differ collectively from CG students (who have at least one parent who has earned a college degree). First, FG students are, on average, slightly older than CG students. Thirty-four percent of FG students are aged 30 years or older, compared to only 17% of CG students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). This age difference may explain why FG students are more likely to have dependents (60% vs. 45%) and less likely than CG students to attend college full-time (40% vs. 48%; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). Students with dependents may need to work at least part-time, thus making it harder to attend school full-time.

Second, FG students choose different colleges than CG students. While less than a quarter (24%) of CG students attend less-selective colleges, over half (54%) of FG students attend less-selective colleges (Fry, 2021). FG students comprise over 60% of students at

two-year colleges (i.e., public, private nonprofit, private for-profit) and private, for-profit four-year colleges (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019). In contrast, they represent less than half of students at public and private nonprofit four-year colleges (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019). Due to attending less selective colleges than their CG peers, FG students may find fewer opportunities related to networks, internships, and the ability to do research than their CG peers, which may affect the options students find when they graduate.

Third, FG students and CG students come from families that vary by income and wealth, leading to significant consequences for many FG students. The median family income (\$41,000) of FG students is less than half the median income (\$90,000) of CG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019). This income disparity means that it is more difficult for parents of FG students (as opposed to CG students) to set aside money for their children's college education (Hillman et al., 2015). Consequently, FG students are more likely than their CG peers to take out loans, and loans of more significant amounts, to cover tuition and other educational expenses (Furquim et al., 2017). While CG students may feel the stress of paying for college, FG students are more likely than CG students (54% vs. 45%) to leave higher education without a college degree because they cannot afford tuition (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). For the FG students who earn postsecondary degrees, 66% will have incurred debt for their higher education, compared to 56% of CG students (Fry, 2021).

Fourth, Black and Latinx students are more likely to be FG students than they are to be CG students. Historically, race-based factors and policies have actively prohibited, then discouraged, the success of students of color in higher education. For example, as late as 1950, budgets for public education for Black students in Mississippi were about a quarter of the

budgets allocated for White students, which made it easier for White students to apply to and enter into college (Herbold, 1995). The impact of these race-based policies can be seen today in the educational outcomes of Black and Latinx students, who have among the lowest college graduation rates of all racial/ethnic groups (Shapiro et al., 2017). As a result, Black and Latinx students comprise 41% of all FG students, but only 20% of all CG students (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). In contrast, White students comprise 70% of all CG students, but only 49% of all FG students (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). White students are more likely to be CG than FG, while Black and Latinx students are more likely to be FG than CG.

In summary, FG students tend to be older, more likely to have dependents, and less likely to attend college full-time than their CG peers. Furthermore, they are more likely to enroll in two-year and for-profit, four-year colleges, choose less-selective colleges, and have lower levels of both income and wealth than CG students. Finally, nearly half of all FG students are Black or Latinx. While these demographics do not describe all FG students, collectively, FG students have life experiences and circumstances that may create barriers and challenges that CG students do not confront as frequently in their pursuit of higher education.

Strengths of FG Students

Often, discussions about FG students examine the barriers and challenges they face in higher education. While it is critical to understand these challenges, it is also crucial to highlight the assets that FG students bring to their college campuses. While FG students exhibit many strengths, the literature highlights their determination to push through barriers, a high level of motivation, and the ability to adapt and build the necessary skills to succeed.

Perseverance, resilience, grit, self-efficacy are elements necessary to accomplish one's goals, and are cited in the scholarly literature as qualities that FG students identify as essential to

their success. House et al. (2020) found that FG students relied upon their resilience to overcome the challenges of tremendous financial stress and more work hours than CG students. Similarly, Havlik et al. (2020) found that FG students summoned their perseverance and resilience to manage challenges, while Evans et al. (2020) concluded that self-efficacy was a critical factor in FG student success. Another asset of FG students featured in scholarly research is a high level of motivation.

Motivating Factors

In one study, FG students described themselves as highly self-motivated and believed this quality was essential to their success (Evans et al., 2020). While FG students may have many different motivators for graduating from college, two prominent themes emerged in the literature. The first was family. For many FG students, motivation may mean being a role model for younger siblings (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020). Family can be such a powerful motivating force that, for some FG students, it is the most significant motivation for persistence (Havlik et al., 2020). O'Neal et al. (2016) found that some FG students want to unburden loved ones of lifelong struggles and honor their families' sacrifices by supporting their families. They believed it was worth fighting through challenges if a college degree could help them provide a better life for their loved ones.

For some FG students, family as a motivating factor connects to a second motivating factor - pride. Evans et al. (2020) found that being the first in one's family to accomplish a goal like graduating from college may engender high levels of pressure and foster a deep sense of pride as one does what no one else in the family has done before. For some FG students, their motivation may stem from a desire to prove that they (and others like them) can succeed in environments where others have underestimated (House et al., 2020) or discriminated against

them (Havlik et al., 2020). Pride in one's identity – be it race, socioeconomic class, or FG status – can serve as a powerful motivator (Havlik et al., 2020; O'Neal et al., 2016). It appears that this pride can give meaning to struggle and give FG students the energy and drive to fight through the challenges they face.

Overcoming Obstacles

Finally, FG students are often aware of the various barriers (i.e., social, economic, cultural) that confront them, but these challenges have taught them to be self-sufficient and develop the skills they need to succeed (Evans et al., 2020). For example, in one study, FG students reported that learning how to seek out and build necessary relationships, particularly with their instructors (Havlik et al., 2020), was essential to their college success. While limited financial resources can cause stress for students, one FG student revealed how having limited financial resources taught her how to navigate and manage her finances more carefully (O'Neal et al., 2016). Finally, FG student participants in a study by Evans et al. (2020) observed that they felt their success depended on their self-sufficiency abilities and held themselves accountable for their actions. Furthermore, they expressed that balancing family, community, work, and school responsibilities were critical to their success (Evans et al., 2020).

Understanding the assets and skills that FG students bring to their college campuses may help universities provide services and programming that will leverage FG students' strengths and help connect FG students directly to long-term successes. The literature revealed that FG students are persistent, resilient, determined, and demonstrate the grit to push through their challenges collectively. Additionally, they are highly motivated to make their families proud, make life easier, and honor their families for all they have sacrificed. Pride rooted in identity (i.e., race, socioeconomic status, FG status) is also a powerful motivator. Many FG students are

proud to be the first in their families to earn college degrees, but they're also eager to prove what they are capable of, particularly to individuals who have doubted FG students' abilities. Finally, FG students come with many skills and develop new ones to succeed in higher education. In short, FG students have the persistence, motivation, and ability to develop the skills needed to overcome their obstacles.

Challenges Faced by FG Students

College can present challenges and obstacles for any student. However, the struggles may be directly related to their FG status for some students. This section examines external and internal barriers that may confront FG students. External challenges include financial concerns, lack of necessary campus information, and campus culture, while internal challenges include a feeling of otherness, imposter syndrome, and not feeling academically prepared.

One prominent theme in the literature is that FG students struggle with financial concerns, which manifest in several ways. For many FG students, wondering how they will afford tuition is a continual source of stress (Evans et al., 2020). This question can feel even more critical for undocumented FG students, who are ineligible for federal and state aid and many private scholarships (O'Neal et al., 2016). For other FG students, the process of applying for financial assistance can create high levels of stress (Evans et al., 2020). Applying for financial aid can involve many steps, and many institutions have financial aid forms that students must complete, in addition to the FAFSA. Finally, many FG students must work one or more jobs to meet all their obligations, including paying for school (O'Neal et al., 2016).

Another theme is that FG students must cope with the lack of necessary information to navigate the college experience. Some FG students have lamented that they could not get the critical information they needed about choosing classes, particularly those classes required for

their study concentration (Evans et al., 2020). O'Neal et al. (2016) found that FG students felt frustrated when they could not get knowledgeable or consistent answers to their questions. FG students getting inconsistent or incomplete information can have significant implications, especially if the information is related to loans or other financial aid (Gibbons et al., 2019). While CG students may face inconsistent or incomplete information in their college experiences, one study found that, compared to FG students, CG students were more comfortable interacting with professors (Hutchison, 2017). Having at least one parent who has graduated from college may equip CG students with social capital, a term that refers to the network of relationships that helps individuals secure the resources they need (Pascarella et al., 2004). Social capital may help CG students interact with professors and thus seek out and receive more accurate and complete information than their FG peers.

Finally, an external struggle faced by FG students is the campus culture or climate that FG students endure. In one study, the FG student participants expressed that, before they even arrived at college, they knew that others had low expectations of their academic abilities (Means & Pyne, 2017). Once they arrived at college, other FG students found that they were negatively stereotyped by their peers and/or instructors (Gibbons et al., 2019). Finally, other FG students have noted that their identities, related to race or FG status, were not welcomed (Means & Pyne, 2017) or invalidated their experiences (Havlik et al., 2020).

External struggles may contribute to internal battles. For example, some FG students may experience a feeling of 'otherness' because of their race, FG status, and/or family's socioeconomic status (Havlik et al., 2020). Peers and instructors can exacerbate this feeling of otherness through stereotypes, low expectations, and/or invalidation of FG students. A sense of otherness may lead to an 'outsider' status and, as a result, FG students may feel that they cannot

participate in the same activities as their CG peers (Gibbons et al., 2019). A feeling of distrust of others may be particularly salient for FG students who are undocumented (O'Neal et al., 2016).

Another internal struggle that many FG students face is imposter syndrome - the feeling that acceptance into a group (e.g., a school, team, place of employment) is an error (Demetriou et al., 2017). This feeling that one does not belong can stem from internalized messages received before FG students step onto their college campuses (Means & Pyne, 2017). FG students who experience imposter syndrome question their competencies or abilities to succeed academically, particularly when compared to their peers, and fear that others will soon realize they do not belong on campus. Feeling academically unprepared is not uncommon for FG students. Many FG students recognize that they have had limited access to rigorous college preparatory curriculum (Means & Pyne, 2017) and may wonder how they can compete with their CG student peers who have had access to better educational resources. FG students may also feel disadvantaged academically because they lack parents who know how to succeed in college (Havlik et al., 2020).

While CG students may also experience imposter syndrome or feel anxiety about paying for tuition, the literature indicates that FG students are more likely to face the above mentioned external and internal challenges. In some cases, the challenges result from others' responses to the students' FG status or their race. It is particularly salient that students of color are more likely to be FG students than CG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019). Some students must face the pressure of being the first in their families to attend or graduate from college, while also coping with racial bias and microaggressions on campus.

FG Student Identity

Because FG students face many internal and external barriers that make their college experiences much more challenging than their peers; institutions often attempt to make the FG student experience more manageable by creating institutional programming centered around the FG identity. However, research suggests that the FG student term itself may be problematic because it combines a large, diverse group under a single term (Bettencourt et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Many scholars feel that the term discredits other identity associations, such as race and social class, but it could be used as an organizational identity in higher education (Bettencourt et al., 2020).

In a study of FG students by Bettencourt et al. (2020), many participants were unaware that they had FG student status until they were informed by the institution, sometimes in multiple instances. One participant in the study struggled to understand why the FG student identity mattered, while others only found meaning in the FG student identity when they could relate the identity to their struggles or college experiences that differed from CG students (Bettencourt et al., 2020). FG students often find themselves reminded of their unique FG identity and use the FG student term to convey these differences to other students (Bettencourt et al., 2020; Orbe, 2008). Further, the disadvantages they repeatedly face make them aware of the significance of their FG student identity (Havlik et al., 2020). The FG student status is also a reminder that their experiences are outside the norm, resulting in a feeling of otherness (Havlik et al., 2020). Some FG students found that the FG student status was embarrassing, and they tried to hide the identity from other students, as they worried that others would think their parents did not value education (Orbe, 2008).

Research has suggested that institutional efforts to create a meaningful social identity from FG student status and support programs for FG students, like those programs focused on race or gender, have been ill-conceived and ineffective (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Instead, universities should create programs that focus on students' multiple identities and specific support needs rather than grouping all FG students into one identity (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) stressed the importance of considering how other social identities, such as race, gender, and social class, shape the FG student experience. The term FG student fails to highlight the complexity of FG student lives.

FG Identity and Intersectionality

Much of the scholarly research on the FG student experience has neglected how other dimensions of their identities could significantly impact their experiences (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Similarly, most of the scholarly research on FG students has focused on the experiences of White FG students, whereas most FG students tend to be students of color (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). The research that has focused on the intersectionality of FG student status and other social identities has highlighted the wide variations in FG student experiences, many of which can be related to racial or cultural differences (Cho et al., 2008; Kim & Sax, 2009; Lundberg et al., 2007).

The theory of intersectionality was first addressed in Crenshaw's (1991) work on the Critical Race Feminist Theory, which addressed how the systems of patriarchy and racism hinder opportunities for Black women. Scholars have continued research in intersectionality, and there are "at least 14 categories, or lines of difference, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, national belonging, religion, language, phenotype, and able-bodiedness" (Lutz, 2002, as cited by Núñez, 2014, p. 85). Intersectionality also looks at how institutional and societal

power dynamics marginalize specific populations as well as explains how to challenge and stop this marginalization (Núñez, 2014). American higher education was created by and for elite, White, heteronormative males, and higher education perpetuates these values (DiAngelo, 2006; Karabel, 2014). As many FG students have identities separate from the predominant and historical population, their experiences in higher education are shaped by feelings of marginality and alienation, which the blanket term ‘FG student’ fails to address fully (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

FG Identity and Microaggressions

For FG students, navigating the higher education system presents daily obstacles that can create an unwelcoming and sometimes hostile environment (Gray et al., 2017). Interactions with CG students can reinforce feelings of ‘otherness’ for FG students, but also “subtle racism and classism...expressed through microaggressions that reflect the active manifestation of oppressive worldviews that create, foster, and enforce marginalization” (Sue, 2010, as cited by Gray et al., 2017, p. 1229). Microaggressions can present themselves in various ways, ranging from subtle snubs disguised as compliments to outright insults like racial slurs (Gray et al., 2017).

In Bettencourt et al.'s (2020) study, some FG participants identified situations where CG students negatively perceived their FG student status. For example, one participant discussed FAFSA when a CG student overheard her conversation and made a snide remark about financial aid based on negative perceptions of FG, low-income students (Bettencourt et al., 2020). In another study done by Gray et al. (2017), a FG student participant recounted telling her class about not having running water growing up and seeing the looks of judgment from her peers. Other study participants discussed more outright microaggressions, some possibly fueled by their racial and cultural identities. One participant shared being called a “Rosa Parks” by inebriated

White male students on a college bus, while another recalled having her lips made fun of by White peers (Gray et al., 2017). These interactions with peers can cause FG students to fear disclosing their FG student identity due to the psychological impacts of microaggressions and stereotype threats. Stereotype threat can be defined as an identity contingency where someone's racial, cultural, or social identity is related to a negative stereotype and can affect how others see and treat that person (Steele, 2010). Both microaggressions and stereotype threats have lasting effects that can be incredibly difficult to overcome and may negatively impact how individuals function and see themselves in society (Gray et al., 2017; Steele, 2010).

Although many of the microaggressions encountered were through peer interactions, some students experienced microaggressions from university staff. One FG student identified a situation where her program of study assumed that she had limitless resources to pursue opportunities, such as study abroad trips. Still, the reality is that many FG students miss out on academic opportunities due to their FG student status (Bettencourt et al., 2020). Other FG students reported being invalidated by professors because of their upbringings in poor neighborhoods or being told they were not trying hard enough because they could not afford certain academic experiences (Gray et al., 2017). Constant reminders that they were missing out on opportunities that their CG student peers were not, adds another layer of isolation for FG students (Bettencourt et al., 2020).

To cope with the frequent microaggressions presented by both FG and intersectional identities, FG students have developed strategies, such as dodging, code-switching, and building peer support networks (Gray et al., 2017). Dodging an issue, or using discretion, involves FG students choosing to avoid certain situations that would require disclosing information about their stigmatized identity (Gray et al., 2017). Code-switching is a term used by FG students who

are also students of color that involves changing language/dialect, behaviors, and/or mannerisms to adapt to different racial or social class contexts (Gray et al., 2017). Finally, FG students also speak about building peer relationships to provide support and act as a defensive mechanism to cope with microaggressions (Gray et al., 2017). These coping techniques allow FG students to navigate the challenging landscape of higher education institutions.

Persistence of FG Students

Research has shown that FG students are more likely to withdraw from college (i.e., not persisting after the second year) than CG students (Ishitani, 2006). In the literature, persistence has various definitions often characterized by institution type (e.g., 2-year, 4-year), degree type (e.g., certificate, associate, bachelor's degree), and length of continuous enrollment into the fall term of the second year (Haydarov et al., 2013; Zeiser et al., 2015).

Persistence is more challenging for FG students as they face the barriers previously mentioned, such as financial concerns, lack of knowledge about the college experience, imposter syndrome, and lack of academic preparedness. NASPA's Center for First-generation Student Success reported that 82% of FG students persisted at their institutions after the first year compared to 86% of CG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019a). Initially, these persistence rates appear favorable, indicating a minimal difference between FG students and CG students in persistence after the first year. However, only 20% of FG students complete a bachelor's degree within six years, compared to 49% of CG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019a). In addition, 5% of FG students departed after the first year without enrolling again compared to 1% of CG students (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019a).

The extended time to degree completion or departure experienced by FG students is often due to financial burdens, academic competence, and lack of belonging (Pratt et al., 2019). FG students must often rely on outside employment to reduce the financial burden created by seeking a postsecondary education which may make it harder to participate in school activities and engage with their peers (Pratt et al., 2019). In contrast, Martinez et al. (2012) found that working while in school increased resiliency in FG students and prompted engagement with their peers and the university community, further increasing the likelihood of persistence. Persistence can be influenced, positively or negatively, by the financial and related work status of FG students.

Perceptions held by FG students also factor into persistence. Bassett (2021) found that students who began college with negative perceptions about seeking support were less likely to communicate their challenges, failing to utilize institutional support structures. Means and Pyne (2017) concluded that institutional support programs focused on academic and social engagement helped retain FG students. Many FG students lack confidence in their academic abilities due to their experiences in high school and carry this perception into college (Pratt et al., 2019). FG students' perceptions of academic competence often dissuade them from entering rigorous fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Dika & D'Amico, 2016).

Belonging

One of the most critical factors influencing FG student persistence is a sense of belonging in or connection to higher education. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a sense of community as relational between group members, a “feeling that members matter to one another and to the

group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). From an educational perspective, Strayhorn (2018) stated:

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (p. 4).

Strayhorn (2018) further explained that a sense of belonging is relevant to everyone, framing it as "a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior" (p. 28). Students of different genders, races/ethnicities, low socioeconomic status, or FG status are at risk for marginalization and isolation and often place great significance on a sense of belonging. Hausmann et al. (2007) found that a sense of belonging associated with peer, parental, and faculty support was positively related to persistence. FG students who experience a sense of belonging during college have the need, motivation, and influenced behavior to persist to completion.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE; Indiana University School of Education Center for Postsecondary Research, 2020) surveyed 121,955 first-year students and 149,466 seniors from 521 IHEs granting bachelor's degrees to determine their sense of belonging at their institution. Of those individuals surveyed, 40.7% ($n = 72,706$) of FG students felt a sense of belonging at their institutions. CG students felt a slightly greater sense of belonging at 41.4% ($n = 109,108$). The NSSE survey further explored the sense of belonging and engagement by asking students to indicate the quality of their interactions with the students, advisors, faculty, student services staff (e.g., careers services, activities, housing), and administrative offices (e.g., registrar, financial aid) at their institutions. More FG students agreed (44.3%, $n = 50,608$) than

disagreed (33.9%, $n = 14,440$) that they felt valued by their institutions based on the quality of their interactions. More FG students also agreed (44.3%, $n = 49,977$) that they felt part of the community at their institutions based on the quality of their interactions than disagreed (34.5%, $n = 15,194$). The NSSE survey found that students who engaged in supportive relationships benefited from collaborative learning and increased support-seeking behaviors.

The NSSE survey also explored students' sense of belonging and engagement by asking the students' perceptions of how much their institutions provided supportive environments. Institutions can support students through support services (e.g., tutoring, writing), encouraging interactions with students from different backgrounds, and opportunities for social activities. Additionally, institutions can support overall health and well-being; help students manage personal responsibilities (e.g., work, family); and address social, political, or economic issues. FG students agreed (36.9%, $n = 56,044$) more than disagreed (24.9%, $n = 16,606$) that they felt valued by their institutions based on the supportive environments provided. FG students also agreed (36.9%, $n = 55,014$) more than disagreed (25.7%, $n = 17,743$) that they felt like a part of the community at their institutions based on these supportive environments. The NSSE survey found that institutions that provide support and engagement are further committed to student success, increasing student satisfaction, and performance. A positive effect on persistence was found with 42.3% ($n = 163,801$) of the first-year students indicating an intent to return. Overall, the survey found that a sense of belonging was positively correlated with engagement and student development, thus positively impacting persistence and retention rates (Indiana University School of Education Center for Postsecondary Research, 2020).

Engagement

Past research has consistently demonstrated the influence of student engagement on learning (Kahu, 2013) and its impact on indicators of student success, such as higher grades, persistence, and retention (Axelson & Flick, 2011). These indicators of success positively affect individual students and the reputations of their respective institutions of higher education (Trowler, 2010). Engagement appears in descriptions of student success, often described “as academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational objectives” (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 10). However, the definition of engagement varies within the literature; thus, measuring engagement depends on an institution's adopted definition and subsequent metrics. Furthermore, the exact relationship between engagement and success encompasses multiple variables, such as belonging, behavior, and institutional support.

Defining Engagement

Although researchers generally agree that student engagement is essential to academic success, the literature lacks a universal definition, model, or concept of the term (Axelson & Flick, 2011; Trowler, 2010; Zhoc et al., 2019). Modern research on engagement credits Astin’s 1980s research on student involvement suggesting “that a student’s involvement, (the quantity and quality of physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience), produces learning in direct proportion to that involvement” (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 40). Definitions such as Astin’s support a cognitive concept (students expend mental effort to learn). In contrast, other definitions demonstrate a behavioral concept (students ask questions or seek tutoring) or an affective concept (students invest emotionally to work harder and be prepared) (Mandernach, 2015).

Although some student engagement models may include all three dimensions (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, affective), Axelson and Flick (2011) asserted that more needs to be known about how these three dimensions interact. Understanding the relationships among these dimensions will give a more complete and richer view of student engagement (Kahu, 2013). Examining the relationships among these dimensions is critical because a student may experience high engagement in one dimension but low or limited levels in the other dimensions (Trowler, 2010).

Behavioral Engagement

Of these three dimensions of student engagement, the behavioral dimension appears to be the most prominent in the literature (Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010; Zhoc et al., 2019). Quaye et al. (2020) stated that “student engagement is simply characterized as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (p. 3). Kuh et al. (2007) found that student engagement represented students' time spent in educationally purposeful activities. As behaviors are observable, behavioral engagement is the easiest to operationalize and measure of the three engagement dimensions and, thus, is the most commonly assessed (Nguyen et al., 2016). In the context of higher education, one can observe how often students go to tutoring and how that behavior connects to measurable outcomes, such as higher grades, improved GPAs, or better graduation rates. In contrast, measuring internal processes, such as exerted mental effort or motivation, can be challenging.

Measuring Engagement

Axelson and Flick (2011) suggested that instruments such as the NSSE survey should serve as indicators of institutional excellence to provide a mechanism for comparison and to identify areas for improvement. The NSSE survey uses behavior to measure student engagement

through observable activities, such as faculty-student interactions, participation in learning experiences, and study time per week. Engagement on the part of the institution is measured in institutional features, such as a supportive learning environment (Axelson & Flick, 2011).

However, although it is easier to observe and measure behaviors, some researchers question whether the behavioral dimension is a better indicator of engagement than the cognitive or affective dimensions. Focusing solely on a student's behavior does not provide any information about the student's thoughts or feelings (Axelson & Flick, 2011), thus offering a limited view of the student's experience (Kahu, 2013). Axelson and Flick (2011) caution that one should not consider behavioral engagement as evidence of or proxy for emotional or cognitive engagement. One can exhibit a behavior without being mentally or emotionally involved, demonstrating only compliance, not genuine engagement (Trowler, 2010). For this reason, IHEs should consider models of engagement that examine cognitive and emotional dimensions of engagement, in addition to observable behaviors.

Critical Factors for Engaging with FG Students

Engagement with higher education requires a successful transition from high school to the college experience (Trowler & Trowler, 2010). Due to the various challenges facing FG students, it may be harder for them to smoothly adjust to higher education than their CG peers. In terms of academic success, the literature suggests that FG students are less engaged due to insufficient knowledge of the college experience; lack of parental guidance or knowledge navigating college; and racial, ethnic, or cultural differences that tend to create barriers to belonging in the college environment (Kuh et al., 2007). However, it appears that two critical elements will help IHEs and FG students successfully engage: relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, and understanding how the FG identity may affect individual student engagement.

First, positive relationships are paramount. IHEs need to strategically support FG students in developing relationships with other students, faculty, and staff (Fletcher, 2021). While FG students can build relationships without intervention from IHEs, they may need assistance in connecting with other FG students or faculty and staff who understand the needs, challenges, and lived experiences of FG students. Investing in relationship-building can create a virtuous cycle. Good relationships can lead to higher levels of engagement, which leads to better grades (Kahu, 2013), which continues to foster strong relationships between students, faculty, and staff.

A second element that may promote FG engagement is understanding how the FG identity may affect individual student engagement. For staff seeking program improvement, asking more refined questions would be more productive than blaming students or the university for lack of engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Related to this notion, Kahu (2013) offered a model that encouraged IHEs to consider the socio-cultural factors influencing engagement. For example, FG students may find it hard to seek help from instructors if, in the past, FG students have felt that instructors have low expectations of them due to their race or income (Kahu, 2013).

Considering these factors, Quaye et al. (2020) suggested that institutions become 'student ready,' focusing on how prepared they are to engage students successfully. While IHEs work to determine the best way to define and measure student engagement, it is critical to recognize that FG students are not a homogenous population and will not benefit from a 'one size fits all' system of support.

Institutional Support Services

Shumaker and Wood (2016) identified two perspectives regarding how to facilitate student success. One school of thought places the responsibility on the student, while the other places it on the institution. Although both are important, institutions are responsible for being

proactive and responsive to their students' needs. This section reviews support services needed and offered to FG students and literature on institutional responsibility, including service utilization, institutional culture, and faculty relationships.

Tailored Support

FG students commonly face internal and external challenges that impact their postsecondary experiences. IHEs should provide support that responds to these challenges. Beyond the support services typically offered across IHEs to all students, including tutoring, writing centers, and academic advising, IHEs often provide tailored support for FG students, whether through the federal TRIO Program or institutionally sponsored FG students support services and learning communities.

FG Student Support Services

The TRIO Program is a federal program that provides grants to IHEs and other organizations that serve youth (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2021). These grants allow organizations to provide targeted support to students who are FG, low-income, or disabled (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2021). As a result of federal legislation, TRIO developed various programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, and Upward Bound Math/Science Program (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2011).

One of the most extensive programs, Student Support Services (SSS), was developed to increase retention and graduation rates, increase transfer rates from two- to four-year institutions, and foster an institutional culture that supports disabled, low-income, and/or FG students (Chaney et al., 1998). SSS programming includes academic tutoring, course selection support,

assistance navigating financial aid and other funding sources, guidance on applying to graduate or professional programs, and support for students at two-year institutions applying for admission to four-year institutions (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2020). Additionally, SSS may provide career planning support, cultural events, mentoring, and assistance with securing temporary housing (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2020).

Outside of TRIO, institutions may provide FG student-specific support services and programming or establish centers that serve as hubs for FG students. Kezar and Kitchen (2020) explained that most IHEs implement programming and interventions that focus on one issue, such as developing a first-year experience course. However, institutions should employ a comprehensive approach that focuses on connecting various existing services and interventions inside and outside the classroom (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). The authors credit Tinto (2012) as an advocate for integrated and interconnected programming that best supports students. Whether through the TRIO program, a singular program, or comprehensive programming, IHEs often provide support specific to FG students to address their challenges and help them achieve their academic goals.

Learning Communities

Some IHEs provide learning communities specific to FG students. There are four common learning communities: curricular, residential, classroom, and student type (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). Curriculum learning communities involve enrolling students in two or more classes together, which provides opportunities for community building and engagement in shared activities (Brower & Dettinger, 1998). In addition to the curriculum component, some IHEs incorporate a residential learning community where students live together in on-campus housing, building interactions outside the classroom. Classroom learning communities center around

shared learning and group experiences within a classroom. Some learning communities center around student types, such as underrepresented students, FG students, students with disabilities, or students with the same interests (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999).

Zhao and Kuh (2004) used a random sample of over 80,000 students who completed the NSSE in 2002. The study found that, across the board, participation in learning communities positively impacted academic performance, educational engagement, attendance, and satisfaction with students' experiences in IHEs (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). In addition, in a qualitative study of seven cohorts of FG students and low-income student learning communities, Jehangir (2009) showed that the students in the learning communities were better able to find their voices and gain clearer senses of self. Their experiences were normalized and validated through interactions with FG students' peers.

Understanding Institutional Service Utilization

Traditionally, IHE practitioners have believed that FG students do not utilize services as much as their CG peers (Barry et al., 2009), which compounds the challenges that FG students already face. Wright (2019) used the NSSE to study the connections between student learning outcomes and supportive campus environments for 5,643 students (1,847 of which were FG students) at a large public research institution in the Southeastern U.S. and found that FG students engaged with only half as many variables that contributed to positive learning outcomes as their CG peers. The differences between the groups were particularly evident among variables related to academic preparedness, the quality of student relationships with administrative personnel, and institutional support provided to students for non-academic responsibilities, including work and family (Wright, 2019).

Although FG students would likely benefit from engaging with their institutions in those areas, a lack of social capital may influence their lack of service utilization (Wright, 2019). Since their parents have not completed college degrees, FG students often have less social capital than their CG peers (Pascarella et al., 2004). This differential social capital creates a disadvantage for FG students by limiting their understanding of higher education culture and access to information on the most beneficial educational decisions, including college selection, academic planning, and engagement in co-curricular activities (Pascarella et al., 2004). This limited understanding of how to navigate higher education can impact their ability and familiarity with using services provided by the institution. Similarly, Bassett (2021) reinforced that FG students used institutional resources at lower rates than their CG peers, and their structural and cultural factors impacted their lower service utilization rates.

Although it has historically been perceived that FG students do not seek services as much as their CG peers, opposing views exist in the literature regarding this subject. Through a study of 1,398 students at a large, suburban community college with a high transfer rate, Shumaker and Wood (2016) determined that generational status did not result in a difference in service utilization. However, differences were found in the accessibility and usefulness of services between FG and CG students. This finding is important because, unlike other studies, it found that although FG and CG students use the services provided at their institution at the same rate, FG students "experience disparate benefits from the services" (Shumaker & Wood, 2016, p. 16). Notably, this points to the need to analyze the role and responsibility of institutions, institutional culture, and the level of support provided to FG students as these factors impact service utilization.

Institutional Culture

Part of increasing service utilization and embracing the institutional responsibility for FG students involves acknowledging and addressing institutional cultures that are not conducive to FG students' success. Institutional culture refers to "the meaning made from dominant practices, beliefs, and ways of being at the university" (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014, p. 13). Through interviews with six students at a large, public Midwestern IHE, DeRosa and Dolby (2014) found that the institution's culture, which includes connections to administrators and peers, impacts students' perceptions and experiences. The students voiced a lack of connection to administrators, perceptions of limited understanding of their financial needs, and insensitivity toward their diverse student experiences (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). Additionally, peer relationships influenced their perceptions of institutional culture. The students reported feeling that their peers did not understand the financial strain they experienced as FG students and even felt excluded due to their social class. These devaluing experiences impact students, and IHEs are responsible for creating more welcoming and inclusive spaces (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014). One key component of addressing institutional responsibility rests among IHE faculty and staff.

FG Students' Relationships with Faculty and Staff

The literature emphasizes that FG students' relationships with faculty and staff are vital to success at IHEs (Bassett, 2021; Means & Pyne, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2017). In particular, the faculty and student relationship is crucial to student support-seeking and positive outcomes. Effective faculty relationships must be close, significant, and trusting (Bassett, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2017), which helps FG students feel more comfortable seeking support (Schwartz et al., 2017). The level of engagement from the instructor impacts students as well. Instructors must be proactive in reaching out to students and expressing an interest in making connections (Means &

Pyne, 2017). Further, if faculty are unavailable, students may feel that they will be a burden if asking for assistance. This burden is of particular concern for FG students, who often question whether they belong and/or may struggle to reach out for help (Means & Pyne, 2017).

For faculty and staff to connect with FG students, they should openly discuss previous help- and support-seeking experiences and demystify the process of asking for help (Bassett, 2021). When guiding FG students, IHE representatives should give specific and non-judgmental advice (Bassett, 2021). This type of advice is particularly important given the lack of understanding and empathy FG students felt from faculty, which impacted their views of institutional culture (DeRosa & Dolby, 2014).

More positive, meaningful interactions with faculty and staff will positively impact students' experiences and perceptions of institutional culture. Furthermore, students who experience productive encounters with faculty and staff successfully attain their goals and earn their degrees (Bassett, 2021). Ultimately, the depth of the relationship and nature of the interactions with faculty and staff impact students' experiences and outcomes.

Chapter Summary

FG students experience many challenges in IHEs, including financial limitations and lack of social capital (Evans et al., 2020). Amidst those challenges, they demonstrate perseverance, resilience, (Havlik et al., 2020), and self-efficacy (Evans et al., 2020). Although FG students share similarities, their experiences vary based on racial or cultural differences (Cho et al., 2008; Kim & Sax, 2009; Lundberg et al., 2007). Given their experiences and challenges, FG students are more likely to withdraw and not persist (Ishitani, 2006), which is a significant concern. Persistence is impacted by a student's sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007) and level of engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2011). In response to FG students' needs, IHEs often offer a

variety of support services; however, students' service utilization varies by institution (Barry et al., 2009; Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Furthermore, students' relationships with faculty and staff are consistently shown to be vital to their success in IHEs (Bassett, 2021; Means & Pyne, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2017).

Chapter III: Methodology

As seen in the literature, FG students possess unique strengths that can be leveraged for college success and to confront obstacles that may hinder their academic performances and experiences. Many FG students persevere and complete degrees when faced with these obstacles, but not all FG students reach this goal. Due to the additional challenges faced by FG students, universities need to continually engage with and provide support to these students.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

While You First has made great strides to engage with FG students, it is not satisfied with the level of engagement. To help them improve along these dimensions, this study aimed to identify the current perceptions and needs of FG students at VCU and analyze the engagement of VCU FG students with You First. Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data and evidence-based practices identified in the research literature, the Capstone team generated the following theory of change: If You First identifies the students' perceptions of their FG identities, defines student engagement, increases awareness of You First, and determines the needs of the FG students at VCU, then it will improve the academic outcomes and experience of VCU FG students.

To help You First operationalize this theory of change, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are VCU FG students' perceptions of their FG identity?
2. What are VCU FG students' perceptions of being identified as FG by You First?
3. What are the needs (e.g., financial, technological, basic necessities, advising, mental health) of FG students at VCU?

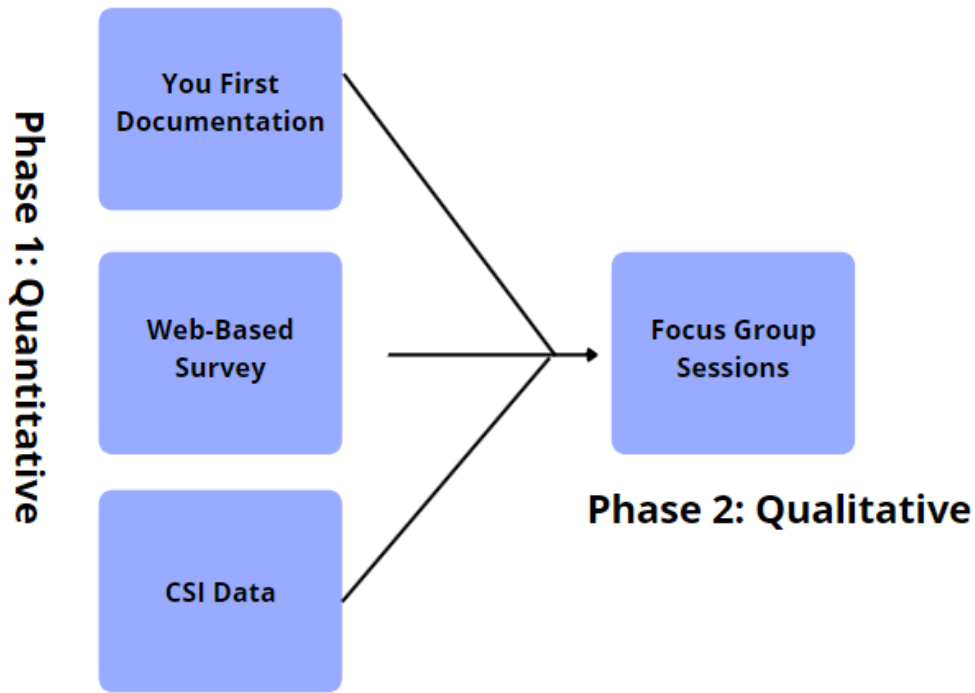
4. What factors (e.g., affordability, employment responsibilities, lack of time, event location, opportunity to meet new people) impact VCU FG students' engagement with You First?

Research Design

The team used a mixed methods approach to answer the study's research questions. A mixed methods research approach collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data; it allows researchers to make discoveries and corroborate, expand, and clarify responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene et al., 1989). This approach allows for one research method to aid in developing the subsequent methods of research used in the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene et al., 1989).

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design

The research team used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design and a combination of the follow-up explanations and participant selection models to collect and analyze the data in two phases. The explanatory sequential mixed methods design involves collecting and analyzing data in two phases: quantitative data followed by qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). The follow-up explanation model allows researchers to use the qualitative data to explain or expand on the findings in the quantitative phase (Phase 1). In contrast, the participation selection model allows for the intentional selection of participants for the second phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). Figure 1 shows the structure of the study's research design. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The second phase involved collecting and analyzing the qualitative data intended to be used to expand upon and further explain the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Figure 1*You First Capstone Research Design Process*

In Phase 1, the quantitative data were collected and analyzed from You First documentation, the College Student Inventory (CSI) instrument, and a web-based survey distributed to all FG students at VCU. The web-based survey aimed to collect information about FG students' perceptions of being FG, their awareness of You First, their participation with VCU and You First, and their needs from You First.

In Phase 2, the team collected qualitative data via focus groups with FG students at VCU. These data were then analyzed to explain further the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The team conducted focus group sessions with VCU FG students who indicated an interest in participating while completing the web-based survey and volunteers who were participating in You First programs or UNIV 191 FG student courses. The focus group sessions

aimed to gain a deeper understanding of FG students’ awareness of and participation with You First and to record suggestions for programmatic changes within You First that may better serve the FG student population at VCU.

Rationale for the Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included gathering You First documentation from the Capstone partner, obtaining CSI data from VCU’s Student Success unit, administering a web-based survey, and conducting focus group sessions (see Table 3).

Table 3

Research Questions Mapped to Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Methods of Data Collection			
	Web-based Survey	CSI Data	Focus Group Sessions	You First Documents
What are VCU FG students’ perceptions of their first-generation identity?	X		X	
What are VCU FG students’ perceptions of being identified as first-generation by You First?	X		X	
What are the needs (e.g., financial, technological, basic necessities, advising, mental health) of FG students at VCU?	X	X	X	
What factors (e.g., affordability, employment responsibilities, lack of time, location of event, opportunity to meet new people) impact VCU FG students’ engagement with You First?	X	X	X	X

The survey allowed the team to gather current information not found in other sources. Furthermore, the team used the survey to collect the information necessary to answer questions that could solve problems or guide policy change (Dillman et al., 2014). The team developed and distributed a web-based survey as the primary data collection tool.

The survey collected a sample of characteristics, behaviors, and thoughts of those students within the FG student population who did participate (Ponto, 2015). The responses from the web-based survey informed the pool of potential focus group participants and guided more in-depth questioning for the focus group sessions in Phase 2.

Focus groups were chosen as the qualitative research method because they allow for the collection of more in-depth information in an environment that allows the participants to interact as they formulate responses (Rosenthal, 2016). The ability for FG students to interact with each other and discuss their similar experiences concerning the focus group questions allowed the team to further examine perceptions around FG identity and uncover the needs of this student population. The team used the focus group sessions to seek clarification on unclear survey responses from the participants. Thus, the information collected in Phase 2 allowed the team to gain an expanded understanding of the FG students' identity perceptions, needs, and engagement. Phase 2 also enabled the participants' voices to be heard and allowed them to share further insights about their personal experiences.

Quantitative Phase

You First Documentation

To inform our understanding of FG student engagement with You First, the team investigated current and past engagement practices to identify trends or shifts in student participation. The You First data provided information on changes in FG student enrollment,

event participation trends, utilization of the listserv, shifts in student organization membership, and participation in other programs within the unit. The documentation provided contained the following data sets:

- VCU FG Student Enrollment Data from Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021
- You First Event Offerings from Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Fall 2021
- You First Event Participation from Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Fall 2021
- You First Listserv Subscribership from Fall 2020 and Fall 2021
- You First Student Organization Membership from Fall 2020 and Fall 2021
- You First Mentorship Program Participation from Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021
- VCU Summer Scholars Participation from Summer 2019, Summer 2020, and Summer 2021

Data Analysis

Using Google Sheets, the team compared each year of data provided for the You First student organization, the You First Mentorship program, and Summer Scholars to identify trends and calculate the percentage of growth or decline. Event offerings for Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Fall 2021 were analyzed to determine the type of event, the topic covered, the number of registrants based on modality, and attendance rates. The event topics were quantified to compare participation across the academic years, identify the most attended events, and calculate the attendance rate percentages by topic.

CSI Data

The CSI is an assessment tool designed to gauge new, incoming first-year undergraduate students' motivations, needs, and predispositions (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2021). The various surveys within the CSI contribute to identifying at-risk students and serve to predict necessary

interventions related to retention and completion. VCU's Student Success unit, part of the Division of Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success (SEMSS), manages the institution's use of the CSI's Form B. Completing the CSI's Form B (Appendix A) at VCU is a precursor for new students to meet with their academic advisor for the first time to register for classes (Drumm, 2021). VCU uploads data from the CSI outcome reports to Navigate, a student success management system that connects advisors, faculty, and administrators for more coordinated support of students (EAB, 2021). Academic advisors then use the CSI information to assess the possibility of risks and provide interventions designed to keep students persisting to the following term.

Form B is the most widely used instrument within the inventory. Participating institutions distribute Form B to all new incoming students before the fall semester begins. The survey collects student background information, including name, gender, age, and high school grade point average. Additionally, it gathers family background information (i.e., race/ethnicity, parents/guardians' educational level) and college experience information (i.e., decision to enroll, degree sought, plans to work). The 17 independent scales measure (Appendix B) the following motivational factors:

- Academic (i.e., study habits, reading interests, verbal and writing confidence, math and science confidence, commitment to college, interaction with previous teachers),
- General Coping (i.e., social engagement, family support, capacity for tolerance, career plans, financial security),
- Request for Support Services (i.e., academic assistance, personal counseling, social engagement, career guidance, financial guidance), and
- Supplementary Scales (i.e., internal validity).

To help explain students' motivation factors, the independent scales are combined into four summary observation scales using stanine values: Dropout Proneness, Predicted Academic Difficulty, Educational Stress, and Receptivity to Institutional Help. The CSI also provides recommendations based on the student's needs and desires, which are intended to be used by advisors to discuss action items or next steps with the student.

Data Analysis

The CSI data files received by the team included an institutional category field labeled 'FGEN' added by VCU's Student Success unit to indicate whether the student was identified as a FG student or CG student. The FGEN field is populated using the FG status entered on the student's application for admission to VCU, which matches the definition of a FG student in the Higher Education Act of 1965. This study compared the institution's FGEN category to the student's response that indicated his/her parent's highest level of education on the CSI for consistency. If the student's CSI response did not match the institution's FGEN category for the student, then the team removed the record. In the CSI data sets, the team removed 262 responses for 2019, 199 for 2020, and 174 for 2021.

Using Google Sheets, the team divided the CSI data sets for 2019, 2020, and 2021 into separate tabs by FG (FGEN) or CG (CGEN) status. For each status, the team calculated an average of each summary observation scale category using the percentile score and the average of each independent scale using the percentile score. The analysis then compared the FG and CG data across all three years to determine the differences in mean responses based on the 17 independent and four summary observation scales within the instrument that measured motivation.

Web-based Survey

The Capstone team developed a web-based survey covering seven areas (Appendix C) administered through Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) hosted at VCU. REDCap is a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies (Harris et al., 2019). The survey assessed how VCU FG students feel about being identified as FG, determined their specific needs, and identified factors that may influence their engagement with You First.

The survey contained a combination of quantitative (i.e., yes/no, multiple-choice, scaled response) and qualitative (i.e., open-ended) questions divided into six sections: Connections to Campus, Feelings of Support, Being FG, Participation at VCU, You First, and Needs and Support. All response options to the survey questions were presented in ascending order to avoid inflated data that may happen when using descending-ordered scales (Chyung et al., 2018). Additionally, the survey included 13 demographic questions and then questions about identity, needs, and engagement. It used branching and skip logic to direct the participants to the appropriate questions based on their previous answers. After developing the survey, the research team sought feedback from volunteers from a lay audience, colleagues, and experts for construct and content validity.

Participants

The participants were recruited from the enrolled undergraduate student population at VCU who indicated their FG status on their application for admission. As of Fall 2021, 6,345 undergraduate FG students were enrolled at VCU (K. Smith, personal communication, January 13, 2022). You First identified 5,204 FG students who could receive the survey. A total of 335

surveys were submitted, but 60 were incomplete, resulting in 275 completed surveys. The survey response rate was 6.44%, with a 90% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

Most survey respondents (92%) graduated from a high school in Virginia. Nearly one-third of the participants (27%) indicated that their family's total annual household income was under \$30,000. Fewer than one-tenth (9%) of the participants indicated that their family's total annual household income was \$100,000 or higher. Over three-quarters (77%) of the participants indicated that they had not attended another college or university before coming to VCU. The participants were enrolled in a total of 62 different programs of study, with biology (9%), psychology (9%), pre-nursing (6%), and health physical education & exercise science (5%) being the highest responses. Table 4 shows the demographic information for the survey participants.

Data Collection and Procedures

An invitation to the survey was emailed to 5,204 FG students identified by You First with support from the Enrollment Research & Evaluation Office of the SEMSS division (Appendix D). The email provided a link to the survey and information about the study. Before entering the survey, informed consent was collected from the participants (Appendix E). At the end of the survey, the participants indicated whether they wanted to attend focus group sessions.

The survey remained open for three weeks, with one follow-up email sent after the second week. The participants who completed the survey were directed to the Participation Raffle Google Form to complete an entry into a raffle to win one of four \$25 Visa gift cards (see Appendix F). After the survey closed, the team exported the data as two files: comma-delimited

Table 4*Survey Participant Demographic Information*

Variable	<i>n</i> = 275 (%)
Gender	
Cisgender Female	207 (75%)
Cisgender Male	40 (15%)
Non-binary	13 (5%)
Prefer not to Disclose	3 (1%)
Gender Non-conforming	2 (1%)
Genderqueer	2 (1%)
Not Listed	2 (1%)
Exploring	1 (<1%)
Questioning	1 (<1%)
Transgender Man	1 (<1%)
Transgender Woman	0 (0%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Black or African American	73 (26%)
White	69 (25%)
Latinx or Hispanic	55 (20%)
Asian	45 (16%)
Two or More Races	19 (7%)
Middle Eastern or Northern African	7 (3%)
Prefer not to Disclose	3 (1%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2 (1%)
Other/Not Listed	2 (1%)
Native American or Alaskan Native	0 (0%)
Student Status	
Continuing-Fall 2021	178 (65%)
New-Fall 2021	96 (35%)
Undergraduate Classification	
Junior (Completed 54-84 credit hours)	94 (34%)
Freshman (Completed 0 to 23 credit hours)	64 (23%)
Senior (Completed 85 credit hours or more)	61 (22%)
Sophomore (Completed 24-53 credit hours)	56 (21%)
Enrollment Status	
Enrolled for 12 or More Credit Hours for Fall 2021	255 (92%)
Enrolled for Fewer than 12 Credits Hours for Fall 2021	18 (7%)
Not Currently Enrolled for the Fall 2021 semester	2 (1%)

(.csv) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistics data (.sav). The team removed incomplete survey submissions before using the data in Google Sheets and SPSS.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed for insights, trends, characteristics, and variance within the sample population in SPSS using descriptive statistics (frequency and cross-tabulation analysis). The team chose to collapse their 5-point response categories within Likert-type scales into trichotomous categories to clarify further the intent of the respondents (Grimbeek et al., 2005; Jeong & Lee, 2016; Lionello, 2021), which is more applicable when presenting the findings and recommendations for process improvement to You First. These Likert-type scales were not presented to respondents as holding any numerical value and do not present a higher or lower degree of choice. For example, one of the Likert scale's 5-point response categories (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree or disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) was collapsed into a 3-point scale. The scale used in the analysis was created by collapsing responses for categories 1 and 2 into one category and 4 and 5 into one category, resulting in a scale of 1 = *disagree*, 2 = *neutral*, and 3 = *agree*. All Likert-type scales were collapsed using this process.

The survey also contained open-ended questions for analysis. Dedoose (Version 9.0.18) was used to code and analyze the responses to the open-ended questions. The team used *a priori* code to identify themes within the data. A priori code is a thematic code developed before examining the data collected using the research and survey questions as a guide (Harding, 2015). The team created a code dictionary (Appendix G) to define the themes and related codes. To refine the code dictionary, each team member independently coded the responses to the same question using chunking, a method for gathering sufficient context of the meaning of participant

responses (Dedoose, 2017). The team reviewed the consistency of the coding and revised the code dictionary as necessary.

Using this coding procedure, the team divided the questions between member pairs and used blind coding to prevent unintentional influence. The pairs arrived at a consensus on the final coding of each question. The team discussed all coded excerpts and refined codes as necessary. By uniformly utilizing blind coding and chunking, the team increased the reliability and validity of the analysis.

Data Integration

Given this study's explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the team used data from the quantitative phase to guide the selection of participants and the development of questions for the qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). To this end, the quantitative data were collected and analyzed in Phase 1 to plan the collection and analysis of the qualitative data in Phase 2. Using this approach, the quantitative data analysis informed the qualitative data collection and allowed for data integration (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The team conducted a preliminary review of the survey results, particularly the open-ended questions, to help guide the creation of the focus group questions. The team independently reviewed the survey results and identified the themes that warranted additional exploration in the focus group sessions.

Qualitative Phase

Participants

The focus group session participants were recruited from the FG student population who, at the time of the study, were participating in You First programs or UNIV 191 FG student courses and those who volunteered to participate from the FG student survey population. The focus group participants who did not complete the web-based survey answered a questionnaire

that collected their informed consent and the following demographic information: new, continuing, or transfer student status; undergraduate classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), current enrollment status (i.e., full-time, part-time), race/ethnicity, gender, and age.

Most focus group participants (90%) graduated from a high school in Virginia. One-third of the participants (30%) indicated that their family's total annual household income was under \$30,000. Over three-quarters (80%) of the participants indicated that they had not attended another college or university before coming to VCU. The participants were enrolled in six different programs of study, with political science (30%) and chemistry (30%) having the highest percentages of participants. Table 5 shows the demographic information for the focus group participants.

Data Collection and Procedures

To identify differences across the FG student population, the team recruited two types of participants and divided the focus group sessions accordingly: Familiar with You First and Not Familiar with You First. The Familiar with You First group consisted of students who answered “extremely familiar,” “moderately familiar,” and “somewhat familiar” when answering the survey question “How familiar are you with VCU’s You First?” The Not Familiar with You First group consisted of students who answered “not at all familiar” or “slightly familiar” to the same survey question.

Potential focus group participants received an email (Appendix H) with information on the study and a link to the focus group consent form (Appendix I), providing the ability to sign up for a focus group session based on the categories noted above. The participants who had not completed the survey were prompted to provide demographic information via a REDCap survey

Table 5*Focus Group Participants' Demographic Information*

Variable	<i>n</i> = 10 (%)
Gender	
Cisgender Female	7 (70%)
Cisgender Male	2 (20%)
Non-binary	1 (10%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	3 (30%)
White	3 (30%)
Black or African American	2 (20%)
Latinx or Hispanic	1 (10%)
Two or More Races	1 (10%)
Student Status	
Continuing-Fall 2021	7 (70%)
New-Fall 2021	3 (30%)
Undergraduate Classification	
Senior (Completed 85 Credit Hours or More)	4 (40%)
Junior (Completed 54-84 Credit Hours)	4 (40%)
Sophomore (Completed 24-53 Credit Hours)	1 (10%)
Freshman (Completed 0 to 23 Credit Hours)	1 (10%)
Enrollment Status	
Enrolled for 12 or More Credit Hours for Fall 2021	10 (100%)

that mirrored the demographic section of the FG student survey (Appendix J). Given the COVID-19 precautions at the time of the study, the team gave the participants the option to participate in a Zoom video conferencing session or in-person focus group. The team members informed the participants that the focus group sessions would be recorded. After the participants submitted their focus group consent forms, they received confirmation emails from our research team verifying their participation and providing the location information for the sessions.

The team developed a focus group protocol (Appendix K) with a script and questions for the participants to ensure consistency across the focus groups. The protocol included an introduction of the focus group facilitator(s) and an overview of the focus group process. Additionally, the protocol reinforced the participants' ability to stop at any time and a reminder of the written consent to participate.

The team used a semi-structured interview approach to allow for a conversational dialogue between the team and the participants. The semi-structured interview questions consisted of topics related to the participants' responses from the FG student survey and the study's research questions. The first topic, College Experience, focused on how being a FG student impacted their experiences at VCU and how their experiences differed from CG students. The second topic, Support, focused on the support offered by You First. The third topic, Awareness, focused on how You First can reach FG students with their programming. The final topic, Connections, focused on FG students' relationships with faculty members. Each topic in the protocol included a transition with an introduction to the next set of questions. Additionally, the team members used follow-up questions and prompts to solicit more information for specific questions.

The team offered seven focus group sessions based on the number of survey respondents who indicated an interest in participating. The team scheduled focus group sessions over two weeks and collected data from 10 participants across all focus group sessions. Three participants were in the Not Familiar with You First group, and seven were in the Familiar with You First group.

Two offered sessions were not held due to a lack of interest in that particular offering. Two focus group sessions were conducted via Zoom and facilitated by one team member in each

session. One focus group session was conducted in person and facilitated by two team members. The remaining two focus group sessions became one-on-one interviews when only one student participated in each session. These one-on-one interviews were conducted via Zoom and facilitated by one team member.

The focus group sessions conducted via Zoom lasted between 55 minutes and 58 minutes. The in-person focus group session lasted 53 minutes. The one-on-one interviews lasted between 22 and 56 minutes, with a mean time of 39 minutes. The team took precautions to ensure the fidelity of the study. First, team members conducted focus groups with participants unknown to team members. Additionally, at least two team members coded each focus group transcript. Next, if possible, transcripts were de-identified before coding. Finally, survey responses were de-identified by default due to anonymous submissions.

The individuals who participated in the focus group sessions received a second raffle entry to win one of four \$25 Visa gift cards. After the data collection was complete, the team entered the list of participants' names from the survey and focus group sessions into the Wheel of Names (<https://wheelofnames.com/>) to select the four winners randomly. The winners were selected one at a time, removing each winning name before selecting subsequent winners. The winners received the gift cards via an email from one of the team members.

Data Analysis

The team conducted the focus group sessions via Zoom video conferencing and in-person and recorded all focus groups using Zoom's built-in recording capabilities, which provided session transcriptions. Dedoose (Version 9.0.18) was used to code and analyze the focus group transcripts. The team used the same coding process as described in Phase 1.

Using this coding procedure, the team divided the transcripts between pairs of team members and used blind coding to prevent unintentional influence. The pairs arrived at a consensus on the final coding of each transcript. Then, the team discussed all coded excerpts and refined the codes as necessary. By uniformly utilizing blind coding and chunking, the team increased the reliability and validity of the analysis.

Limitations and Biases

Several limitations should be considered regarding the outcomes of this study. First, the Capstone project is completed within an academic year. This program requirement limited the team's time to collect data, including administering the survey and conducting focus group sessions. Despite multiple attempts to encourage focus group participants, the team saw low focus group participation. With more time, the team might have been able to solicit more participation. However, this academic year also spanned another year of the COVID-19 pandemic, so higher education and its students continued to experience significant changes that could have influenced their capacity or willingness to take on additional tasks such as voluntary study participation.

Secondly, some study features include the potential for bias. Three team members had been FG students, and the fourth team member worked primarily with FG students. As a result, bias toward FG students and their responses (even if positive) may have skewed the data analysis. Additionally, the team acknowledges the potential for bias within the participant set. The focus groups consisted only of participants who consented to discuss their FG experience; thus, the team did not hear the experiences of students who did not wish to disclose their FG student identity.

A third limitation may have been using focus groups instead of one-on-one interviews. Focus groups were chosen over interviews due to the limited time constraint already identified. However, focus group participants may not feel comfortable sharing the same level of personal detail as they may in a one-on-one interview.

The last limitation concerns the limited scope of this organizational improvement effort, which included only the perceptions, needs, and experiences of FG students from VCU. While the experiences of VCU FG students may reflect those of FG students at other institutions, readers should not over-generalize and apply conclusions broadly.

Chapter Summary

Based on the Request for Assistance submitted by You First, minimal engagement from FG students with events and services presented a gap in meeting the needs of this student population. The study aimed to identify current perceptions and needs of FG students at VCU and analyze the engagement of VCU FG students with You First. Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the team collected quantitative and qualitative data from You First and FG students at VCU. Various methods were used to recruit FG students to participate in a web-based survey and focus group sessions. The team analyzed survey responses to guide more in-depth discussions during the focus group sessions, which served as a mechanism for the team to make discoveries, corroborate, expand, and clarify responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene et al., 1989). Participants discussed their shared experiences and provided information to further inform the team's analysis of FG student engagement with You First. Using the data gathered through these efforts we surfaced relevant findings to inform recommendations You First can use to address the engagement gap.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Research Findings

FG students at VCU provided key insights into the experiences of FG students at VCU and their engagement with You First. The quantitative phase of this study collected data from You First and data sets containing the results of the institution's administration of the CSI instrument. The team developed and deployed a web-based survey for VCU FG students consisting of quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions. The qualitative phase of this study collected data during the focus group sessions. The team analyzed all data sources following the sequential design steps of the study to make connections between themes and triangulate data. Rather than relying on quantitative or qualitative data alone, conducting both phases of research allowed the team to adequately describe the current perceptions and needs of FG students at VCU and analyze the engagement of VCU FG students with You First.

Throughout the study, the Capstone team received valuable data from You First. The data analysis from the study's quantitative and qualitative phases, coupled with the problem analysis and review of literature, provided informative findings to answer the research questions that guided this study.

1. What are VCU FG students' perceptions of their first-generation identity?
2. What are VCU FG students' perceptions of being identified as first-generation by You First?
3. What are the needs (e.g., financial, technological, basic necessities, advising, mental health) of FG students at VCU?
4. What factors (e.g., affordability, employment responsibilities, lack of time, event location, opportunity to meet new people) impact VCU FG student engagement with You First?

What are VCU FG Students' Perceptions of Their First-Generation Identity?

FG students' perceptions of their FG identity can be problematic if they discredit other identities such as race and socioeconomic status (Bettencourt et al., 2020). The team analyzed data from the survey and focus group sessions to determine how VCU FG students felt about their generational identity. Findings indicated that FG students at VCU want to be known for more than their generational status and that FG students positively view their FG identity.

Quantitative Findings - Survey Responses

The survey included six closed-ended questions related to FG students' feelings about being FG, the importance of the FG identity, and the effect of the FG identity on their experience at VCU. An analysis of these survey responses found differences among survey respondents associated with race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and student classification.

Race and Ethnicity

The first survey question related to FG identity asked students, "When I think about being a first-generation student, I generally have ____ feelings." Response options included "positive," "negative," "both positive and negative," and "neither positive nor negative." Nearly half of Latinx and Hispanic survey respondents (49%, $n = 24$) indicated "positive" feelings. In comparison, about one-third of Black or African American respondents (32%, $n = 20$) and White respondents (34%, $n = 22$), and just over a quarter of Asian respondents (26%, $n = 10$) have "positive" feelings about their FG identity. While Asian students were the least likely to have "positive" feelings about their FG identity, they were most likely (54%, $n = 21$) to have "both positive and negative" feelings. Forty-five percent of Black or African American students ($n = 28$), 40% of White students ($n = 26$), and 37% of Latinx survey respondents ($n = 18$) expressed these same mixed feelings. These findings suggest that race and ethnicity may connect to how

positively or negatively some students feel about their FG identity, indicating an intersection between race and ethnicity and the FG identity.

Socioeconomic Status

Although FG status is often associated with low-income status, the team found that FG students of all income levels are affected by their FG identity. A clear majority of survey respondents believe that their experience as a FG student differs from those of CG peers. While 74.5% ($n = 181$) of all survey respondents agreed with this sentiment, an even higher percentage (82.7%, $n = 24$) of students whose families earn between \$50,000 and \$74,999 believe their FG student identity is important. The team also found that students with annual family incomes between \$74,000 and \$99,999 are disproportionately more likely to believe their FG student identity is important. It appears that the FG identity matters, even to students whose families earn moderate levels of income.

Student Classification

As students move from their first to final year of college, they experience the FG identity differently. While half of the survey respondents (51.2%, $n = 125$) agreed that they often think about being FG students, only 41.9% ($n = 23$) of freshmen responded similarly. In contrast, juniors spend more time thinking about their FG identity than students of other classifications, with 58.9% ($n = 50$) of juniors who agreed that they spend time thinking about their FG identity. Just over half of sophomores (55.1% ($n = 27$)) and just under half of the seniors (45.4%, $n = 25$) agreed with this statement. Freshmen are the least likely to think about their FG identity, while juniors are most likely to think about this identity.

Additionally, the team found that student classification affected respondents' feelings about the FG identity. Although sophomores comprised just under 20% ($n = 48$) of survey

respondents, they accounted for almost a quarter (24.4%, $n = 26$) of all survey respondents who felt both positive and negative about being FG. Seniors are proportionately the most likely to have positive feelings about being FG. Forty-three percent ($n = 23$) of seniors felt positive about being FG, in contrast to 32% ($n = 17$) of freshmen, 23% ($n = 11$) of sophomores, and 39% ($n = 33$) of juniors. It seems that a significant portion of FG sophomores struggle with conflicting feelings about the FG identity; however, as they move into their final year of college, they feel mostly positive about the FG identity. In summary, survey respondents expressed different feelings about their FG identity depending on their student classification.

Qualitative Findings - Open-ended Survey Responses

The open-ended survey questions resulted in three primary findings. First, FG students at VCU face many challenges, including difficulty with social situations, support-seeking, and lack of social capital, which overlaps significantly with focus group findings discussed subsequently. Secondly, FG students want to be known for more than just their generational status. Lastly, FG students expressed an overwhelmingly positive view of their generational status.

FG Students Face Many Challenges

Within the open-ended survey questions, respondents described the many challenges they face as FG students. Four significant challenges were identified in this qualitative analysis: difficulty in social situations, support-seeking, lack of social capital, and financial challenges.

Difficulty in Social Situations. Students described challenges with getting to know others and in social situations. One respondent revealed, “I have social anxiety and it can be difficult for me to interact with others.” Similarly, another respondent explained:

I experience a lot of anxiety around talking to other students and faculty. Throwing people like me into icebreaker activities and "get to know you" social free-for-all with hundreds of people... can be more isolating than helpful.

Not all attributed the difficulty to anxiety. One student observed, "It's hard for me to come out because I don't know anyone; therefore, I don't like doing things by myself, and I'm really shy."

Support-Seeking. Many students shared uncertainty about navigating VCU and where to find support. One student described this uncertainty and its impact:

I don't know how to navigate anything. I wish there was a "first-generation student" college course that we could take and learn how to properly take care of ourselves and our futures. I know nothing about loans or finding housing; I don't know how to fill out financial aid forms. I have nobody to turn [to], to ask if I've forgotten anything, and I'm consistently existing in a cesspool of anxiety, feeling like I've done everything wrong, and it's going to come back to haunt me eventually. I don't know how to navigate any of this. I still don't have an academic advisor assigned to me, and appointments with the financial aid department are few and far between (you almost have to book like two months out). It's just such an isolating experience; it feels burdensome to talk to my parents about [it].

Another student echoed this and described it as feeling like they are "drifting along." This feeling persists for students beyond their freshman year, as this student shared: "Even though I am a junior, it still feels like I'm figuring out what to do in college. I'm still trying to explain to my family how college works, and I'm not so sure I even know."

Lack of Social Capital. A few students expressed a lack of social capital. One student observed, "It's hard being a part of an environment I was never taught about." Another student

identified the lack of social capital as most challenging in their freshman year: “Being a first-generation student was most important in my first year of college. Everyone I knew who had parents who had been to college sort of had explained to them some basic expectations.”

Financial Challenges. Several students identified financial challenges that make pursuing higher education more difficult. One student revealed, “I can't afford this school anymore, and at times I want to give up.” Another student added that “juggling everything can be tough at times. Especially trying to afford college and maintain grades.”

Beyond the FG Student Identity

When survey respondents were asked what they wanted You First to know about them, students expressed that they are more than just their generational status and the challenges they face. One student affirmed that “being first-generation is intersectional, and there are many factors that affect me as a student.” Other students echoed this sentiment when discussing different parts of their identities.

Many students noted their family and caregiving responsibilities. One student expressed that “I want [You First] to know that although I'm in college, I also have two babies.” In addition to being a parent, another student commented that they are the “sole provider for my family.” Similarly, a third student stated, “I am an older student and single parent, and I'm also a commuter student as I live in Charlottesville.”

Some students discussed their nationality, immigration status, and experience as students of color. One student remarked on the challenges of navigating college as an immigrant student:

I wish that they knew that I am an immigrant first-generation student who is paying her way through college on her own, with no help. I am not that well-versed in college, so I'm learning as I explore VCU and Richmond.

Students reiterated the need to be seen as their full selves when discussing the unique experience of people of color (POC). One student expressed the desire for You First to know about the experience of students of color: “Black first-gen and other POC first-gen students’ experiences are way different from others.”

Positive View of the FG Identity

When asked, “What does being a first-generation college student mean to you?” survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated a highly positive view of their FG identity. In coding open-ended survey responses, the team found five themes related to this positive view: pride, opportunity, the positive effect of higher education on the student’s family and others, validation of parents’ or family’s struggles or sacrifices, and a positive sense of self.

Pride. Many respondents explicitly expressed pride or honor when stating what their FG identity means to them: “It makes me so proud to be first-gen;” “I am honored to be the first.” Some students, like this student, implied these positive feelings: “It means so much to me being a first-generation college student.” For some respondents, their FG identity gives them pride in showing what they can accomplish. One student shared that their FG identity means “being able to demonstrate that I am capable of achieving my goals.” Students’ pride and a sense of accomplishment are often connected to barriers or setbacks, as demonstrated by this survey respondent: “I have successfully overcome obstacles in my past.” Students also emphasized the assets they possess to overcome challenges. One respondent asserted, “Rather than view my identity as a first-generation student as a burden, I utilize it as a strength to help me overcome issues I face.”

Opportunity. For several survey respondents, their FG identity represents opportunities to attend college, experience a different life than their parents had, have higher earning potential, or make their parents proud. Several responses echoed this student's gratitude for the chance to pursue higher education: "I'm grateful for the opportunity to attend college." Some respondents recognized that they experience a privilege that had not been available to their parents by attending college. One student commented, "Having the opportunity [to do] something my parents weren't able to do, I'm very lucky and thankful." While some respondents highlighted current opportunities, other students, such as this student, focused on the future: "I have invested the power within myself to create a better future for myself." For some respondents, being FG means financial stability or higher earning potential. One student remarked, "I will have the opportunity to make more money." Finally, many respondents, such as this respondent, look forward to making their parents proud and showing their gratitude: "Being a first-generation student means making my parents proud and hopefully, one day give back to them everything they have given me. My dream is to make them proud."

Positive Effect of FG Students' Higher Education on Others. According to survey responses, many students positively view their FG identity because they know their higher education will positively affect others. For this respondent, their higher education will give others hope: "It means being a trailblazer. Letting those behind me know that it is possible." Another respondent elaborated on what it means to be a role model: "I will set an example of excellence for those in my family who come after me." The positive effect of higher education for future generations was evident in responses such as this one: "It means starting something for

future generations of my family.” Finally, many respondents believe that earning a college degree will allow them to provide for their families. One student pronounced, “Graduating will be an awesome feeling because I’ll be able to get a good job and take care of the ones I love!” This student expressed enormous pride about her future graduation from college, but her response also focused on how her higher education will positively affect her family.

Validation of Parents’ or Family’s Struggles and Sacrifices. Several students indicated that their pride in being FG intertwines with their family’s pride. One student declared, “Graduating college will be one of the biggest successes in my family, and I am so excited to do it.” For another student, being the first in their family to earn a college degree will validate difficult choices their parents made: “[I am] earning a degree and doing so not only for myself but for my family. Mainly to prove my family’s sacrifice of leaving their family and immigrating to the US was worth it.” Many students want to ensure that their parents’ hardships are not in vain. One student commented, “It means that all of the struggles and sacrifices my parents endured were not for nothing. They worked hard to ensure I would have a better life than they did, so I wouldn’t have to struggle as they have.” These students’ views support research by Havlik et al. (2020) and O’Neal et al. (2016), who found that many FG students are motivated to unburden their families of lifelong struggles and honor their sacrifices for their children. One student did not mention their parents’ struggles or hardships, but connected their chance to experience higher education to their parents’ support: “I have made it farther than my parents, but they were the ones who helped me get here.”

Positive Sense of Self. Students overwhelmingly expressed that they are more than just the challenges they face and demonstrated a strong and positive sense of self. Many respondents expressed a strong desire to succeed, motivating them to work hard. As one respondent affirmed, “I wish you knew how determined I am to follow my dreams. I have the motivation, determination, and intellect to be really successful...” Some attribute that hard work to their hopes for the future. One student stated, “I hope to provide the best future for myself and my family.” Similarly, another student identified a “drive to go somewhere far in life.” Overall, the survey respondents discussed the intersectionality of their identities as critical information for You First to know about them. They also pointed to their desire for You First to know how proud they are of their identities and how determined they are to succeed.

Most survey respondents expressed a favorable view of their FG identity. When asked what their FG identity means to them, students wrote about pride, honor, accomplishment, gratitude, and a positive sense of self. Additionally, responses indicated opportunity, the positive effect of their higher education on others, particularly family members, and the chance for the student to validate their family's struggles with their success in college and beyond.

Qualitative Findings - Focus Groups

Focus group participants discussed the various challenges they face, similar to those who responded to the survey. The team's coding of participant responses uncovered three primary challenges: difficulties seeking support, lack of social capital, and financial challenges. These findings significantly overlap with survey responses, which further emphasize FG student perceptions of their identity and the prevalence of their challenges.

Support-Seeking

Participants expressed feeling lost and unsure of where to find support. One participant discussed challenges identifying resources earlier in their academic career:

I can say from personal experience it's not until now that I'm realizing that there's so many programs that I can go into through VCU... I was so lost. I didn't know anything. I just knew that I needed to apply, and then I got in, and I'm enrolled. That's all I knew.

Another participant explained how being a FG student impacted their knowledge of existing resources and even where resources were physically located on campus:

It impacts resources - you don't know where to go so you had to navigate that yourself... for example, with financial aid, I legit did not know where the office was. I went to one of those multiple times to find something that they wanted me to do. I couldn't even navigate it. It's just really difficult.

For one student, this challenge persists even as a junior:

It's hard because there's still a lot of things that I don't know right now. I'm a junior. I don't know what I need to graduate. I don't know how to even apply to grad school. I don't know what comes next. I don't know a lot of things.

Lack of Social Capital

The lack of social capital respondents described compounded the uncertainty of where and how to find support. A student explained, “Non first-gen students have more of an idea of what they're doing when it comes to using campus resources and how to interact with college-wide events.” Similarly, a focus group participant observed that CG students often have parents who can help them navigate higher education:

Because as a first-gen student, you don't have anywhere else to turn. If you're not a first-gen student, you probably have parents who went to college, have a white-collar job, maybe a middle-class job. You turn to them for their experience, their connections.

Because of this, some students navigate higher education on their own, as one focus group participant explained, "I had to do a lot of stuff myself, and I don't know a lot of the college lingo. I feel like I'm less prepared than people who aren't first-gen." The lack of social capital is difficult for students, as one respondent described: "It's hard when you don't have anybody that came before you to show you how to navigate different things."

Financial Challenges

Similar to survey responses, participants described the financial difficulties of pursuing higher education. One student revealed the financial strain of paying for college and the impact on food access:

One of the big financial problems I have is just eating, just having money for food because I'm sure other people are experiencing this as well, but you have to take on a lot of debt to go to school.

That participant went on to add: "I have to be frugal with my money because I don't want to add to more debt." Another student expanded on this by pointing out the wealth gap they have experienced compared to their CG peers:

I see that wealth gap...[CG students] have means of understanding how to apply for these scholarships and the grants, and their family already has a college fund set up, whereas my family did it within the past year and a half.

In summary, quantitative data indicated differences in student perceptions of their FG identity based on race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and student classification. Survey

respondents and focus group participants described many overlapping challenges, including difficulty with support-seeking, lack of social capital, and financial challenges. This finding aligns with work by Evans et al. (2020), who found that FG students often struggle with the stress of paying for college and applying for financial assistance, in addition to the challenges of getting the critical information they need to navigate higher education. Furthermore, students expressed wanting to be seen as more than just their generational status and emphasized family and caregiving responsibilities, nationality, immigration status, and their experiences as students of color. In essence, students want to be seen as their full selves. Lastly, students expressed an overwhelmingly positive view of their FG identity, including pride, opportunity, positive sense of self, the positive effect of higher education on others, and the chance to validate their family's struggles and sacrifices.

What are VCU FG Students' Perceptions of Being Identified as First-Generation by You First?

To make the FG student experience more manageable, institutions often provide programming centered around the FG identity. Research suggests that, due to these mechanisms of increased identification, FG students can be made to feel even more different than their peers (Bettencourt et al., 2020; Orbe, 2008). To understand how VCU FG students felt about being identified by You First, the team analyzed data from the survey and focus group sessions to determine whether students associated positive or negative feelings with the identification. Findings from the survey and focus groups revealed two themes: FG students are not aware enough of You First to have negative perceptions, and FG students want You First to identify and reach out to them.

Quantitative Findings - Survey Responses

The survey asked two questions to identify how respondents felt about being identified as FG by You First. The first question sought to understand the level of familiarity with You First. The second question asked respondents how they would prefer You First to communicate with them.

When asked about familiarity with You First and its services, most respondents answered that they are not familiar with the organization. Out of 238 responses to this question, 58.5% ($n = 140$) indicated that they were not familiar. Less than a quarter of respondents (22.7%, $n = 54$) indicated that they were familiar with You First. The remainder of respondents (18.5%, $n = 44$) indicated they were somewhat familiar with You First.

The team conducted a cross-tabulation analysis to find a connection between students' level of familiarity with You First and race and ethnicity, student classification, or socioeconomic status. White and Asian students were disproportionately less familiar with You First than students from other racial groups, with 64.1% of both Asian ($n = 25$) and White ($n = 41$) students indicating that they were not familiar, compared to 54.8% ($n = 34$) of Black or African students. In contrast, Black or African American students were disproportionately more likely to be familiar with You First, with 29% ($n = 18$) of Black or African American students indicating that they were familiar. Of Asian students, 17.9% ($n = 14$) were familiar, and 21.9% ($n = 23$) of White students were familiar with You First.

The team did not find any disproportionate frequencies concerning student classification and familiarity with You First but did find disproportionate frequencies concerning socioeconomic status. Although 58.8% of survey respondents indicated a lack of familiarity with You First, almost three-quarters (72.4%, $n = 21$) of students whose families earn an annual income between \$75,000 and \$99,999 indicated a lack of familiarity. This finding may suggest

that although FG students from low-income brackets learn about You First, perhaps more strategic outreach and promotion is needed for FG students of higher-income brackets.

Currently, You First asks FG students to contact them to be added to their listserv of You First members rather than identifying them when they start their freshman year (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021). You First chose this process to avoid potentially alienating FG students by identifying them as FG students (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021). When asked about their communication preferences, most FG students would prefer to be automatically added to the You First listserv. Out of the 235 respondents who answered this question, 59.6% ($n = 140$) would prefer to be automatically added to the You First listserv, 7.7% ($n = 18$) would prefer to contact You First to be added to the listserv, and 7.2% ($n = 17$) do not want to receive emails at all. The remainder of respondents (25.5%, $n = 60$) were unsure of their communication preferences at the time of the survey.

Qualitative Findings - Open-ended Survey Responses

The team analyzed data from the survey responses to further understand how VCU FG students felt about being identified by You First. The main theme that arose is the lack of awareness of institutional resources and You First. When survey respondents were asked what they wanted You First to know about them, they shared a lack of awareness of existing university resources. One student explained, “I’m proud to be first-generation, and I wish I knew what resources there were here at VCU for first-gen students.” A second student shared how overwhelming it is not to know where to obtain support: “I have been learning everything about college on my own, and sometimes it gets overwhelming not knowing where to look for assistance.”

Notably, similar to previously discussed survey findings, many respondents described a lack of awareness of You First and its programming. Numerous students articulated a desire to know more about You First, like this respondent who wanted to know "what the program offers and is about." Similarly, another student commented, "I don't know enough information and wish to get more." One student expressed the desire to have known about it earlier in her academic career: "I wish I knew what it was and was told about it sooner than today."

Qualitative Findings - Focus Groups

Like the open-ended survey responses described above, focus group participants wished they knew more about You First or had learned about it earlier in their college careers. Many focus group participants found out about You First in their junior or senior year and felt they missed an opportunity. One participant vocalized their dissatisfaction in not learning about You First until later:

It's hard, especially the first year. As you go on, it gets a little easier because you learn how to navigate everything yourself, and you find...the resources that you need in advisors and mentors, but the first year is very hard. I wish that somebody or this program [had given me] guidance...[It] would have been so much easier.

Another participant agreed with the desire to have known about You First earlier and further expressed that "the most important thing is when [You First staff] reach out, they should intercept [FG students], as soon as possible." Some FG students do not find out about You First until graduation, as one participant described when asked about the program: "I've heard about it. But I don't know a lot of details. I got a stole from them for graduation. They were like, you should get this. And I was like, okay."

Responses to the survey and focus group questions suggest there are no negative perceptions because most respondents were unaware of You First and its services. Additionally, responses about FG student identity from the previous section indicate that the FG students at VCU have highly positive perceptions of their FG student identity. This positive perception of their identity combined with a desire to have You First reach out would seem to negate the idea that You First identifying FG students would be negatively received.

What are the Needs of FG Students at VCU?

FG students are faced with many challenges and obstacles that create barriers to successful degree completion. Adapting to campus culture, a lack of college knowledge or information, financial issues, and a lack of belonging or feeling connected to campus are common barriers that FG students face, as documented throughout the literature (Evans et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). To understand the needs of FG students at VCU, the team analyzed data from the CSI, the web-based survey, and the focus group sessions to determine FG students' needs at VCU. Findings revealed multiple needs of FG students, many of which parallel the national literature and some of which are unique to VCU: communication, financial assistance, access to services, connections with other FG students, support past year one, accessible information, bridging the gap in family's understanding, desire for earlier interaction with institutional services, and relationships with faculty.

CSI Data

The data from three years of CSI responses demonstrates the need for FG student support, especially during the first year. VCU FG students consistently scored 22-25 points higher than CG students over all three years in the *Dropout Proneness* category, which measures an overall inclination towards dropping out before degree completion (Ruffalo Noel Levitz,

2021). Similarly, VCU FG students scored around ten points higher than CG students over all three years in the *Predicted Academic Difficulty* category, which measures who is most likely to have a low grade point average (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2021). Another notable difference between FG students and CG students is the category of *Financial Security*, which measures how a student feels about their financial situation (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2021). Lower scores indicate less financial stability, and VCU FG students consistently scored 21-22 points lower than their CG peers. Scores for VCU FG students and CG students in the *Educational Stress* category are closer, ranging from two to four points higher for FG students, meaning that FG students are slightly more likely to experience distress during their college years (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2021). These findings highlight an opportunity for You First to offer elevated support to FG students identified by the CSI as expressing need upon college entry.

Qualitative Findings - Open-ended Survey Responses

Survey respondents were asked to describe their needs and how You First could best support those needs. Responses to this question ranged from the desire for better communication from You First, financial aid information, more access to services and events, and connections to other FG students. Others expressed that they felt You First was doing a good job already.

Communication From You First

The most prevalent theme from the open-ended question centered on the need for communication from You First to FG students. Multiple respondents expressed that You First could better support them by “reaching out more to first-generation students by making their presence known” and “being more persistent in trying to reach other FG students.”

Respondents also identified methods of communication, such as email, to keep FG students apprised of current events and offerings from You First: “Keep sending emails about

opportunities to help first-generation students.” Another respondent requested that You First be “more descriptive in emails” about offerings. Some respondents even explicitly asked to be added to a mailing list for more information about resources.

Help with Financial Aid

The second most prevalent theme in responses was the need for help with financial aid and paying for college. Respondents identified five main areas where more support is needed: loans, scholarships, grants, help with finances, and help in navigating the financial aid process. One survey respondent noted the importance of financial guidance to her future: “I just need help with understanding loans...and how to make sure I'm not making financial decisions now that will negatively impact my future.” Another respondent indicated that the most challenging part of being a FG student is navigating financial aid: “I think I've struggled the most with financial aid. You First should hold workshops every year when FAFSA is available to help students and their families.”

Easier Access to Services and Events

Another area of need identified by survey respondents is the desire to offer specific events and services at different times and in other modalities. For example, one respondent commented that they are “an online student and would like to attend some events, but they are not virtual. I believe in making knowledge more accessible and easier.” Other respondents felt similarly, with multiple requests for virtual options. Likewise, respondents, such as this student, also requested events to be held at different times:

I feel as if hosting multiple events at different times would be more beneficial for the busy schedules of first-generation college students. For example, host two workshops in the same week for the same thing (such as information about grad school).

First-generation college students like myself work quite often, and being able to have options is always very convenient.

As mentioned previously, FG students face many barriers to success in academia, such as employment and other commitments that consume their time, and having flexible offerings would allow for easier participation.

Connections with Other FG Students

Finally, survey respondents requested more opportunities to connect with other FG students as a way for You First to support their needs better. Some FG students wanted a mentor or a peer to help them navigate their way through college:

I wish that we could have a mentor or buddy throughout our whole college experience that we could ask questions to or reach out to or even just go to activities with to make our experience as first-generation students more welcoming and less scary.

Other FG students felt isolated and wished that there were more social events to help facilitate these connections: “Provide more social events with icebreakers and opportunities to connect to other people- with plans to continue the conversation beyond a controlled setting. Basically, just help me make more friends.”

Although some FG students wish they had more opportunities to meet other FG students and benefit from those connections and friendships, most survey respondents appreciate You First's efforts. One student asserted, "I've felt very supported. I'm set to graduate in May; just keep doing what you're doing for the next batches of students."

Qualitative Findings - Focus Groups

Focus group participants were able to articulate additional needs or expand upon needs already identified by survey respondents such as support past the first year of college, accessible

FG information and events, help in bridging the gap in their family's understanding of higher education, and personal connections to other FG students.

Support Past First Year of College

Focus groups participants noted that they received the help they needed in their first year of college. However, one participant felt that the support faded after their first year in college and they needed more: “[During] freshman year, I had a lot of guidance and support. But that became less and less prominent as I went on.” Another participant agreed:

They want to address freshmen who don't know anything. But then they lose the interest of juniors and seniors who are about to leave. And personally, speaking from my own experience, when I hit junior year, I was on my own.

The participant's comment highlights that juniors and seniors have different needs than first-year students. Another participant elaborated on challenges that juniors or seniors may face: “It's hard to figure out the transition from undergrad into the workforce or grad school. It's hard as a first-gen because there's a lot of pressure from your family. Because you've done it, you've graduated, you're the golden child.”

Focus group participants appreciated the support they received their first year. However, several focus group participants wanted help tailored to the needs of FG students preparing to exit college and into the next stage of their lives.

More Accessible FG Information and Events

Like survey respondents, several focus group participants remarked that recording events would make information more accessible so that students were not bound to someone else's

schedule or time frame. One student elaborated on how students' schedules can create barriers: "Sometimes you can't go even though you want to. You have to work or have a three-hour class until 9 pm. Recording [events] is a good option." Another participant agreed that having a signup sheet for students interested in receiving the recording link later would help: "Have a signup sheet for students, maybe they're able to attend. You could put them on a list of [people] to send a video afterward just in case."

Other focus group participants want information easily located in one place, reducing the time and effort to find what they need. One student suggested, "If they made a hub, or somewhere where there were links for everything that first-gen students would normally be looking for – that would be useful." Another student agreed that having a hub would reduce frustration and the run around in getting answers:

I like a hub that answers frequently asked questions. If there's something that a whole bunch of students are asking about, like financial aid – there can be a hub of links there. Instead of having to go back and forth, asking this person and that person.

Bridging the Gap in Family's Understanding

Focus group participants recognize that their families are proud of them. However, students noted that if their parents did not attend college, they could not fully comprehend their experience in higher education. This lack of understanding may make it harder for some students to receive logistical or technical help from their parents. One participant remarked:

I wish there were a means of helping my family understand what college is. I have few family members who went to college, and even then, they never graduated. They barely

understand what is going on. My mother is trying her hardest to be that support. But when I say things like FAFSA, Rams Connect, or the Commons, she's overwhelmed.

Other focus group participants lamented that their parents could not fully appreciate their academic accomplishments. One student explained:

I made the Dean's List for the first time last semester, and when I told my dad, he was like, "What's that?" I don't know what to tell you other than he's the Dean of Students, and I made his list because of my grades and GPA. He was like, "Oh, nice!"

While the father was proud, without understanding the importance or role of a dean at a university, it was difficult for him to fully appreciate the meaning of this accomplishment.

Another focus group student agreed:

I know that my parents are proud of me, and they acknowledge my efforts, but they don't fully grasp what that means to make the Dean's List – it's hard. They see the accomplishment but cannot fully grasp what's behind it.

Finally, another focus group participant felt that because their parents had not attended college, it was harder for the student to share the details of their daily experience in college with their parents, even though the parents expressed interest:

My parents ask me about how well school is going. There's only so much that I can tell them because they don't fully comprehend the day-to-day life of a college student.

They've never experienced it. Maybe if they can see what I'm doing, see what classes look like, what the university looks like, then they'll have a better understanding of what it's like to be a first-gen student.

Focus group participants also indicated that they need help bridging the gap in their parents' understanding of higher education. One focus group participant remarked, "Family weekend is this weekend. You can bring your families, and we're going to have a station set up where they can learn about different stuff that first-gen students experience - that might be helpful." Another focus group participant agreed, "There's a family weekend for all VCU students. It would be nice for first-gen students to have one as well, just because we're all in the same crowd. We really don't know what's going on." In addition to events that help parents understand their college experience, FG students need help to explain the details of higher education to their parents. One focus group participant elaborated:

There's a vocabulary that my parents don't understand. That's increasingly crucial because I've done the FAFSA every year myself, and I've talked to my mom about it, like, this is the plan...and she'll say yes, but I don't think there's a real grasp on how to pay that money back, and what that's going to mean in six years.

Many FG students know that their parents support them emotionally, are proud of their accomplishments, and care about their experience in college. Students want their families to feel included in their college experience. However, they need support in helping their families understand their daily life at college, their academic accomplishments, and the language and processes of higher education.

Earlier Interaction with You First

Focus group participants expressed the desire for earlier interactions with You First, especially during the first year of college. While participants were not always sure of the best

method for You First to reach out to students, they agreed that reaching out as early as possible was best, with some even suggesting reaching out to high school students:

Catching people in high school [or] coming out of high school. In my high school, there were college fairs. Events like those are helpful. Here at VCU...in the Commons and outside the Commons when they have events like the SOVO [Student Organization and Volunteer Opportunities] fair...that would be a good way [to promote You First]. I didn't know this program existed until now. If you want to catch people before they even come into college, starting at their high schools is the best place.

Another participant recommended having a specific orientation event for FG students to reach out earlier:

This is just like a random idea... but getting students involved...way early on, like before they even, like, step foot on campus...I think an idea for that would be...for orientation, I feel like we should, like, lump the first-gen people together like on the first orientation zoom call or whatever like mine was a Zoom call. But even that would, like, help build a community early on, so you have, like, people you know before you can get there.

With college being such a daunting experience, having support and a sense of community early on in their academic career is critical for FG students.

Making Connections

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the focus group sessions, as in the survey findings, was the need for help in making connections to others. This need for connection to other FG students, previously identified by survey respondents, was further addressed by

focus group participants.

When focus group participants were asked what services they would like to see You First offer FG students, most participants indicated a need for opportunities to connect with other FG students. One student expressed how important the connection with other FG students was to her: “I have found that the events to connect with other first-generation students are the most helpful during my time here because we support one another and learn together.” Another student valued the experience of feeling safe when connected with other FG students and how beneficial the UNIV courses that are specific to first-generation students are:

Forming connections with other first-gen students [matters] because you can't look at someone and know [if] they're first-gen or not. If you're placed in those communities or groups, you feel safer and similar to the people around you, for example, like the class my advisor put me in.

Other participants expressed the value of having a FG student mentor to help them make connections: “If I knew there was somebody who went through this already, who was also a first-gen and I had a mentor who could guide me, I feel like that'd be a really good resource,” and “She has a good idea about having a mentor. It's always good to have more points of contact...but more connections with others is always welcome.” Overall, participants felt that connecting with other FG students early in their academic pursuits would provide a sense of belonging, safety, and a mechanism to support each other.

One participant liked large-scale events but also saw the value in more intimate relationships: “When I go to basketball games, I always go with a friend. We would be a part of this big community, this big thing, but I have a safe person, a friend.” Another participant agreed, “I'm drawn to free events that have niche groups of people that I can talk to and maybe join after

the event." One participant noted that they want to connect specifically with other first-year FG students: "As a first-year, first-gen upper-class students are very scary. Interacting with first-gens in their first year would make things a lot easier when it comes to going to these events."

Finally, one participant wanted a place where FG students could interact organically, outside of an established event. The student suggested, "Having a general office to go to, a drop-in, to say hi and interact with other first-gens would be cool; like a study area for just first-gen students to help each other or talk." Focus group participants recognized there are many events to meet people but wanted help connecting with other FG students.

Relationships with Faculty. As discussed previously, 55.3% ($n = 147$) of survey respondents indicated that they usually or always felt supported by their professors, while 21.8% ($n = 60$) indicated that they never felt supported by their professors. These survey responses led to asking focus group participants, "How would you describe a meaningful relationship with faculty?" and "What keeps you from having a meaningful relationship with your professors?" Focus group participants expressed several barriers that prevent them from having meaningful relationships with faculty, including personal anxiety, being independent, class size, faculty's competing priorities, and methods of communication:

Social anxiety felt by participants when interacting with faculty was very prevalent:

...forming that relationship with them still is very hard for people like me who have social anxiety. Talking to people makes it hard, especially professors who know what they're talking about. And these questions sound really stupid that I'm about to ask them.

Another participant felt that navigating conversations with faculty during COVID-19 increased her anxiety: "I would have had more relationships if it wasn't for COVID. I'm an introvert. I am shy."

In addition to social anxiety, participants expressed that class size was a barrier to connecting with faculty:

Making connections with your professors [is] something that everyone tells you to do.

But it's difficult to create a connection and maintain it. Back when we were still in person, in freshman introductory classes, there's 300 people, so it's difficult to make an impression. Professors are often tired after class, and they don't want to stay back and talk to you more. A lot of them only wanted to focus on academic topics during office hours.

A few participants expressed that being independent prevented them from seeking out relationships with faculty: "I've always dealt with things by myself. I've always taken care of my academics by myself. So, I feel like maybe I should just not ask them for help." Another student said, "I keep myself back. I really care. Because I'm really independent. I hate asking for help. I feel like it's like a sign of weakness."

Participants spoke about how faculty have many roles and connecting is often difficult. One participant specifically mentioned that faculty have competing priorities; therefore, their connection with them is no longer valid:

I formed strong relationships with different faculty. But the problem is they are no longer faculty; they have moved out. And now they're in director positions, and they're untouchable. You can't speak to them anymore because they're busy, like [in] dean positions.

Another participant stated, "I've talked to a lot of professors; they have deadlines, but they also have to teach class, so they can't always take the time out because they have their job also."

Participants also indicated that faculty focused only on teaching:

I can usually tell when professors are just there because they have to be there to teach. Like, they don't look like they have an interest in the subject. They just come in, and [are] quick to go through the lesson and then quick to kick us out of the classroom. It feels like they're not there to make a connection with the students and help them; they're just there to teach.

Participants had strong feelings about how they communicated with faculty, indicating a preference for face-to-face communication. One student recounted this incident:

I had this experience recently where I spoke to someone over Zoom. This was a very important issue that I had to discuss and the person on the other end wasn't taking what I was saying seriously because it's something that is happening over Zoom. You have this mental dissonance. You think that because it's happening remotely, you don't need to put as much effort into resolving an issue. I think this is happening to both faculty and staff, that a lot of my friends have reported that they've spoken about, for example, a hold that hasn't been taken off their financial record, right? It takes so much longer because when they communicate over Zoom, they're not being taken seriously. But when you're in person and face to face with someone, they can't put you on the back burner; they have to resolve something right then and there.

In summary, survey respondents and focus group participants illuminated multiple themes related to their needs as FG students at VCU. Prominent themes from survey respondents were communication, financial aid information, access to services and events, and connections with other FG students. Some focus group participants stressed the value of FG student support that extends past the first year of college. Students also discussed various ways to make FG

information and events accessible to all students. Participants expressed their wish to bridge the gap in their family's understanding of their students' experiences in higher education.

Participants also expressed that they want help meeting other FG students and cultivating relationships with faculty to facilitate making personal connections.

What Factors Impact VCU FG Students' Engagement with You First?

Student engagement is a significant component of student success and impacts academic performance, persistence, and retention (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Engagement is also one of the most critical challenges You First identified in their Request for Assistance. To understand how and to what extent VCU FG students engage with You First, the team analyzed survey responses and focus group transcripts to determine what factors encourage or discourage participation with You First.

Quantitative Findings - Survey Responses

The survey asked respondents questions across three categories related to student engagement: Connections to Campus, Feelings of Support, and You First. The analysis reveals a few key findings. First, FG students have an overall strong connection to campus but less so with faculty. Secondly, FG students are supported by their families, peers, and academic advisors. Lastly, although most FG students who have engaged with You First felt supported by You First, students identify lack of time as their most significant barrier to participating and indicate dissatisfaction with their level of participation.

Connections to Campus

Survey respondents were asked six questions about their connections to campus. As shown in Table 6, most respondents felt connected across all but one question. When answering,

“I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU,” 43.8% ($n = 116$) of respondents selected “never” and 19.2% ($n = 51$) “neutral.”

Across four questions related to campus connections, over half of respondents who never felt connected to campus identified their family’s total annual household income as under \$49,999. For this socioeconomic group, some notable responses arose indicating a relationship

Table 6

Frequency Distribution of Connections to Campus

	Always <i>n</i> (%)	Neutral <i>n</i> (%)	Never <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
I feel like I belong at VCU.	158 (59.4%)	48 (18%)	60 (22.6%)	266 (100%)
I feel like I can be my authentic self at VCU.	189 (71.6%)	37 (14%)	38 (14.4%)	264 (100%)
I feel like I am meeting my academic goals at VCU.	175 (66.8%)	41 (15.6%)	46 (17.6%)	262 (100%)
I feel comfortable expressing my opinions to others at VCU.	168 (63.4%)	50 (18.9%)	47 (17.7%)	265 (100%)
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with my peers at VCU.	134 (50.4%)	59 (22.2%)	73 (27.4%)	266 (100%)
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU.	98 (37%)	51 (19.2%)	116 (43.8%)	265 (100%)

Note: Respondents were not required to answer all questions; therefore, *n* varies for each question.

between family income level and indicators of belonging, connection, and academic success that may contribute to degree attainment. For “I feel like I belong at VCU,” 58.4% ($n = 35$) respondents with family incomes under \$49,999 selected “never.” For “I feel like I can be my authentic self at VCU,” 65.8% ($n = 25$) selected “never.” For “I feel like I am meeting my

academic goals at VCU,” 60.9% ($n = 28$) selected “never.” For “I feel like I have meaningful relationships with my peers at VCU,” 52.1% ($n = 38$) selected “never.” Just under half selected “never” for “I feel comfortable expressing my opinions to others at VCU” (48.9%, $n = 23$), and “I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU” (49.2%, $n = 57$). These findings show a need and opportunity to further support and build campus connections for students within this socioeconomic group.

Black or African American respondents consistently account for most students who never felt connected to campus (see Table 7). This trend shows a need for more attention and resources to support Black and African American FG students’ sense of connection to campus. Additionally, this may indicate environmental and institutional barriers that negatively contribute to Black and African American students’ lack of connection to campus.

Lastly, of the classifications, freshmen and juniors selected “never” more often than sophomores or seniors (see Table 8). Freshmen disproportionately selected “never” likely due to being new students at the university, which presents an opportunity for intentional support around building connections for that group of FG students. Juniors consistently selected “never” for each question related to feeling connected. Their feelings could be attributed to imposter syndrome, lack of belonging, and academic competence (Pratt et al., 2019).

Feelings of Support

Survey respondents were asked four questions relating to feelings of support. As shown in Table 9, most respondents felt supported by their family, peers, and academic advisor. Although most respondents indicated that they always felt supported by faculty, a higher percentage of respondents indicated that they never felt supported by faculty than by the other support groups (21.5%, $n = 59$). As mentioned previously, 43.8% ($n = 116$) of FG students

Table 7

Frequency Distribution by Race/Ethnicity for Students Who Never Felt Connected to Campus

	I feel like I belong at VCU <i>n</i> (%)	I feel like I can be my authentic self at VCU <i>n</i> (%)	I feel like I am meeting my academic goals at VCU <i>n</i> (%)	I feel comfortable expressing my opinions to others at VCU <i>n</i> (%)	I feel like I have meaningful relationships with my peers at VCU <i>n</i> (%)	I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU <i>n</i> (%)
Asian	5 (8.3%)	2 (5.3%)	4 (8.7%)	7 (14.9%)	4 (5.5%)	14 (12.1%)
Black or African American	22 (36.7%)	15 (39.5%)	15 (32.6%)	15 (31.9%)	24 (32.9%)	38 (32.8%)
Latinx or Hispanic	9 (15%)	6 (15.8%)	9 (19.6%)	8 (17%)	13 (17.8%)	20 (17.2%)
Middle Eastern or Northern African	2 (3.3%)	1 (2.6%)	3 (6.5%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.6%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	15 (25%)	10 (26.3%)	10 (21.7%)	12 (25.5%)	24 (32.9%)	30 (25.9%)
Two or more races	4 (6.7%)	3 (7.9%)	4 (8.7%)	2 (4.3%)	6 (8.2%)	9 (7.8%)
Other/Not listed	1 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Prefer not to disclose	2 (3.3%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	2 (2.7%)	2 (1.7%)
Total	60 (100%)	38 (100%)	46 (100%)	47 (100%)	73 (100%)	116 (100%)

expressed similar feelings, indicating a lack of connections due to never having meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU.

Table 8

Frequency Distribution by Student Classification of Respondents Who Never Felt Connected

	Freshman <i>n</i> (%)	Sophomore <i>n</i> (%)	Juniors <i>n</i> (%)	Seniors <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
I feel like I belong at VCU.	19 (31.7%)	9 (15%)	21 (35%)	11 (18.3%)	60 (100%)
I feel like I can be my authentic self at VCU.	13 (34.2%)	6 (15.8%)	14 (36.8%)	5 (13.2%)	38 (100%)
I feel like I am meeting my academic goals at VCU.	14 (30.4%)	11 (23.9%)	15 (32.6%)	6 (13%)	46 (100%)
I feel comfortable expressing my opinions to others at VCU.	13 (27.7%)	7 (14.9%)	21 (44.7%)	6 (12.8%)	47 (100%)
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with my peers at VCU.	16 (21.9%)	15 (20.5%)	27 (37%)	15 (20.5%)	73 (100%)
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU.	28 (24.1%)	23 (19.8%)	43 (37.1%)	22 (19%)	116 (100%)

Concerning socioeconomic status, over half of respondents who never felt supported identified their family’s total annual household income as under \$49,999. For “I feel supported by my peers,” 67.7% (*n* = 21) respondents selected “never.” For “I feel supported by my family,” 63.4% (*n* = 26) respondents selected “never.” For “I feel supported by my professors,” 54.2% (*n* = 32) selected “never.” For “I feel supported by my academic advisor,” 52.4% (*n* = 22) selected “never.” This same socioeconomic group indicated similar feelings related to never feeling

Table 9

Frequency Distribution of Feelings of Support

	Always	Neutral	Never	Total
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
I feel supported by my family.	205 (74.5%)	20 (7.3%)	41 (14.9%)	266 (100%)
I feel supported by my academic advisor.	165 (70%)	59 (21.5%)	42 (15.3%)	266 (100%)
I feel supported by my professors.	147 (53.5%)	60 (21.8%)	59 (21.5%)	266 (100%)
I feel supported by my peers.	174 (63.3%)	60 (21.8%)	31 (11.3%)	265 (100%)

Note: Respondents were not required to answer all questions; therefore, n varies for each question.

connected to campus, suggesting an increased need for support and a barrier to engagement within this income level.

Notably, Black or African American respondents consistently account for most students who never felt supported (see Table 10). Coupled with Black or African American respondents never feeling connected to campus as mentioned previously, these findings indicate an increased need for support services and a barrier to engagement within this race/ethnic group.

Finally, most respondents always felt supported by their family, academic advisor, professors, and peers regardless of their student classification as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Of the students that selected “never,” juniors responded in this way more than others, as shown in Table 11.

Based on the responses to the survey sections *Connections to Campus* and *Feelings of Support*, several significant barriers to FG student engagement exist. First, FG students in the

socioeconomic group of annual family income under \$49,999 were more likely to have never felt connected to or supported at VCU. Additionally, Black or African American FG students indicated similar feelings related to connections and support. Furthermore, FG juniors expressed never feeling connected or supported more than any other student classification. Combined, the lack of connection and support points to the possibility that these FG students are not experiencing a sense of belonging, thus affecting their engagement with You First at VCU.

Table 10

Frequency Distribution by Race/Ethnicity for Students Who Never Felt Supported

	I feel supported by my family. <i>n</i> (%)	I feel supported by my academic advisor. <i>n</i> (%)	I feel supported by my professors. <i>n</i> (%)	I feel supported by my peers. <i>n</i> (%)
Asian	6 (14.6%)	4 (9.5%)	10 (16.9%)	1 (3.2%)
Black or African American	14 (34.1%)	15 (35.7%)	19 (32.2%)	13 (41.9%)
Latinx or Hispanic	6 (14.6%)	8 (19%)	8 (13.6%)	4 (12.9%)
Middle Eastern or Northern African	1 (2.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.4%)	1 (3.2%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	13 (31.7%)	10 (23.8%)	14 (23.7%)	7 (22.6%)
Two or more races	1 (2.4%)	3 (7.1%)	4 (6.8%)	4 (12.9%)
Other/Not listed	0 (0%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (1.7%)	0 (0%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (1.7%)	1 (3.2%)
Total	41 (100%)	42 (100%)	59 (100%)	31 (100%)

Table 11*Frequency Distribution by Student Classification for Students Who Never Felt Supported*

	I feel supported by my family.	I feel supported by my academic advisor.	I feel supported by my professors.	I feel supported by my peers.
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Freshman: Completed 0 to 23 credit hours	9 (22%)	9 (21.4%)	14 (23.7%)	12 (38.7%)
Sophomore: Completed 24-53 credit hours	8 (19.5%)	5 (11.9%)	9 (15.3%)	3 (9.7%)
Junior: Completed 54-84 credit hours	15 (36.6%)	15 (35.7%)	22 (37.3%)	14 (45.2%)
Senior: Completed 85 credit hours or more	9 (22%)	13 (31%)	14 (23.7%)	2 (6.5%)

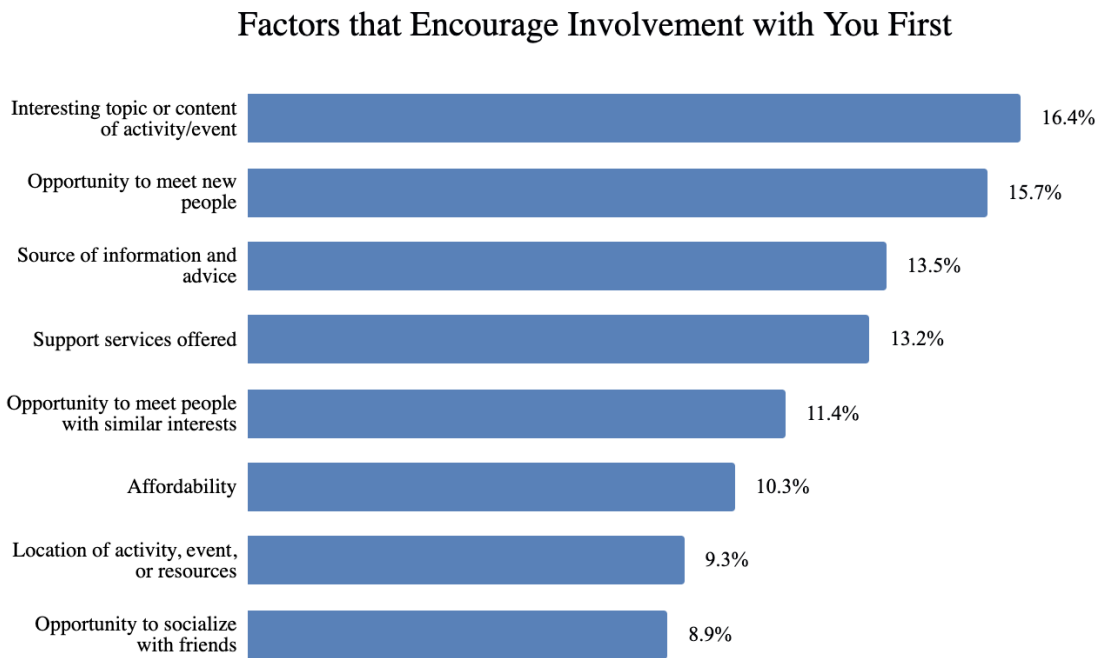
You First

All survey respondents were asked two questions about their involvement with You First. Respondents that answered “yes” (33.5%, $n = 54$) or “I don’t know” (8.1%, $n = 13$) to the question “Have you participated in You First events and programs?” were asked an additional five questions about their involvement and relationships with You First.

Responses from You First Participants. Among the 41.6% ($n = 67$) of overall respondents who had or may have participated in You First events and programs, over half indicated that they participate “sometimes” (48.5%, $n = 32$) or “always” (15.2%, $n = 10$). The remainder indicated “never” (36.4%, $n = 24$) for their participation level.

Next, respondents were asked to select factors that encouraged them to participate in You First events and activities. The top three selections were “interesting topic or content of activity/event” (16.4%, $n = 46$), “opportunity to meet new people” (15.7%, $n = 44$), and “source of information and advice” (13.5%, $n = 38$), as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses.

The next three questions asked respondents about their feelings of support related to You First services and programming. Respondents were asked to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements shown below in Table 12.

Notably, most respondents agree that they felt supported by You First at VCU. Around half of the respondents agree that they have meaningful relationships with You First and that You First has contributed to the students’ academic success. A small percentage of respondents

disagree with each of these statements, with Black or African American students accounting for most respondents who disagree (See Table 13). These findings further reinforce the need for increased support of Black and African American students discussed in the previous sections.

Table 12

Frequency Distribution of Feelings of You First Support

	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
I feel supported by You First at VCU.	51 (77.3%)	13 (19.7%)	2 (3%)
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with You First staff at VCU.	31 (47%)	26 (39.4%)	9 (13.6%)
You First programming and events have contributed to my academic success.	31 (48.4%)	27 (42.2%)	6 (9.4%)

Note: Respondents were not required to answer all questions; therefore, n varies for each question.

Responses from You First Non-Participants. Respondents who answered “no” (58.4%, *n* = 94) to the question “Have you participated in You First events and programs?” were asked an additional question about factors that discourage involvement with You First. Most respondents selected “lack of time” (29.6%, *n* = 64) from the list of provided factors, as shown in Figure 3. Being “unaware of available resources, events, and activities” (20.4%, *n* = 44) and “employment responsibilities” (11.6%, *n* = 25) were the second and third most chosen factors that discourage involvement with You First.

Finally, all respondents were asked if they were satisfied with their level of participation with You First. Over half of respondents (58.1%, $n = 90$) reported that they were not satisfied with their level of participation, while 41.9% ($n = 65$) reported that they were satisfied with their level of participation. This data would seem to indicate that survey respondents want to be more involved with You First but have not participated for various reasons.

Table 13

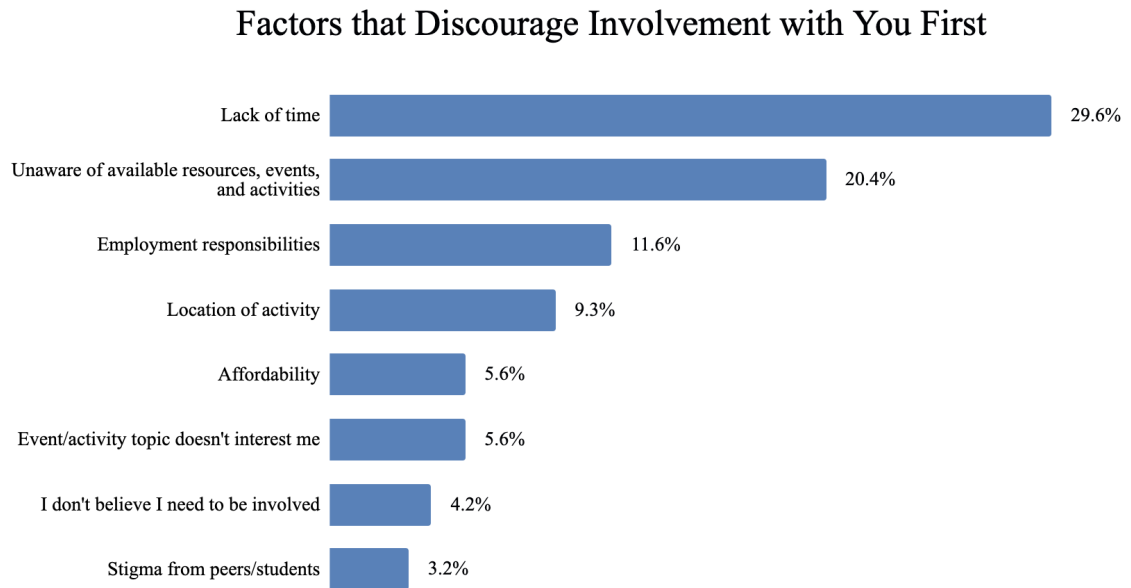
Frequency Distribution by Race/Ethnicity who Disagree that You First Supports Them

	I feel supported by You First at VCU. <i>n (%)</i>	I feel like I have meaningful relationships with You First staff at VCU. <i>n (%)</i>	You First programming and events have contributed to my academic success. <i>n (%)</i>
Asian	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)
Black or African American	2 (100%)	5 (55.6%)	4 (66.7%)
Latinx or Hispanic	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	0 (0%)
Middle Eastern or Northern African	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (33.3%)
Two or more races	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other/Not listed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	2 (100%)	9 (100%)	6 (100%)

Quantitative Findings - You First Documentation

An analysis of You First documentation provided insights into the trends within the unit’s programming and events. There are currently 6,345 undergraduate FG students at VCU. These students may opt-in to be added to the You First listserv to receive communication and resources specific to FG students. In Fall 2020, there were 1,066 subscribers, and 230 additional subscribers joined in Fall 2021 for a total of 1,296. As such, 20.4% of FG students at VCU are subscribed to the You First listserv.

Figure 3



Note: Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses.

You First's three cornerstone programs are the You First student organization, Summer Scholars, and the You First Mentorship program. The You First student organization had 359 members in Fall 2020, and an additional 105 joined in Fall 2021 for a total of 464 members. The Summer Scholars program has seen a 59.3% growth from 2020 to 2021. The program had 67

participants in 2019, 59 participants in 2020, and 94 in 2021. The You First Mentorship program has shown a 9.6% decline in mentors and a 9.5% growth in mentees from 2020 to 2021. In 2019, the program had 45 mentors and 203 mentees, 52 mentors and 219 mentees in 2020, and 47 mentors and 240 mentees in 2021. The decline in mentors can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and mentors reducing responsibilities (E. Bambacus, personal communication, June 22, 2021).

You First also offers social activities, events covering varying topics (academics, life skills, identity, career), study sessions, Strengths Finder workshops, and information sessions about You First programming. In the 2020-2021 academic year, You First hosted 37 events (25 in the Fall and 12 in the Spring) attended by 448 students. Complete modality information is not available for each of these events but based on the information provided, You First offered events in both virtual and in-person formats. Registration information is not available for all events. However, there were 284 registrants with 198 attendees across nine events, resulting in a 69.7% attendance rate by those who registered. The top five most well-attended individual events in the 2020-21 academic year occurred in September and October. They covered information about You First programming, how to be successful in an online class, paying for college, prioritizing mental health, and imposter syndrome.

Overall, the team determined that the most well-attended events related to identity and academics (see Table 14). The events that averaged the most attendees per individual event focused on identity, academics, and programming information (see Table 14). Although the identity, academics, and programming information events occurred throughout both semesters, the fall events resulted in larger attendance. Event participation indicates topics of interest to students and that they are likely more willing to engage in the fall semester.

In Fall 2021, You First hosted 49 events, 36 of which were study sessions (See Table 15). The Fall 2021 events yielded 433 attendees, of which 394 attended in person and 39 attended virtually. For the 13 events with pre-registration, 374 students initially registered, and 294 attended, which means that 78.6% of registrants attended. Although the study sessions only took

Table 14

You First Events in 2020-2021 by Topic

	Number of Events Offered	Total Number of Attendees	Average Attendees per Event
Life Skills	7	58	8
Study Session	7	31	4
Identity	6	124	21
Academics	6	122	20
Strengths Finder	4	17	4
Career	2	26	9
Financial	2	11	6
Programming Information	2	44	22
Social	1	15	15

place in person, most of the events allowed attendees to participate in person and virtually. The most well-attended events took place during National First-Generation College Week in November and were the FG resources fair (89 attendees), etiquette dinner (60 attendees), and bingo event (65 attendees).

Overall, there were five categories of events (as determined by the team) in Fall 2021: social, life skills, academics, identity, and study sessions (see Table 15). The events with the

most average attendees per event were social and life skills (see Table 15). As previously discussed, survey respondents indicated a desire for social events, which is strongly reinforced by participation in social events during Fall 2021. Specifically, two of the most attended Fall 2021 social events and the most attended life skills event occurred in November during National First-Generation College Week, highlighting that timeframe as a prime opportunity to engage students in You First events.

Table 15

You First Events in Fall 2021 by Topic

	Number of Events Offered	Total Number of Attendees	Average Attendees per Event
Study Session	36	139	4
Academics	5	36	7
Life Skills	4	92	23
Social	3	165	55
Identity	1	1	1

In sum, You First's primary mode of communication only captures 20.4% of FG students at VCU yet has the potential to increase its reach to FG students at VCU. They have experienced growth in the Summer Scholars program and a slight decline in the You First Mentorship program mentors which warrants ongoing monitoring to support and maintain its growth. Overall, You First offers a wide variety of events in different modalities, with high participation rates with over 70% of pre-registered individuals attending the events indicating that events are a programmatic strength with the possibility of expanding and growing.

Qualitative Findings - Focus Groups

As discussed previously, many FG students wish they had known about You First earlier and explained that they need You First events and information to be more accessible. Among focus group participants, these themes also emerged as factors that affect VCU FG students' engagement with VCU. Focus group participants offered suggestions for increasing You First awareness. Additionally, they discussed how event modality would make You First events more accessible for FG students.

Awareness of You First

FG student awareness of You First resources and services is critical to engagement with You First. As previously mentioned, most FG students surveyed were unaware of You First. For many of those that are aware of You First, many wished that they had discovered You First earlier in their academic career. When questioned about ways for You First to promote awareness of their services, focus group participants had various suggestions. Surprisingly, participants expressed the importance of having an on-campus physical presence for awareness in an increasingly virtual world. According to them, this presence should be in places that students consider popular gathering spots or locations en route to those places. One participant suggested setting up in the Compass:

You know how in the Compass, club orgs will set up apple cider, or coffee stands, or just a table out there...to catch people as they're walking to class? That would be beneficial because it doesn't take a lot of time to [stop] if you're walking to class and the tables [are] there.

Another participant suggested the University Student Commons as a prime location:

Definitely the Commons because that's where everybody meets up. It's that middle place

on the campus. If they were at the Commons more, I would probably have seen their booth and could have gone up to them and gotten a flier or something.

According to participants, other examples of physical locations that would be helpful to have a You First presence include the library, Shafer Court dining center, and orientation. Additionally, participants suggested You First be present at high school college fairs and student organization events such as the Student Organization and Volunteer Opportunities (SOVO) Fair and Business Organizations and Student Services (BOSS) Days.

Modality of Events

As detailed in the qualitative findings (open-ended survey responses and focus groups), one of FG students' needs at VCU is greater access to FG events and information. This need affects FG students' involvement with You First events and programming. Specifically, survey respondents and focus group participants would like to see more events offered both in-person and virtually. One participant stated: "If you had both options of in-person and virtual, so those who aren't able to go in person, they could just virtually come. If I have the option of attending virtually, I will definitely go." Another participant agreed that offering both modalities would accommodate more students: "I agree with her – having both options so that not only if you don't like to go outside but also for people who aren't so comfortable."

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized data provided by You First and the team's quantitative findings from the survey and qualitative results from the survey and focus group. Data analysis found that FG students at VCU have positive feelings about their FG identity overall. However, a positive view of the FG identity does not remove or negate FG students' challenges. Because of these challenges, FG students want support in connecting to other FG students and faculty, more

accessible access to information and events, and help navigating the resources and support available at VCU. Overwhelmingly, many FG students indicated they wished they had known of You First sooner and preferred that You First automatically add FG students to its listserv.

Chapter V: Recommendations for Engaging FG Students

As requested by You First, this team was charged with identifying the underlying issues related to minimal engagement with VCU FG students and determining recommendations to increase engagement so VCU can retain more FG students through degree completion. A review of the literature and the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data led the team to offer five recommendations to You First. Based on its problem and context analysis, the team structured the study around this student-centered theory of change: If You First identifies student perceptions of their FG identities, defines student engagement, increases awareness of You First, and determines the needs of FG students at VCU, then they will improve the FG student academic outcomes and student experience. In testing this theory, the team concluded, however, that the primary challenge is not defining student engagement but rather FG students' lack of awareness of You First services and programs. Minimal engagement is one of the main issues You First brought forth in its Request for Assistance to the Capstone team. However, the team's findings illustrate that those students who are aware are already engaged with You First; if they are not, the underlying challenge is one of awareness.

Further, the team determined that You First has significant mechanisms to track registration and participation in events and programs that can continue to serve as a baseline for measuring student engagement. These tracking efforts can continuously support planning for subsequent years. In addition to behavioral (observable) engagement, You First can also consider cognitive (mental effort) and affective (student motivation) concepts as other ways to conceptualize student engagement (Mandernach, 2015).

Resources and Capacity to Implement Recommendations

As a NASPA First-Generation Forward Institution, VCU has committed to FG student success and retention. FG students at VCU account for 30% of the total undergraduate population which continues to grow each year (K. Smith, personal communication, January 13, 2022). With this NASPA designation, VCU has indicated that the commitment to supporting FG students is a strategic priority. However, current resources and staffing for the primary support office, You First, are limited. You First currently has one full-time administrator and a recently added graduate assistant. This limited staff currently supports all FG students subscribed to the You First listserv, the You First student organization members, the You First Mentorship program, and the Altria Summer Scholars program. While some of the recommendations proposed consider the current limited staffing, many of the recommendations will require additional resources for staffing to support FG students as the awareness and reach of You First expand to encompass a more significant percentage of the FG population.

Although most of You First's budget should come from the institution, exploring additional funding sources would help support the suggested recommendations, thus resulting in increased FG student engagement and retention. Expanding their existing corporate partnerships with Altria Group, Inc. and Dupont could provide additional funding or resources. Also, You First could seek more corporate partnerships focused on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) or healthcare to provide scholarship programs to support FG students interested in those fields. Research grants and contracts offered by the Institute of Education Sciences or philanthropic organizations like the First Generation Foundation could provide supplementary funding for You First initiatives. Partnering with VCU's Alumni and Development Relations unit

to implement a fundraising campaign that targets FG support initiatives could also secure additional financial resources.

FG students account for 6,345 of the enrolled undergraduate students at VCU (K. Smith, personal communication, January 13, 2022). With the undergraduate in-state tuition and fees for the 2021-22 academic year totaling \$12,094 (VCU, 2021h), FG students contribute approximately \$76 million in tuition revenue to VCU. Engaging and retaining FG students is essential given their significant financial impact on the university and students' investment in their education. Furthermore, the institution's strategic plan commits to supporting student success, including improving student retention and graduation rates (VCU, 2022c). As such, increasing financial resources for You First to support FG students is a fiscally responsible and student-centered decision.

In this chapter, we offer five overarching recommendations, along with resource considerations to build capacity, for You First to employ in its efforts to increase engagement with and retain FG students: 1) increase awareness of You First, 2) promote FG student connections, 3) provide more accessible information, 4) formalize partnerships across the institution, and 5) cultivate inclusivity among FG students' families.

Recommendation 1: Increase Awareness of You First

Survey and focus group participants highlighted a notable concern for You First: Most FG students at VCU are unaware of it. Even among students familiar with You First, many expressed the desire to learn about You First earlier in their academic careers. You First currently provides information for FG students on their website and through communications sent out to FG students subscribed to their listserv. The listserv offers an opportunity to create significant impact with limited staffing. Also, the listserv reaches more students than any other You First

effort, but that effort must expand significantly to reach the FG students who are not receiving it. FG students usually hear about You First during Weeks of Welcome and the Student Opportunity and Organization Fair and must request to be added to the You First listserv. You First should consider the following ways to increase awareness of their programs and services for FG students at VCU.

Automatically Enroll FG Students to the You First Email Listserv

FG students indicated a strong desire to be automatically added to the You First listserv when they enroll at VCU, with the option to unsubscribe. Email is the primary method of communication to FG students at VCU, and currently, the listserv reaches only a small portion (20.4%, $n = 1,296$) of FG students. This means that approximately 80% of the FG student population at VCU is missing out on information from You First about services, events, and opportunities for support. While turning some students away by identifying them is a concern for You First, survey and focus group results indicate that this concern is not an issue for FG students. Survey and focus group participants consistently expressed the desire to have You First reach out to them as early as possible, with 59.6% ($n = 140$) wanting to be automatically added to the listserv. Additionally, even if some students choose to unsubscribe based on being identified, the reach to FG students would be far greater than the current system of signing up for the listserv on their own.

Create Tailored Communications for FG Students

As demonstrated by survey and focus group responses, FG students do not comprise a homogenous group. FG students have different views of their identity, their environments, and more based on other identities and phases of life. For example, survey respondents indicated that they felt differently about their FG identities based on race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status,

and student classification. You First could develop communications plans and events based on other identities, such as Black and African American FG students, who did not feel as supported as their peers. Additionally, they could create programming that recognizes that Asian students are more likely to have both positive and negative feelings about being FG than students of other races.

Similarly, messaging around FG status and identity could be tailored to FG students at different points in their academic careers. The survey demonstrated that sophomores are more likely to have conflicting views of their FG identities than seniors' more positive feelings. Also related to student classification, freshmen are less likely to think about their FG identity, while juniors spend more time thinking about that identity. As students move through their college experience, they think and feel differently about their FG identity, and communication from You First could support students in different ways as their FG identity evolves.

Finally, You First may want to consider tailored communication for FG students of varying income levels. Although the FG status is often associated with low-income groups, survey responses indicated that FG students with annual family incomes of \$50,000 or higher are also affected by the FG identity. It may be more challenging for You First to know the family income levels of their students. However, creating programming or communication that considers how the FG identity impacts students of all income levels will help improve awareness and student engagement.

Provide Multiple Points of Contact

Survey and focus group participants also stressed the importance of having a robust You First physical presence on campus to increase awareness. FG students are regularly on campus, walking to classes, the dining hall, the library, and other gathering spots. They frequently take

notice of clubs and organizations with tables or displays set up in high-traffic areas. For example, many participants suggested a visible presence of You First at campus locations such as the University Student Commons, the Compass outside Shafer Dining Court, inside Shafer Dining Court, libraries on the Monroe Park and Medical College campus, and orientation events. Another suggestion for physical presence is at student organization fairs like the SOVO Fair and BOSS Days.

When coordinating opportunities for a physical presence on campus, promoting further awareness of these events is essential. For example, You First could use the TelegRAM email to let students know that they will have a pop-up table at the Compass. Additionally, You First could share this across various social media and electronic communication platforms. Students regularly receive information about campus happenings, and emphasizing You First's presence with multiple communication touchpoints is essential to ensuring students know where and when to connect with You First.

Survey and focus group participants also mentioned how easy it could be for new students to get lost on campus. As a solution, You First could partner with the University Student Commons and Activities and VCU Admissions to provide additional signage around campus to help incoming FG students. This solution would make it easier for FG students to navigate the physical campus, thus reducing stress and time spent figuring out where helpful offices and valuable resources are located.

Conduct Earlier Outreach to Incoming FG Students

This strategy addresses another critical finding: In the survey and focus groups, FG students consistently expressed the desire to learn about You First before entering college. Along with the You First listserv and orientation presence, many participants suggested having a You

First presence at high school college fairs. While this is an enormous undertaking for an organization with limited resources, connecting with the Admissions Office that attends these events would leverage existing resources and opportunities to provide information about You First to FG students before admission. VCU Admissions offers information about all college fairs they attend online (VCU, 2022a). These events could be the first point of contact to provide information about You First to prospective students in collaboration with VCU Admissions, thus providing earlier outreach to FG students and demonstrating that VCU is a place where FG students will be valued and embraced to promote a sense of belonging.

Similar to partnering with VCU Admissions, You First could also partner with the VCU Orientation office to conduct FG-specific campus tours for prospective and incoming FG students. This strategy would allow You First to dive deeper into the campus environment for FG students and families unfamiliar with the college experience. Additionally, these tours could highlight important places around campus for FG students, like the You First office, the University Student Commons, the Student Services Center in Harris Hall, and other locations. Some focus group participants shared that earlier outreach from You First would have been helpful. This proposed strategy would allow You First to connect with FG students perhaps even earlier than orientation.

Another tool that You First could utilize for earlier outreach is the CSI that every incoming VCU freshman must take. As identified in earlier sections, analysis of the data provided from the CSI indicates that FG students are at greater risk of dropping out, having lower GPAs, financial insecurity, and emotional stress. Academic advisors access the CSI information through the Navigate dashboard. Other units, such as VCU Career Services, Student Accessibility, Educational Opportunity, and Student Affairs, receive aggregate reports to inform

program development and categorized lists for targeted student outreach. You First could also request the aggregate report for FG students from Student Success each year. Using the CSI information similarly would allow You First to identify students who may need more support entering VCU and use a targeted communication plan to reach out to those students to offer resources. Many FG students expressed the desire for You First to reach out to them, particularly when they have difficulty managing everything in their lives. Earlier outreach would increase awareness, encourage further FG student engagement with You First and help improve FG student retention rates.

Survey and focus group participants consistently expressed that they wished they had known about You First earlier. This finding, coupled with quantitative data from the survey and You First documentation, helped the Capstone team determine an awareness gap among FG students at VCU about You First and its services. You First could immediately increase awareness by automatically adding FG students to the You First listserv when they enroll at VCU. Similarly, increasing physical presence at events and locations around campus would reach an even wider audience that may have missed email communications from You First. Also, conducting earlier outreach to incoming FG students, whether through Admissions at high school college fairs, campus tours, or targeted communications based on needs identified through the CSI, would increase FG student engagement. Finally, You First can keep students engaged and supported throughout their academic careers by creating tailored communications and offerings based on race and ethnicity, student classification, and socioeconomic status.

Some of these recommendations will require additional resources, such as an additional staff person to manage added communication plans and physical presence efforts. Developing and maintaining partnerships with other VCU departments may also require additional staffing

beyond the current level. However, these tactics will increase campus awareness and help improve FG student engagement with You First.

Recommendation 2: Promote FG Student Connections

Literature highlights that a sense of belonging, in or connection to higher education, positively influences FG student persistence. Research also shows that FG students who have supportive relationships with other students, faculty, and staff benefit from collaborative learning and increased support-seeking behaviors (Indiana University School of Education Center for Postsecondary Research, 2020). To foster a sense of belonging for FG students, You First hosts multiple events throughout the academic year. You First also provides different avenues for FG students to engage in campus life, such as their You First Mentorship program, Summer Scholars program, and the You First student organization.

While most FG students surveyed in this study felt like they belong at VCU (59.4%, $n = 158$), FG students overwhelmingly expressed a need to connect with others like them. Building relationships with other FG students, faculty, and staff can help provide benefits, such as better grades, to FG students that lead to higher levels of engagement (Kahu, 2013). The team offers two additional strategies and related actions for You First to help ensure FG students become engaged and connected.

Connect FG Students with Other FG Students

FG students at VCU indicated a desire to connect with other FG students and those with similar experiences. A survey respondent described this as, "Just knowing that other students are going through the same experience [as me]." Additionally, a focus group participant stated: "I have found that the events to connect with other first-generation students are the most helpful during my time here because we support one another and learn together." Study participants

further indicated that connecting with FG students in their programs or schools and colleges would be helpful. A participant recalled attending a You First event and seeing a classmate: "... that's where I met one girl who was in my class, and I was like, we sit beside each other every day. I had no idea you were first-gen!" Based on this feedback from FG students, several actions follow to help You First facilitate these connections.

Create a You First Student Ambassador Program

There are many opportunities available for You First to host FG student events specific to schools and colleges to connect FG students with others in their programs or majors. Creating a You First Student Ambassador program could provide a mechanism for FG students to connect, form study groups, and acquire leadership skills. You First could recruit FG upper-class students to serve as You First Student Ambassadors, appointing a representative from VCU's 16 schools and colleges. Each fall, recruitment efforts for ambassadors could occur during the SOVO fair in conjunction with launching an email campaign to the FG student listserv. Additional recruitment could come from the You First newsletter or any currently established You First programs (Altria Scholars, Summer Scholars, the You First Mentorship program, You First student organization). Once You First launches the You First Student Ambassador Program, the You First student organization could host "Meet and Greet" events. You First Student Ambassadors could host breakout sessions to allow FG students to connect with their schools and colleges and find friends or study group partners. The existing You First Mentorship program is a one-to-one relationship to meet individual student needs. In contrast, the You First Student Ambassador Program would focus on FG students making connections with other FG students within the same schools and colleges and academic programs.

Creating and implementing the You First Student Ambassadors program may require additional resources beyond the limited staffing that currently exists. Program support could come from creating other staff positions within You First. Furthermore, You First could incentivize student participation in the program for FG juniors and seniors appointed as ambassadors by utilizing different mechanisms of student funding support such as work-study positions, hourly student worker positions, or graduate assistant positions.

Identify a Dedicated Space for FG Students

In addition to providing opportunities for more specialized connections for FG students, You First could expand their physical footprint at VCU to include a lounge or study space. This dedicated space could help FG students feel more connected to one another. Study participants indicated a desire to have a place where FG students could interact with other FG students outside of scheduled events. One participant stated: "Having a general office to go to, a drop-in, to say hi and interact with other first-gens would be cool; like a study area for just first-gen students to help each other or talk." Considering You First's limited resources and space limitations, using reservable space in the University Student Commons to host You First drop-in hours for FG students may be feasible. You First's graduate assistant, You First student organization members, or a You First Student Ambassador could staff these established drop-in hours. Having a dedicated space would allow FG students to connect socially and academically with each other and with faculty and staff.

To adequately expand You First's footprint on campus, a dedicated space could include study rooms, meeting rooms, a family room, and a Little Ram Pantry box. While acquiring additional space may not be feasible in the near term due to You First's current financial

resources, this recommendation could be added to You First's strategic plan to ensure an increase in financial allocations earmarked for physical space.

Connect FG Students with Faculty

Providing support and connections for FG students is a priority of You First. Still, a theme emerged from the study's survey and focus group sessions: a need to better connect with faculty. Over half of survey respondents (55.3%, $n = 147$) indicated that they usually or always felt supported by their professors, while 21.8% ($n = 60$) indicated that they never felt supported by their professors. Most survey respondents also expressed a lack of connectedness with faculty; 43.8% ($n = 116$) indicated never having a meaningful relationship with at least one faculty member at VCU. Focus group participants had similar sentiments, noting personal anxiety, being independent, large class sizes, faculty's competing priorities, and communication methods as barriers to forming relationships or connections.

Provide FG Training or Professional Development for Faculty

You First should provide faculty training or professional development opportunities to learn more about FG students and the barriers these students face. VCU currently offers several opportunities for faculty to participate in training on interacting with different student populations. One example is VCU's Military Student Services office, which gives Green Zone training to work with military students and support veterans, offered under the Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success umbrella. Similarly, the Division of Student Affairs offers two different training sessions: Rams in Recovery training for faculty to become allies to students struggling with substance abuse and the University Counseling office's Safe Zone training for faculty working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) students. In addition to the information You First offers to

faculty who attend new faculty orientation, offering more in-depth FG student training, similar to Green Zone and Safe Zone training, for all faculty would greatly benefit FG students. To accomplish this, You First could create interactive online training modules that include engaging video content for faculty. Faculty could view these videos outside of a formal orientation or meeting. Furthermore, FG faculty engaged with You First could present training for other faculty within their departments. This would have the added benefit of alleviating some of the workload on the limited You First staff.

In addition, as part of FG training/professional development for faculty, You First could showcase the resources available through VCU's designation as a First-Gen Forward Institution by NASPA's Center for First-generation Student Success. Faculty may not be aware that these resources exist and can utilize programming and resources offered by the Center, including journal articles and engagement opportunities such as in-person and virtual conferences and webinars.

An effort to connect FG students with other FG students and faculty simultaneously would be to expand the offerings of the UNIV 191 FG courses. Currently, three sections of this course accommodate approximately 75 FG students. By increasing these course offerings, more FG students could benefit from the information and skills acquired with a specific focus on creating and maintaining a meaningful relationship with the professor.

Study participants overwhelmingly expressed a need to connect with other FG students and faculty at VCU. The ability to connect with FG students could enable more robust relationships with others who have similar experiences, build connections for same school/college study or support groups, and provide more significant opportunities for friendships. Creating a You First Student Ambassador Program would increase chances for FG

students to connect with other FG students within their schools/colleges. To further facilitate the need for connections, You First could establish a dedicated space for FG students to meet and socialize. Participants also asserted the need to connect with faculty, which would provide them with a better sense of support during their academic journey. Establishing training for faculty and providing access to additional resources would help bridge the gap that FG students experience in connecting with faculty. Enrolling more FG students in UNIV 191 FG courses would simultaneously allow FG students to connect with other FG students and create meaningful relationships with faculty.

Recommendation 3: Increase Accessibility to Information and Events

Focus group participants and survey respondents indicated that they would like You First to make information and events more accessible to FG students. Several FG students shared they want to attend You First events more often, but that lack of time or the student's schedule was a barrier. FG students also indicated it could be challenging to get the information they need related to academics or financial aid because they do not know where to find information quickly or easily. Currently, You First provides information for FG students on their website and through communications sent out to FG students subscribed to their listserv. You First also promotes events in the university's TelegRAM newsletter to all students daily. In addition to these various forms of outreach, focus group participants and survey responses pointed to three strategies for increasing accessibility.

Provide an Online Hub of Information for FG Students

First, FG students would like You First to offer an online hub to find the information they need quickly. FG Students could access this online hub through the You First website with a secure login for students. Some students suggested creating a resource for Frequently Asked

Questions (FAQs) related to financial aid, applying for graduation, or other critical processes.

You First's online hub could include a calendar of You First events and other important dates.

Finally, FG students would like a hub that contains links to helpful VCU offices or resources so that students do not need to spend so much time searching for answers to their questions.

Offer Events in Multiple Modalities

Secondly, FG students would like to see events offered both in-person and virtually. In response to health concerns caused by COVID-19, You First pivoted to virtual events beginning in March of 2020. It is critical for You First to continue to offer events in different modalities to accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of FG students. Some FG students enjoy and benefit from in-person events. However, virtual events reduce the need for other FG students to travel to campus and park. Furthermore, virtual events may help some students feel safer, either physically or emotionally. While it may not be feasible to offer every event virtually and in person, FG students would like You First to continue to provide events in different modalities.

Record Topical Events

Finally, FG students would like You First to record their events, particularly when covering topical information. Recording events will increase the accessibility of information offered by You First because students can watch recordings at times most convenient for them. It may be challenging to confirm who has viewed recordings for engagement metrics. However, this strategy will accommodate students who feel that they cannot attend events due to lack of time or have class or work during peak event times but still want information offered by You First. Students suggested that all recording links be kept in a You First hub so that students can easily find and access the information when it is convenient for them.

Focus group participants and survey respondents asserted that offering events in multiple modalities (in person and virtually), recording You First events, and providing an online hub of information for FG students will make information more accessible. Greater accessibility of information and events means that FG students will spend less time looking for the answers or information they need. You First may need to reconsider how it captures engagements if students view recorded events or visit an online hub for resources. However, employing these strategies identified by FG students will accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of FG students at VCU.

Recommendation 4: Formalize Campus Partnerships

Survey respondents expressed their desire for You First to know that they are more than just their generational status. FG students discussed the intersectionality of their identities, including caregiving responsibilities, nationality, immigration status, and their experiences as people of color. Additionally, they noted how other aspects of their identities impact their experiences. The study found that FG students with total annual family household incomes under \$49,999 and Black and African American FG students were more likely to have “never” felt connected to or supported at VCU. You First should focus on these specific student groups and identify organizations with which these student populations may engage, thus allowing You First to engage with students’ intersectional identities through intentional collaborations with campus partners. You First has many successful connections with campus partners, as evidenced by the number of collaborative events offered throughout the academic year. Therefore, the goal is to expand, formalize, and build upon this current foundation to continue serving FG students.

Build Partnerships with Student Support Services

Developing more formalized campus partnerships with student support services and identity-based organizations will benefit FG students and help strengthen the organizations involved. Partnerships can help increase students' awareness of existing university resources and allow You First to share information about their programming and services through co-hosting events. First, You First should identify the relevant campus partners. Identity-based organizations include the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA), Fraternity and Sorority Life, Equality VCU, and identity-based student organizations. Student support service units include TRIO, Career Services, University Academic Advising, VCU Advising, Health Promotion and Well-Being Center, University Student Health Services, University Counseling Services, RamPantry, VCU Library, and any other partners identified by You First.

To actively engage these partners, You First could host an open house where key campus partners meet the staff, learn about You First programming and services, and hear directly from students. At this event, You First could provide information and gather contact information to streamline communications and ask institutional partners to consider co-hosting an event with You First. For example, University Counseling Services offers identity-based support groups for Black, LGBTQIA+, Latinx, and Asian students, among other student populations (VCU, 2022b). You First could partner with University Counseling Services to offer a FG support group that focuses on intersectionality. Furthermore, given the significant number of Black and African American students in this study who did not feel connected and supported at VCU, You First should explore meaningful, long-term partnerships with organizations such as OMSA's Men of Color program and the Black Student Union. To determine the best path forward, You First can consult with these organizations to identify specific resources and support for Black and African

American FG students at VCU. You First should continuously engage these partners through email communications about relevant topics and upcoming events. Furthermore, You First could invite campus partners to an annual meeting to revisit FG priorities, provide updates on programming and services, and revisit future collaborations.

Build Partnerships with Academic Advisors

Study participants highlighted the importance of receiving support from their academic advisors, with 70% ($n = 165$) of survey respondents indicating “always” feeling supported by their academic advisor. FG could build upon this strong support by creating a more collaborative partnership between You First and the advising team from the Student Success office to facilitate greater engagement and connections for FG students. First, given that academic advisors are assigned to students by major, You First could invite advisors to engage with the proposed You First Student Ambassadors program. This collaboration allows You First to engage advisors further while also giving students additional contact points with their advisors. Secondly, You First can work with academic advisors to provide more tailored support to FG students. Advisors use the Navigate system and CSI reports to provide coordinated care to students who indicate a need for academic assistance, social engagements, and counseling services. Academic advisors can be encouraged to refer FG students with significant needs to You First for FG-specific support. You First can then ensure the student is aware of resources, including the You First Mentorship program and the You First student organization, by communicating with them directly as stated in Recommendation 1. Using these existing university resources can enhance tailored support to FG students who may need more proactive interventions and provide additional support to advisors in their work assisting FG students.

More formal relationships between You First and campus partners would help address the importance of intersecting identities, concerns about connection and support of FG Black and African American students and those with family incomes below \$49,999, and the overall lack of awareness and desire to be more connected among respondents. Strengthening and formalizing relationships with these campus partners will help keep them informed and engaged with You First programming and develop collaboration on events to support FG students holistically.

Recommendation 5: Include FG Students' Families

The team's final recommendation focuses on FG students' families. Many focus group participants and survey respondents indicated that they are in college because of their families' hard work and sacrifices. However, because FG students' parents did not graduate from college and, in many cases, never attended college, FG students felt that their families failed to understand their experience as college students. Many survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that they would like their families to understand their FG experience better. You First currently provides resources for FG parents, including sessions on "Supporting Your First-Generation Student" during VCU's Preview Days, a Family Orientation event, and a glossary of higher education terms. In addition to these family-centered events, students identified two ways that You First could help.

Offer More Family Events

First, FG students would like more events specifically for FG students' families. Based on feedback from survey respondents and focus group participants, VCU FG students are overwhelmingly proud of their FG identity. They want to share this pride and their campus with their families. More events for FG students and their families would allow FG students to include their families in their experience at VCU. Additionally, events for FG students and their families

during VCU's Family Weekend and other family events during the year would help families understand their students' daily experiences as college students. One student suggested a Family Weekend specifically for FG students and their families. You First could consider a FG Family dinner with an open mic component, allowing students to thank their families or giving their families the chance to express pride in their students publicly. You First could also host a FG Open House for family members to meet their students' advisors and professors. Connecting this recommendation with the recommendation to provide accessible information and events (Recommendation #3), offering family events that are recorded and online, in addition to in-person events, will accommodate families who cannot come to campus due to distance, timing, or cost.

Provide FG Families with Information

While many FG students know that their families are proud of them and their academic achievements, survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that often their families fail to understand their experience as students at VCU. Developing a guidebook or video series that includes higher education terms and language would help FG students' families. Words or terms such as "dean," "office hours," or "FAFSA" may bewilder students' family members who have not attended college. In some cases, this lack of understanding may limit the family member's ability to grasp their students' academic accomplishments or struggles fully. Information for families should also include VCU-specific terms, so families understand what their students mean if they speak of "the Commons" or "the Compass." Information for families that provides language used frequently in higher education and at VCU specifically may help bridge the gap in the family's understanding.

Information for families could also answer questions that FG families frequently have about higher education. Questions could include "What financial aid options are available to students?" or "How much do students need to study?" For individuals who have not been to college, having access to more information about the resources available and the needs of college students may also give families a clearer understanding of their students' experiences. You First can offer this guidebook or series of videos to families of all incoming first-year FG students as part of a welcome package. Additionally, all information for families can be kept in You First's online hub so that the information is easy to find. To increase accessibility, You First should consider offering information to families in various languages.

FG students at VCU know that their families are proud of them and want them to feel included in the college process. As indicated by survey respondents and focus group participants, FG students would like their families to understand their experiences as students at VCU better. Events and information designed explicitly for VCU FG families may help close the gap in families' understanding of college students' needs, challenges, and daily experiences. By offering support to FG families, You First will provide a valuable service to FG students at VCU. Finally, participants acknowledged the sacrifices their families make so that they have the opportunity to attend college. Family events and resources can allow You First to regularly convey gratitude to FG families for all they have done to support their students to and through higher education.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study helped clarify VCU FG students' thoughts, feelings, experiences, and desires and how these conditions influence their engagement. Informed by these critical insights, these recommendations build upon current strengths and address key areas of opportunity. The team identified additional areas of exploration that could further improve FG students at VCU's

engagement with You First. Additional research also could help You First gain further understanding of VCU FG students and provide opportunities for continual improvement.

Black and African American FG students at VCU overwhelmingly expressed never feeling connected to or supported by VCU. Given these findings, You First should consider further investigating the experiences of Black and African American FG students at VCU, including environmental and institutional barriers impacting their lack of support and connection.

Most FG students expressed that they never had meaningful relationships with faculty and never felt supported by faculty. To understand the reasoning behind FG students' feelings regarding faculty, surveying faculty to determine their knowledge of and interactions with FG students could provide insight on ways to provide faculty with the tools they need to support this student population.

While the study found that students of all classification levels are affected by their FG identity, findings also showed that as students move from their freshmen to senior year, they experience their FG identities differently. Freshmen were the least likely to think about being FG, whereas juniors were the most likely to think about their FG identity. Sophomores were the most likely to have both positive and negative feelings about being FG. However, seniors were most likely only to have positive feelings about being FG. Conducting a longitudinal study to determine why perceptions of FG identity become more positive as FG students move from freshmen to seniors could point toward a need for more tailored support within each student classification.

Lastly, 60.9% ($n = 28$) of survey respondents with family incomes under \$49,999 indicated that they never felt that they met their academic goals at VCU. This feeling may negatively impact FG students' experience and persistence at VCU. Further research could

provide insight into factors impeding students from meeting their academic goals and additional supports, including academic pipeline programs, that may better support FG students.

Chapter Summary

The study findings resulted in five recommendations. First, You First should increase awareness of its services and programs by automatically adding FG students to the You First listserv, creating targeted communications, providing multiple points of contact, and facilitating earlier opportunities for outreach to FG students before enrolling at VCU. Secondly, You First should promote FG student connections with other FG students by considering a FG Student Ambassador Program with representatives from each school/college and incorporate FG training for faculty to increase support for FG students. Next, FG students would benefit from information in more accessible formats, such as offering events in various modalities, recording topical events for future viewing, and providing an online hub of information. Furthermore, to better support the diverse needs of FG students, You First should formalize their partnerships across the institution by increasing collaborations with student support services, identity-based organizations, and academic advisors. Lastly, given the importance of family, You First should cultivate inclusivity among FG students' families by offering more family events and providing a VCU-specific glossary of terms and a handbook or video series for families. Implementing these recommendations would positively impact FG students at VCU in many ways. However, some may require additional financial resources for staffing to ensure a successful implementation.

Conclusion

Reflecting You First's commitment to providing support to FG students at VCU, You First seeks to improve engagement as seen by event participation and service utilization rates that vary by program and fall below the total FG population. VCU's high percentage of FG students makes this challenge even more urgent, with the desire to increase FG student retention a critical priority.

This capstone incorporated a problem and context analysis, a review of the literature, and a mixed-methods study to support these important goals. The team analyzed institutional data that included a survey and focus group sessions with FG students at VCU. Additionally, the team used data from You First to gain insight into FG student identities, needs, and factors that impact their engagement with You First. The team analyzed quantitative data analysis using descriptive statistics. Key themes that emerged from the survey analysis guided the selection of participants and the development of questions for the qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Qualitative data from the focus group sessions were analyzed using a priori coding. The data collected provided insight into how VCU FG students feel about their FG identity and being identified as FG by You First. In addition, the team gained a deeper understanding of VCU FG students' challenges by uncovering their needs and the factors that impact their engagement with You First.

FG students at VCU reported that they have positive feelings related to their FG identity. Challenges identified by FG students were not associated with feelings about but rather with experiences related to the FG identity. Through survey responses and focus group sessions, FG students shared that they need help connecting to other FG students and faculty, increased access to information and events, and help to navigate the resources and support available at VCU.

Because of the various challenges they must confront as FG students, such as navigating higher education alone, many survey respondents and focus group participants indicated they wished they had known of You First sooner. This finding suggests a clear need for increased awareness of You First's support services. Increased awareness will lead to increased engagement of FG students, addressing You First's concerns about minimal engagement. This study further found that even among FG students aware of You First, lack of time or scheduling conflicts affected their ability to participate in You First events. Providing events in different modalities, creating an online hub, or recording events will allow FG students to access the valuable topical information You First provides more easily and quickly.

Promoting connections between FG students and cultivating inclusivity among FG students' families will foster critical relationships for FG student success and support You First's effort to increase FG student retention. Additionally, by increasing formal and collaborative relationships with other student support services, identity-based organizations, and academic advisors, You First will better support the diverse needs of FG students at VCU.

Overall, You First's main priority is for FG students at VCU to succeed. The unit's submission of a Request for Assistance demonstrates You First's desire and willingness to improve by making the recommended changes so that more FG students receive the support they need. Specifically, these recommendations should help You First increase its engagement with FG students at VCU and increase the number of FG students utilizing You First services and attending You First events. With the enhancement of their services, You First can offer more opportunities to FG students and ensure that student success is at the forefront of their mission. Furthermore, by leveraging the strengths that FG students bring to VCU - their determination,

pride, and motivation to succeed - You First will build a more positive experience for FG students and their families.

Another vital component of these recommendations is to support the growing undergraduate FG student population at VCU. Experiencing a 4% ($n = 229$) growth from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021, the current undergraduate FG student population totals 6,345 students. With this growth, FG students at VCU now make up 30% of the total undergraduate population (K. Smith, personal communication, January 13, 2022). Leveraging these recommendations supports the need to increase FG student retention rates at VCU.

As the FG population at VCU continues to grow, it is essential to remember the assets that FG students bring to their college experience and the challenges they face on their higher education journey. While retention of FG students at VCU is a critical metric, the ultimate goal is student success. As FG students receive the necessary support at VCU, their increased graduation rates will lead to achieving their career goals and beyond. By creating more opportunities to connect and build relationships with other FG students and faculty, You First will support FG students' success at VCU and give hope to future generations.

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Appendix A

College Student Inventory Form B-Sample

Your Logo Here

Noel-Levitz

College Student Inventory Form B
Michael L. Straffil, Ph.D.

WELCOME

Welcome Preview Student

Take Survey

Remember, answer every item!


The College Student Inventory™ is part of a carefully designed program that helps your institution determine how you learn best.

After completing the inventory, your results will be used to plan a program of support services.

While completing the inventory and participating in the follow-up activities are voluntary, you are strongly encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

The inventory has multiple sections, each with its own set of instructions. Complete each part as accurately as you can.

By completing and submitting this online inventory, you give consent to its release to Noel-Levitz for the purpose of scoring, processing, and preparing reports.



Your Logo Here

Noel-Levitz

College Student Inventory Form B

WELCOME

Please enter the following information:

First Name:

Middle Initial:

Last Name:

Student Identification Number:

Date of Birth:

Gender:

Email Address:

If you are not a student with **Demonstration College**, please do not proceed. Instead, contact RMS-Tech@NoelLevitz.com.

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Your Logo Here

College Student Inventory Form B

WELCOME

Instructions: The main body of the inventory contains 100 items. Answer each item by selecting the option that best describes you. Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

Begin with the first item and complete items 1 through 9 before moving on to the next section.

1 While enrolled in classes, the amount of time I expect to spend **working at a job** is approximately:

- 0 (I have no plans to work)
- 1 to 10 hours per week
- 11 to 20 hours per week
- 21 to 30 hours per week
- 31 to 40 hours per week
- over 40 hours per week

NOTE

This item only applies to time frames during which you are actually attending classes. It does not apply to summer employment, school breaks, or other such periods. If your work schedule varies, take a rough average across weeks.

2 The average of all my grades during my senior year in high school was approximately:

- A
- halfway between A and B
- B
- halfway between B and C
- C
- halfway between C and D
- D

NOTE

If your school did not use letter grades, do your best to translate your grades into the system. If you completed a GED, try to estimate the grades you think you would have earned for your last two GED courses if you had been taking them as regular high school courses. If a response that makes this estimate very difficult, just try to give your best estimate.

3 Compared to the average high school graduating senior in this country, I consider my general academic knowledge to be in the:

- highest 20%
- next to the highest 20%
- middle 20%
- next to the lowest 20%
- lowest 20%

NOTE

This item is about your general academic knowledge. This consists of the ideas and facts you have learned through the core courses designed to prepare you for college (e.g., English, mathematics, science, and social studies).

4 I would describe my racial/ethnic origin as:

- Black/African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Multiracial or other ethnic origin
- Prefer not to respond

5 What is the highest level of education completed by your mother/guardian?

- 8 years or less of elementary school
- some high school but no diploma
- a high school diploma or equivalent
- 1 to 3 years of college (including study at a technical, community, or junior college)
- a 4-year undergraduate college degree (bachelor's degree)
- a master's degree
- a professional degree (medicine, dentistry, law, philosophy, or other similar degrees)

6 What is the highest level of education completed by your father/guardian?

- 8 years or less of elementary school
- some high school but no diploma
- a high school diploma or equivalent
- 1 to 3 years of college (including study at a technical, community, or junior college)
- a 4-year undergraduate college degree (bachelor's degree)
- a master's degree
- a professional degree (medicine, dentistry, law, philosophy, or other similar degrees)

7 The highest degree that I plan to pursue is:

- none
- a 1-year certificate
- a 2-year college degree (associate)
- a 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
- a master's degree
- a professional degree (medicine, dentistry, law, philosophy, or other similar degrees)

8 In relation to the **general population** of our society, I consider my academic ability to be:

- considerably below average
- slightly below average
- average
- slightly above average
- considerably above average (in the top 20%)
- extremely high (in the top 5%)

NOTE

Academic ability is the general capacity to understand and remember complex ideas through formal education. It involves learning through such media as books, lectures, written assignments, and computer programs.

9 Which of the following most accurately describes the **timing** of your decision to apply for admission to your college or university?

- My decision was made a few days before classes began.
- My decision was made a few weeks before classes began.
- My decision was made many months before classes began.

Next

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Your Logo
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College Student Inventory Form B WELCOME

Instructions: Items in this section measure a variety of attitudes toward college. Use the following rating scale to answer each item.

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

If you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a "7." Agreement that is fairly strong but not total is indicated by selecting a "5," while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by a "3." Total disagreement is indicated by selecting "1."

In answering the items on study habits and teachers, you should draw primarily on your pre-college experiences.

Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

10 I have found a potential career that strongly attracts me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11 Most of my teachers have been very caring and dedicated. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12 Books have never gotten me very excited. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13 I have financial problems that are very distracting and troublesome. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14 Enter a "2" for this item. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15 I get along well with people who disagree with my opinion openly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16 I dread the thought of going to school for several more years, and there is a part of me that would like to give up the whole thing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17 I would like to receive some instruction in the most effective ways to take college exams. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18 I take very careful notes during class, and I review them thoroughly before a test. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19 I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20 Most of the teachers I had in school were too opinionated and inflexible. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21 When I was a child, my parents usually understood me, respected my judgment, and treated me in ways that helped me grow. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22 I would like to talk to someone about getting a part-time job during the regular school year. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23 I pick up new vocabulary words quickly, and I find it easy to use them in my speech and writing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24 I would like to attend an informal gathering where I can meet some new friends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25 Of all the things I could do at this point in my life, going to college is definitely the most satisfying. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26 When someone's opinions strongly disagree with my own, I tend to develop unfriendly feelings and to avoid close contact with the person. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27 I plan to transfer to another school before completing a degree at this college or university. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28 I would like to receive some help in improving my study habits. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29 I would like to talk with someone about the qualifications needed for certain occupations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30 I have great difficulty concentrating on schoolwork, and I often get behind. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

[Back](#) [Next](#)

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

Your Logo
Here

College Student Inventory Form B

Instructions: Items in this section measure a variety of attitudes toward college. Use the following rating scale to answer each item.

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

If you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a "7". Agreement that is fairly strong but not total is indicated by selecting a "6," while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by a "5." Total disagreement is indicated by selecting "1."

Answering the items on study habits and teachers you should draw primarily on your pre-college experiences.

Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

31 I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from reading. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32 The teachers I had in school respected me as a person and treated me fairly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33 Participating in large social gatherings is of little interest to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34 I become very confused when I try to choose an occupation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35 Enter a "5" for this item. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36 I have the financial resources that I need to finish college. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

37 Math has always been a challenge for me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

38 I am deeply committed to my educational goals, and I'm fully prepared to make the effort and sacrifices that will be needed to attain them. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

39 I would like to talk with a counselor about eliminating an unwanted habit (involving food, drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

40 My studying is very irregular and unpredictable. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

41 I can feel comfortable with someone who thinks quite differently than I do on major social issues. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

42 I would like to receive some individual help in improving my writing skills. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

43 I would like to find out more about student government and the various student activities on campus. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

44 I would like some help selecting an educational plan that will prepare me to get a good job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

45 My family had one way of looking at me when I was a child, and they didn't understand my feelings very well. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

46 I would like to talk with a counselor about some difficulties in my personal relationships or social life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

47 I would like to talk with someone about getting a loan to help me through school. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

48 I greatly enjoy getting together with a crowd of people and having fun. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

49 I have difficulty organizing my ideas in a paper, and I tend to make a lot of punctuation and grammar mistakes. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

50 I have a very good understanding of general biology (e.g., cell structure, metabolism, genetics, and the circulatory system). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

[Next](#)

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

Your Logo Here

College Street Level 10 Form B

Instructions: Items in this section measure a variety of attitudes toward college. Use the following rating scale to answer each item.

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

If you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a "7". A statement that is fairly strong but not true is indicated by a choice of a "6", while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by a "5." The disagreement is indicated by selecting "1".

In answering the items on study habits and teachers, you should draw primarily on your pre-college experiences.

Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

51 I am very strongly dedicated to finishing college—no matter what obstacles get in my way. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

52 I don't enjoy reading serious books and articles, and I only do it when I have to. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

53 I have made a firm decision to enter a certain occupation and have begun planning my life around that decision. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

54 In my opinion, many teachers are more concerned about themselves than they are about their students. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

55 I would like to talk with someone about the salaries and future outlook for various occupations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

56 Enter a "4" for this item. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

57 I am very good at figuring out the deeper meaning of a short story or novel. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

58 I would like to receive some individual help in improving my math skills. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

59 I don't have any financial problems that will interfere with my schoolwork. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

60 I have a very strong desire to continue my education, and I am quite determined to finish a degree. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

61 I would like to talk with a counselor about some family problems. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

62 I study very hard for all my courses, even those I don't like. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

63 I find it easy to be friends with people whose political ideas differ sharply from my own. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

64 I have a hard time understanding and solving complex math problems. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

65 My family and I communicated very well when I was young, and we had a good understanding of each other's point of view. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

66 Most teachers have a superior attitude that I find very annoying. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

67 I would like to meet an experienced student who can show me around and give me some advice. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

68 I would like to talk to someone about getting a scholarship. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

69 Learning new vocabulary words is a slow and difficult process for me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

70 I would like some help selecting an occupation that is well suited to my interests and abilities. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

[Next](#)

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

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Your Logo
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College Student Inventory Form B WELCOME

Instructions: Items in this section measure a variety of attitudes toward college. Use the following rating scale to answer each item.

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

If you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a "7." Agreement that is fairly strong but not total is indicated by selecting a "6," while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by a "3." Total disagreement is indicated by selecting "1."

In answering the items on study habits and teachers, you should draw primarily on your pre-college experiences.

Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

71 It is hard for me to relax and just have fun with a group of people. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

72 My understanding of the physical sciences is very weak. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

73 I wish that society did not put so much pressure on people to go to college, as I'd really rather be doing other things at this point in my life. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

74 I have no desire to transfer to another school before finishing a degree at this college or university. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

75 Over the years, books have broadened my horizons and stimulated my imagination. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

76 Enter a "7" for this item. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

77 I am very confused about what occupation to pursue. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

78 I have developed a solid system of self-discipline, which helps me keep up with my schoolwork. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

79 I am in a bad financial position, and the pressure to earn extra money will probably interfere with my studies. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

80 I am capable of writing a very clear and well-organized paper. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

81 I feel uneasy and distrustful toward people whose way of thinking is quite dissimilar to my own. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

82 I would like to receive tutoring in one or more of my courses. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

83 When I try to study, I usually get bored and quit after a few minutes. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

84 I would like to talk with a counselor about some emotional tensions that are bothering me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

85 I can think of many things I would rather do than go to college. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

86 I have always enjoyed the challenge of trying to solve complex math problems. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

87 When I was a child, the other members of my family often said hurtful things that caused unpleasant feelings. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

88 I liked my teachers, and I feel they did a good job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

89 Because they irritate me, I tend to stay away from people whose ideas are quite different from my own. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

90 In English classes, I've had difficulty analyzing an author's style and theme. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Back Next

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

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Your Logo
Here

College Student Inventory Form BWELCOME

Instructions: Items in this section measure a variety of attitudes toward college. Use the following rating scale to answer each item.

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

If you agree completely with a statement, you should answer with a "7". Agreement that is fairly strong but not total is indicated by selecting a "5", while agreement that is fairly weak is indicated by a "3". Total disagreement is indicated by selecting "1".

In answering the items on study habits and teachers, you should draw primarily on your pre-college experiences.

Click on the radio button that corresponds to the option you have selected.

91 I would like to find out more about the clubs and social organizations at my college.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

92 I would like to talk to someone about the opportunities available for summer employment.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

93 I have a very good grasp of the scientific ideas I've studied in school.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

94 I often wonder if a college education is really worth all the time, money, and effort that I'm being asked to spend on it.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

95 Enter a "6" for this item.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

96 I am very adventurous and outgoing at large social gatherings.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

97 I would like to talk with a counselor about some feelings of discouragement or unhappy thoughts that keep bothering me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

98 I would like to talk with someone about the advantages and disadvantages of various occupations.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

99 I would like to receive some training to improve my reading skills.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

100 I authorize my institution to share results from this inventory with my advisor and appropriate student service offices, which will help me select courses and make other educational decisions:

YES

NO (If you select this option, all of your reports will be kept on file with the Coordinator of this program; as soon as the Student Reports are available, you will be able to obtain them from the Coordinator.)

NOTE

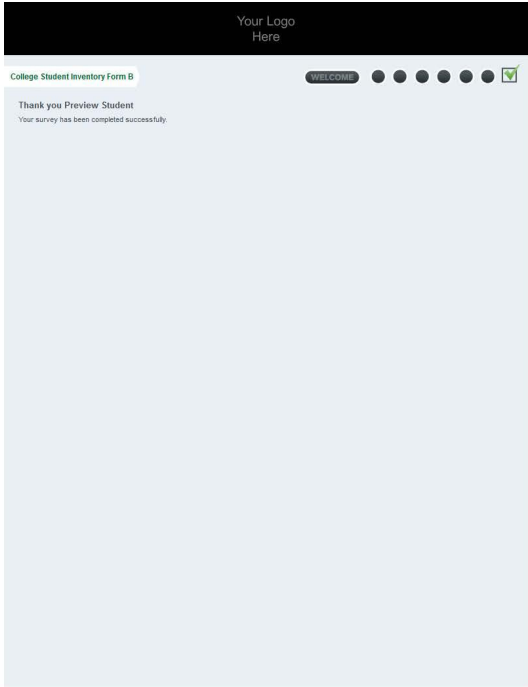
The following is not a rating item. Select Yes if you agree with the statement. Select No if you do not.

BackFinish

RATING SCALE

NOT AT ALL TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 COMPLETELY TRUE

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Appendix B

College Student Inventory Form B Scale Descriptions



The College Student Inventory

Form B Scale Descriptions

The Retention Management System Plus

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The CSI Reports

The College Student Inventory (CSI) Form B is a 100-item questionnaire. Students will likely have completed the inventory before or during the first few weeks of classes, and you can readily access reports about each student. If your campus uses the online CSI, these reports are available immediately upon completion of the CSI. If your campus uses the paper version of the CSI, the answer sheets are shipped to Ruffalo Noel Levitz, scored within two to four business days of arrival to our office, and then posted to a secure online link for your access.

The Advisor/Counselor Report and the Student Report convey the student's self-reported information as concisely as possible. The Student Report includes two to three pages of narrative about the student's results which are not included in the other reports. In the narrative, your campus coordinator may have inserted a paragraph about your particular campus services under Receptivity to Support Services. If your coordinator has given you permission to access these reports electronically, please review the Report Access for Advisors.

The following discussion provides a detailed explanation of the more sensitive CSI Coordinator Report. Though the Coordinator Report is comparable to the Advisor/Counselor Report, a key feature of the Coordinator Report is not, however, included in the Advisor/Counselor Report; namely, the Summary Observations (dropout proneness, predicted academic difficulty, educational stress, and receptivity to institutional help).

Identifying Information

This section lists the student's name, educational level, gender, age, student ID, and group designation. The date that the report was initially generated from the CSI and the name of your institution are also noted.

Restricted Report

If the student has responded "no" to the last item of the CSI, then a boxed statement appears at the

Restricted to Program Coordinator per Student's Request

top of the report:

If you receive or access a Restricted Report by mistake, you should return it promptly to the RMS *Plus* coordinator.

Instructions

This section contains a brief set of instructions to guide you in discussing the report with the student. Suggestions for follow-up measures and appropriate use of the report also appear. This section is printed on every report as a reminder of the basic conditions under which the information has been made available.

Summary Observations (only found on Coordinator Report)

This section presents the results from four summary scales, discussed below. All scores in this section are expressed in terms of stanines, which are normalized standard scores with a mean of 5 and a standard deviation of 1.96. The distribution of students falling into the different categories is:

Score	Distribution
9	4%
8	7%
7	12%
6	17%
5	20%
4	17%
3	12%
2	7%
1	4%

The larger the stanine is, the larger the corresponding raw score. For example, a stanine of 9 indicates that the student's raw score was in the top 4 percent of the normative sample, a stanine of 8 indicates that the student's raw score was in the next 7 percent (and the top 11 percent of the sample), and so forth.

The Dropout Proneness Scale

This scale measures the student's overall inclination to drop out of school before finishing a degree. The scale was developed empirically by comparing students who stayed in school after their first term with those who did not.

One should be careful not to attribute greater predictive power to the dropout scale than it actually possesses. Existing research suggests that many students with high scores on dropout proneness will not, in fact, drop out during their first term. While predictiveness should increase when dropout is studied over time, there are simply too many mediating factors in predicting this behavior with a high degree of accuracy. For this reason, *students with high scores on dropout proneness should be considered as having a pattern of intellectual and motivational traits that is loosely associated with dropping out, but which may or may not lead to actual dropout in any given case.*

The Predicted Academic Difficulty Scale

This scale was developed by correlating CSI questions with first-term college grade point average (GPA). It is thus designed to predict who is most likely to have low grades in college. The caution that applies to the dropout scale also applies to this scale. The scale will identify some, but not all, of the students who will encounter academic difficulty during their college careers. *Predictors of academic difficulty include such factors as study habits, verbal and writing confidence, math and science confidence, desire to finish college, interactions with previous teachers, and high school GPA.*

The Educational Stress Scale

This scale measures the student's general feelings of distress in the context of college. It was developed as a factor analysis of all of the CSI's scales, and it represents the first (largest) factor. One part of the scale focuses on emotional aspects of academic life. Thus, students scoring high on this scale tend to feel dissatisfied with teachers in general based on their earlier school experiences. They also tend to have a lower-than-average score on desire to finish college. Finally, their study habits tend to be lower than average, suggesting difficulties in focusing and self-discipline.

The educational stress scale also measures two broader aspects of distress. First, high-scorers tend to have a lower-than-average sense of family emotional support. Second, high-scorers are more interested in receiving personal counseling than most students. Based on these considerations, *this scale should be considered the CSI's primary indicator of the student's need for personal counseling.*

But one should keep in mind that the CSI's main purpose is not to assess mental health. For this reason there are very important facets of mental health that this scale does not measure. Rather, it is merely one piece of information that can be used in making referrals for personal counseling.

Receptivity to Institutional Help

This scale indicates how responsive the student is likely to be to intervention. The higher the score, the more receptive the student is. This scale is based on how strongly the student expressed the desire for help in a wide variety of areas, such as career counseling, personal counseling, social engagement, academic assistance, and financial guidance.

Overall, the four Summary Observations scales have been keyed in a way that simplifies their joint interpretation. Thus, high scores on the dropout proneness, predicted academic difficulty, and educational stress scales all indicate high need. A high score on receptivity to institutional help indicates a strong desire for help. The general pattern is for high scores to imply the advisability of intervention. In addition to giving referrals to students who score high on these scales, you may want to make a special effort to befriend them so they will feel comfortable coming to you for advice at critical times during their first year in college.

The summary scales involve sensitive global information which a student may not be able to understand or accept in a constructive fashion. Thus, a student with a high score on dropout proneness might misinterpret this score to mean that they should give up because they stand little chance of succeeding at college. *In fact, the opposite conclusion might be called for: that the student can succeed if motivational barriers are overcome. Because of their susceptibility to misinterpretation, it is recommended that the summary scores not be discussed with students.* If a student claims the Coordinator Report, which will occur very rarely, you will want to have a special conference with that student to explain the summary scores.

Motivational Assessment

The heart of the CSI Form B consists of the 17 independent motivational scales in this section. The student's standing on each scale is indicated in two ways: as a percentile rank and as a bar graph on a visual profile.

If you are interested in the exact score, you can refer directly to the percentile rank; if you prefer a general and immediate sense of the student's motivational pattern, the visual profile will give you an overview at a glance. A percentile rank indicates the proportion of students in the normative sample who scored below that student.

These scores are organized into five sections: academic motivation, social motivation, general coping, receptivity to support services, and two supplementary scales.

Academic Motivation

Study Habits. This scale measures the student's willingness to make the sacrifices needed to

achieve academic success. *It focuses on a student's effort, rather than interest in intellectual matters or the desire for a degree.* It can therefore be used to make referrals to services that assist students in developing better study habits.

A sample item is, "I study very hard for all my courses, even those I don't like."

Reading Interests. This scale measures how much the student enjoys the actual learning process, not the extent to which the student is striving to attain high grades or to complete a degree. *It measures the degree to which the student enjoys reading and discussing serious ideas.* Students with high scores are likely to enjoy classroom discussions and will feel comfortable with the high level of intellectual activity that often occurs in the college classroom. Students with low scores can be encouraged to broaden and deepen their intellectual interests.

A sample item is, "Over the years, books have broadened my horizons and stimulated my imagination."

Verbal and Writing Confidence. This scale measures the degree to which the student feels capable of doing well in courses that heavily emphasize reading, writing, and public speaking. It is not intended as a substitute for aptitude assessment, but rather as an indicator of self-esteem relative to this type of task. A comparison between the student's standing on this scale and verbal aptitude or achievement test can be very revealing. Talented students who underestimate their abilities in the verbal area need to be strongly encouraged to recognize their potential. Students with low scores can be referred to services that will help them strengthen their verbal confidence.

A sample item is, "I am capable of writing a very clear and well-organized paper."

Math and Science Confidence. This scale measures the degree to which the student feels capable of doing well in math and science courses. It is an indicator of self-esteem relative to this type of task and is not intended as a substitute for aptitude assessment. A comparison between the student's standing on this scale and a math and science aptitude or achievement test can be very revealing. Some talented students underestimate their abilities, and they need to be strongly encouraged to recognize their talents. Students with low scores can be referred to services that will help them strengthen their confidence in math and science.

A sample item is, "Math has always been a challenge for me."

Commitment to College. This scale measures the degree to which the student values a college education, the satisfactions of college life, and the long-term benefits of graduation. *It identifies students who possess a keen interest in persisting, regardless of their prior level of achievement.* With low-scoring students, an advisor can explore their beliefs and values related to college. In some cases, additional clues about scores for this scale can be informed by low scores in parental education levels, career planning scores, or academic confidence.

A sample item is, "I am very strongly dedicated to finishing college – no matter what obstacles get in my way."

Interactions with Previous Teachers. This scale measures the student's attitudes toward teachers and administrators in general, as acquired through their pre-college experiences. *Students with poor academic achievement often express a general hostility toward teachers and this attitude often interferes with their work.* A counselor may want to help a low-scoring student clarify how certain isolated incidents in school may have influenced their attitude toward all educators. Sometimes a low score reflects a degree of self-sufficiency that borders on arrogance when the student is a high-achiever. Other times a low score may indicate that the student has been treated poorly by one or more teachers as far back as elementary school; perhaps the student was subjected

to ridicule or perhaps efforts were criticized or went unrecognized by a teacher.

A sample item is, "Most of my teachers have been very caring and dedicated."

General Coping

Social Engagement. *This scale measures the student's general inclination to join in social activities.* The relationship between sociability and academic outcomes can be complex. High sociability, for instance, can be a positive force for a person with strong study habits, but a negative force for a person with poor study skills. An advisor may wish to explore the implications of an extreme score, either high or low, with the student.

A sample item is, "I would like to attend an informal gathering where I can meet some new friends."

Family Support. *This scale measures the student's satisfaction with the quality of communication, understanding, and respect that they have experienced in their family.* These are factors that can influence their ability to adapt to the stresses of college life. An advisor can offer encouragement and empathy to low-scoring students, or they can refer these students for personal counseling. Low family support has repeatedly emerged in the validity studies as a strong correlate of attrition, particularly in academically successful students. Many advisors focus heavily on this scale for insights into a student's difficulties.

A sample item is, "My family and I communicated very well when I was young, and we have a good understanding of each other's point of view."

Capacity for Tolerance. *This scale measures the degree to which the student feels that he or she can accept people without regard to their political and social opinions.* Most directly, it indicates whether a student will be able to tolerate the diversity of social backgrounds to which he or she is exposed at college. But the scale also provides a broader indication of the student's general socio-political flexibility as it relates to all unfamiliar and threatening philosophical perspectives, including those that arise in course content. Thus, it can identify students whose perspective may impede the learning of threatening ideas in such areas as philosophy, comparative religion, world literature, world history, and the social sciences. An advisor or counselor may wish to discuss this potential problem with the student and encourage him or her to consider new ways of thinking about the basic issues of life without immediately accepting or rejecting them.

A sample item is, "I find it easy to be friends with people whose political ideas differ sharply from my own."

Career Plans. *This scale measures the degree to which the student has defined a career goal and developed a firm commitment to it.* Because career aspirations are often the central foundation upon which academic motivation is based, students with low scores should be strongly encouraged to seek career counseling. In a more general way, the scale can be useful in assessing the student's progress in moving from the exploratory and adventurous attitudes of adolescence to the adoption of greater realism and responsibility typical of adulthood. Lack of progress on this dimension may indicate the need for personal counseling.

A sample item is, "I have made a firm decision to enter a certain occupation and have begun planning my life around that decision."

Financial Security. *This scale measures the extent to which the student feels secure about his or her financial situation, especially as it relates to current and future college enrollment.* The scale is not intended to measure the objective level of financial resources that the student has, only their feeling of being financially secure. Some students with quite modest means may feel more secure than do

students with much greater means but higher expectations. With low-scoring students, an advisor can explore their financial needs and refer them to appropriate offices for assistance.

A sample item is, "I have the financial resources that I need to finish college."

Request for Support Services

Academic Assistance. *This scale measures the student's desire to receive course-specific tutoring or individual help with study habits, reading skills, examination skills, writing skills, or mathematics skills. It can be taken into account in deciding whether to encourage the student to seek academic assistance.*

A sample item is, "I would like to receive some help in improving my study habits."

Personal Counseling. *This scale measures the student's felt need for help with personal problems. It covers attitudes toward school, instructor problems, roommate problems, family problems, general tensions, problems relating to dating and friendships, and problems in controlling an unwanted habit. The scale is a very useful aid in deciding whether to encourage the student to seek counseling for motivational problems indicated elsewhere in the CSI.*

A sample item is, "I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school."

Social Engagement. *This scale measures the student's desire to meet other students and to participate in group activities. Students with high scores can be directed toward the type of social activities they desire.*

A sample item is, "I would like to attend an informal gathering where I could meet some new friends."

Career Guidance. *This scale measures the student's desire for help in selecting a major or career. It can be used in conjunction with the career planning scale. If the student has a low score on both scales, for example, an advisor can point out that he or she seems to be avoiding the issue of career choice.*

A sample item is, "I would like some help selecting an occupation that is well suited to my interests and abilities."

Financial Guidance. *This scale measures the student's desire to discuss ways of increasing his/her financial resources for college. Even though the opportunities for scholarships are usually very limited at the point at which the student completes the inventory, loans and work-study positions may still be available. A referral to the placement office may also be very helpful. In some cases, it may be helpful for an advisor simply to empathize with the student's situation and provide encouragement regarding the prospects of working part-time while attending school. Depending on the circumstances, the advisor may wish to help the student recognize the advisability of cutting back on his or her course load when working long hours at a job.*

A sample item is, "I would like to talk with someone about getting a loan to help me through school."

Supplementary Scales

Internal Validity. *This scale measures the student's carefulness in completing the inventory. Each question asks the student to follow a simple instruction and it is scored in terms of whether or not the student followed the instruction. The scale is very useful in identifying any students who might have responded randomly in order to finish quickly. A sample item from this category is, "Enter a '2' for this*

question.”

Since the overwhelming majority of students (97.1 percent) make one error or less on the validity scale, the task can be considered quite easy. For this reason, students who fall into the categories labeled “questionable” (two or three errors) or “unsatisfactory” (four or more errors) are likely to be distractible, oppositional, or uncommitted to their education. Because these traits are related to dropout, a low validity score may prove to be an indicator of dropout proneness.

In some cases, a low validity score can indicate that a student has a severe language difficulty. But because the validity task is so easy, many students with serious deficits in English will not be identified through the scale. Schools enrolling large numbers of students with significant problems with English should consider using a standard reading test to screen all first-year students. If that approach is not feasible, advisors should at least remain alert to the possibility that a foreign student may not have had an adequate understanding of the CSI to complete it properly. The indicator of native language can be useful in this regard (see below). Problems can then be handled on an individual basis.

Specific Recommendations

Selecting support services is a difficult task, especially for first-year students. Beginning students have complex needs, which they do not understand very well. In addition, they may have many motivational barriers to admitting their needs, even to themselves. The present section helps students make these decisions by presenting a set of recommendations that clarify their needs, relate their needs to specific forms of assistance, and present the issue of assistance as a set of clear alternatives that can be readily evaluated and compared.

Means of Arriving at Recommendations

To use the recommendations effectively, it is helpful to understand how they are formulated. The CSI’s scoring program contains a pool of 25 potential action statements, which are listed in the following section. Each action relates to a particular form of student assistance (e.g., “Get help with reading skills”). A priority score ranging from 0.0 to 10.00 is computed for each potential action based on a comprehensive analysis of the student’s needs and desires. A 10.0 indicates a very high-priority recommendation.

Needs are inferred from the student’s background data (e.g., high school grades) and motivational assessment (e.g., study habits, desire to finish college). The priority score for a given action will increase in direct proportion to the measured need for that action.

These initial, need-based priority scores are then adjusted in two ways.

- The first adjustment takes into account the student’s general interest in the broader category to which the action belongs. For instance, the priority scores of all potential actions related to academic support are increased if the student’s general receptivity to academic support is high.
- The second adjustment takes into account the student’s desire for the specific assistance in question. If a student expresses a strong desire for help with reading skills, for example, then his or her priority score for this potential action is adjusted upward.

After these computations have been made, the potential actions having the highest priority scores are printed in the form of short, direct recommendations (e.g., “Get help in selecting an academic program”). Recommendations are printed in order of priority scores, with the strongest recommendations at the top. Priority scores are noted directly after the statement of recommendation. For example, “Discuss job market for college graduates 8.0.”

The CSI Coordinator Report ranks the seven strongest recommendations, while the Advisor/Counselor Report and Student Report state the 10.0 strongest recommendations in order of importance to the student.

Most priority scores that appear on reports fall in the top end of the distribution, from 6.0 to 10.0. Approximately 70 percent of priority scores are below 7.0. However, even a priority score of 5.0 is worth consideration, since it exceeds 40 percent of all the priority scores in a normal distribution.

Only rarely will an advisor see a priority score of 10.0, since a student must have both the highest possible need and the highest possible desire in order to earn a priority of 10.0.

Potential Action Statements

The following list contains the 25 potential action statements that form the pool from which recommendations are made in the CSI reports. You'll notice that they cluster thematically around academics, personal, career, financial, and social areas.

- a. Get help with exam skills.
- b. Get help with study habits.
- c. Get help with writing skills.
- d. Get help with basic math skills.
- e. Get tutoring in selected areas.
- f. Get help with reading skills.
- g. Discuss attitude toward school with counselor.
- h. Discuss any unwanted habit with counselor.
- i. Discuss personal relationships and social life with counselor.
- j. Discuss any family problems with counselor.
- k. Discuss any emotional tensions with counselor.
- l. Discuss any unhappy feelings with counselor.
- m. Discuss the qualifications for occupations.
- n. Get help in selecting an academic program.
- o. Discuss job market for college graduates.
- p. Get help in selecting an occupation.
- q. Discuss advantages/disadvantages of occupations.
- r. Get help in finding a part-time job.
- s. Get help in obtaining a loan.
- t. Get help in obtaining a scholarship.
- u. Get help in finding a summer job.
- v. Get help in meeting new friends.
- w. Get information about student activities.
- x. Get advice from an experienced student.
- y. Get information about clubs and social organizations.

Priority of Recommendations

On the CSI Reports, priority scores of greater than 8.0 are most noteworthy. If a student has multiple recommendations that exceed this level, you may need to focus the student's attention on those recommendations that you believe are the most critical. If the student is concerned about having so many priority recommendations, explain that the high scores are partly due to his/her high level of

receptivity. You may also want to explain that 8.0 is a somewhat arbitrary number and that it does not represent a critical dividing point; it is merely a rough boundary line.

Special care should be taken in making final recommendations to students. The printed recommendations should only be considered preliminary, as they are generated by an analytical model that contains a definite margin of error. The model assumes that students are most likely to accept and act upon recommendations that are consistent with their existing motivational framework. Based on this premise, it gives relatively strong weight to the student's general receptivity in the area and to their expressed desire for the specific form of assistance under consideration. While the model appears sound as a general theoretical basis for formulating recommendations, *it is not intended to be definitive*. There will be individuals who do not fit the model's assumptions.

For this reason, *one should never accept recommendations uncritically*. The recommendations should be weighed in terms of all the information you have about the student, including transcripts, placement scores, and the student's comments during your conference. After such consideration, you may well decide to place more emphasis on an intermediate recommendation (e.g., one with a priority score of 6.0) than on a strong one (e.g., one with a priority score of 9.0). Given the unique features in every individual case and the fact that printed recommendations are already a select subset from the larger pool of potential actions, such adjustments are quite appropriate.

Student Background Information

To better understand the student's present motivational pattern, it is often helpful to have an overview of his or her background. For this reason, *the report provides a summary of information about the student's high school academics, family educational background, hours the student plans to work, and other indications*.

High School Academics

This section presents information about the student's high school education.

Senior-Year Grade Point Average. The student is asked to give the average of all their grades during their senior year in high school. The response is often quite accurate and it gives a moderately good indication of the student's first-year academic performance.

Family Background

This section provides valuable information about the student's family background. Since the family often instills many key skills and attitudes, it usually has the single greatest influence on the way a student approaches college.

Racial/Ethnic Origin. This question can be a springboard for the advisor to identify broad bases of community support for all ethnic groups on campus, as well as support services for students of diversity.

Mother's/Father's/Guardian's Education. Information about the educational level of the student's parents is helpful in gaining insight into the student's socioeconomic perspective, especially his or her feelings about education. Students raised by well-educated parents often have a greater-than-average appreciation for the value of education and career success, but they may also feel burdened by pressures to meet high parental expectations. Other parents may strongly encourage achievement so that their child will have more opportunities than they did, or they may discourage academic achievement for cultural reasons. These patterns illustrate the kinds of issues

that a counselor may wish to explore with a student whose other scores indicate a need for special help.

College Experience

This section gives information about the timing of the students' decision to enroll in college, the academic degree they are seeking, and the number of hours per week they plan to work at a job.

Decision to Enroll. The student is asked to indicate when he or she made the decision to enroll at this institution. Research indicates that the closer to the time of actual enrollment that a student makes the decision, the greater the propensity for dropping out.

Degree Sought. The student is asked to specify the highest degree he/she is planning to pursue. This question should not necessarily be taken at face value. Rather, it reveals something about the public stance the student has adopted regarding personal goals. A weak student who expresses an intention of getting an advanced degree may simply be trying to appease parental expectations. On the other hand, a talented student who indicates a low goal may have had their educational goals stunted. The student's answer to this question is a valuable point of departure for further discussion.

Plans to Work. The student is asked to indicate how many hours per week he or she plans to work at a job while enrolled at the college. Students who work more than 15 hours per week while enrolled as full-time students are generally at greater risk of dropping out and/or performing below their expectations.

Other Indications

This section has been designed to provide information about the student's desire to transfer, which should be handled with considerable sensitivity by the advisor. This score does not appear on the student's report.

The Notice Box

The statement in this box emphasizes the discretionary nature of the report. It is important to respect the student's right to claim the CSI Coordinator Report and CSI Advisor/Counselor Report at any time. The intent is to accommodate the student who may feel uncomfortable with his/her results and may decide that he/she does not wish to have them filed in an academic office.

Appendix C

VCU First-Generation Survey

Confidential

Page 1

Putting You First: VCU First-Generation Survey

Thank you for participating in our study. The purpose of this study is to ask for your advice on how to build upon the services of You First, VCU's central support hub for first-generation college students. We are working with VCU's You First team to identify the activities, services, and opportunities that first-generation students most want.

Your advice will help us determine the needs of our first-generation community. We value your time and ideas and are especially interested to learn how You First can better serve you and support your success.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Yeimarie Lopez at lopezy@vcu.edu.

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a quality improvement study. It is essential that you carefully think about whether being in this study is right for you and your situation. This consent form should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to exit at any time by closing your browser window.

- Yes** - I freely consent to participate in this study, and by doing so, I have not waived any of the legal rights or benefits to which I otherwise would be entitled.
- No** - I do not give consent to participate in this study.

Confidential

Page 3

Please select the state or U.S. territory where the high school you graduated from is located.

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming
- American Samoa
- Guam
- Northern Mariana Islands
- Puerto Rico
- U.S. Virgin Islands
- Not Applicable-International Student

Is Fall 2021 your first semester at VCU?

- Yes
- No

Prior to enrolling at VCU, did you attend another college or university?

- Yes
- No

Please select your undergraduate classification. Undergraduate classification is based on earned credit hours.

- Freshman: Completed 0 to 23 credit hours
- Sophomore: Completed 24-53 credit hours
- Junior: Completed 54-84 credit hours
- Senior: Completed 85 credit hours or more

What is your current enrollment status?

- Enrolled for 12 or more credits for Fall 2021
- Enrolled for fewer than 12 credits for Fall 2021
- Not currently enrolled for the Fall 2021 semester

What is your race/ethnicity?

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races
- Other/Not listed
- Prefer not to disclose

Confidential

Page 4

What is your gender?

For more information, VCU's gender identity terms are located at the bottom of the Call Me By My Name website.

- Cisgender Male
- Cisgender Female
- Exploring
- Gender **Non-conforming**
- Genderqueer
- Non-binary**
- Not Listed**
- Questioning
- Transgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Prefer **Not To Disclose**

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Page 5

What is your age?

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- 65+

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Page 6

What is your major?

- Accounting
- Advanced Media Production Technology
- African American Studies
- Anthropology
- Art Foundation
- Art History
- Arts
- Bioinformatics
- Biology
- Biomedical Engineering
- Business
- Business Foundation
- Chemical & Life Science Engineering
- Chemistry
- Cinema
- Clinical Laboratory Sciences
- Clinical Radiation Sciences
- Communication Arts
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science
- Craft and Material Studies
- Criminal Justice
- Dance and Choreography
- Dental Hygiene
- Early Childhood Education & Teaching
- Economics
- Education
- Electrical Engineering
- Elementary Education & Teaching
- English
- Environmental Studies
- Fashion
- Finance
- Financial Technology
- Foreign Language
- Forensic Science
- Gender Sexuality & Women Studies
- Graphic Design
- Health and Physical Education
- Health Sciences
- Health Services
- History
- Health Physical Education & Exercise Science
- Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness
- Human & Organizational Development
- Information Systems
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Interior Design
- International Studies
- Kinetic Imaging
- Library Studies Early & Elementary Education Foundation
- Library Studies for Early & Elementary Education
- Marketing
- Mass Communications
- Mass Communications Foundation
- Mathematical Sciences
- Mechanical Engineering
- Medical Laboratory Sciences
- Music
- Nursing
- Painting and Printmaking
- Philosophy
- Photography and Film
- Physics
- Political Science
- Pre-Clinical Lab Sciences
- Pre-Dental Hygiene

- Pre-Engineering
- Pre-Medical Lab Sciences
- Pre-Nursing
- Pre-Radiation Sciences
- Psychology
- Real Estate
- Religious Studies
- Science
- Sculpture
- Secondary Education & Teaching
- Social Work
- Social Work-Lower Division
- Sociology
- Spanish-Eng Translation & Interpretation
- Special Education & Teaching
- Statistics
- Theatre
- Theatre Foundation
- Undeclared-Engineering
- Undeclared-Humanities & Sciences
- Urban & Regional Studies
- Not Listed

If you selected "Not Listed", please enter your major below:

Progress Bar

25% Complete

Confidential

Page 8

CONNECTIONS TO CAMPUS					
	Never	Sometimes	Neutral	Usually	Always
I feel like I belong at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I can be my authentic self at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I am meeting my academic goals at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable expressing my opinions to others at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with my peers at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with at least one faculty member at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Progress Bar

40% Complete

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Page 9

FEELINGS OF SUPPORT					
	Never	Sometimes	Neutral	Usually	Always
I feel supported by my family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by my professors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by my academic advisor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by my peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Progress Bar

50% Complete

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Page 10

BEING FIRST-GENERATION

What does being a first-generation college student mean to you?

When I think about being a first-generation student, I generally have ____ feelings.

Negative Positive Neither positive nor negative Both positive and negative

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that being a first-generation student impacts my experience at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that my experience as a first-generation student is different from my peers who are not.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often think about being a first-generation student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe my identity as a first-generation student is important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often think about my first-generation student identity like other identities such as race, ethnicity, sex, and/or gender.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Progress Bar

65% Complete

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Page 11

PARTICIPATION AT VCU

Have you participated in events, activities, student organizations, or clubs at VCU?

- Yes
- No

What events, activities, student organizations, or clubs at VCU do you participate in?

How often are you involved in events, activities, student organizations, or clubs at VCU?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

Are you satisfied with your level of participation in events, activities, student organizations, or clubs at VCU?

- Yes
- No

Progress Bar

70% Complete

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Page 12

YOU FIRST AT VCU

You First is a unit that helps VCU first-generation students connect to each other and provides academic and social resources.

How familiar are you with VCU's You First?

- Not at all familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Extremely familiar

Have you participated in You First events and programs?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Which events and programs have you participated in? Check all that apply.

- VCU Altria Scholars
- VCU Summer Scholars
- VCU TRIO Program
- You First Mentee
- You First Mentor
- You First Presents event series
- You First at VCU Student Organization

How often do you participate in You First events and programming?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

What factors encourage your involvement with You First? Check all that apply.

- Affordability
- Interesting topic or content of activity/event
- Location of activity, event, or resources
- Opportunity to meet new people
- Opportunity to socialize with friends
- Opportunity to meet people with similar interests
- Source of information and advice
- Support services offered
- Not listed/other

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel supported by You First at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I have meaningful relationships with You First Staff at VCU.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Page 13

You First programming and events have contributed to my overall academic success.

What factors discourage your involvement with You First? Check all that apply.

- Affordability
- Caregiver/Parental duties
- Employment responsibilities
- Event/activity topic doesn't interest me
- Fear of being stigmatized
- Lack of time
- Location of activity
- Stigma from family
- Stigma from peers/students
- Stigma from professors
- Unaware of available resources, events, and activities
- I don't believe I need to be involved
- My needs are being met elsewhere
- Not listed/other

Are you satisfied with your level of participation in You First events and programming?

Yes
 No

What do you wish You First knew about you as a first-generation student?

You First sends communications about first-generation events, programming, resources, and opportunities to first-generation students at VCU. As a first-generation student, which of the following do you prefer?

Note: Answers to this question will not add or remove you from the email listserv.

- To be automatically added to the You First email listserv when you enroll at VCU
- To contact the You First office and request to be added to the email listserv
- I do not want to receive emails
- I am unsure at this time

Progress Bar

90% Complete

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Page 14

NEEDS AND SUPPORT

Support can mean different things to different people. Some examples of support that students may need are: help with finances, technology, advising, securing basic needs, mental or physical health, etc.

The following VCU and/or non-VCU people meet or support my needs as a first-generation student. Check all that apply.

- Academic advisor
- Faculty member
- Staff member (Not You First)
- Friends at VCU
- Community members
- Family members
- Friends outside of VCU
- Other
- No one

If you checked 'Other', can you tell us who else meets or supports your needs as a first-generation student?

What support, events, information, or services have you found most helpful during your time at VCU?

The following You First programs or people meet or support my needs as a first-generation student. Check all that apply.

- VCU Altria Scholars
- VCU Summer Scholars
- VCU TRIO program
- You First peer mentor
- You First staff member
- You First Student Organization
- Other
- No one

If you checked 'Other', can you tell us who else meets or supports your needs as a first-generation student?

What support, events, information, or services have you found most helpful from You First?

How could You First better support your needs as a first-generation student?

Progress Bar

95% Complete

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THANK YOU

To further understand the experiences of first-generation students at VCU, we will be conducting focus group sessions in-person and via Zoom this semester. Focus group sessions could include up to 10 first-generation students at VCU and the group would talk about their experiences as first-generation students. These sessions are expected to last approximately 30 minutes.

Are you interested in participating in an interview/focus group?

- Yes
- No

Please provide your email address so that we may send you information on the focus group sessions.

Progress Bar

100% Complete

Appendix D

First-Generation Student Survey Email Invitation

[View Online](#)



VCU Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success

Dear Shelley Jordan:

We are contacting you today to ask for your advice on how to build upon the services of You First, VCU's central support hub for first-generation college students. First-generation college students are students whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) has not earned a bachelor's degree from a college in the U.S.

We are doctoral students in VCU's Educational Leadership Program working with VCU's You First team to identify the activities, services, and opportunities that first-generation students most want. We value your time and ideas and are especially interested to learn how You First can better serve you and support your success.

If you are a first-generation undergraduate student enrolled at VCU, we invite you to participate in this survey. The survey is confidential, voluntary, and should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, you will have the option to sign up for a focus group. After submitting the survey, you may also enter a raffle for a \$25 Visa gift card.

To begin, please visit the [VCU First-Generation Survey](#).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Yeimarie Lopez at lopezy@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Adams
Brittany Gracik
Rochelle Jordan
Yeimarie Lopez

Email: success@vcu.edu

Web: sem.vcu.edu

Appendix E

Survey Informed Consent

STUDY TITLE: Putting You First: First-Generation Student Perceptions, Needs, and Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY (VCU) RESEARCHERS:

Jennifer Adams, Ed.D. Student and CollegeTracks College Success Director,
adamsj11@vcu.edu

Brittany Gracik, Ed.D. Student and Associate Director for the VCU Business Executive MBA Program, gracikbm@vcu.edu

Rochelle Jordan, Ed.D. Student and Coordinator of Strategic Analytics for the VCU Graduate School, rhjordan@vcu.edu

Yeimarie Lopez, Ed.D. Student and Compliance Administrator for VCU Online, lopezy@vcu.edu

ABOUT THIS CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a quality improvement study. It is essential that you carefully think about whether being in this study is right for you and your situation. This consent form should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you have any questions about this consent form or the study, please contact Yeimarie Lopez at lopezy@vcu.edu.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to identify current perceptions and needs of first-generation students (FGS) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and analyze the engagement of VCU FGS with VCU's You First Office.

PROCEDURE

If you agree to complete the survey, it will take approximately 5-10 minutes.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary. If you do participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision not to participate or withdraw at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

RISK AND BENEFITS The survey questions might make you feel uncomfortable. There is also a small risk that someone outside the study could see or misuse the information you provided. Your participation may help us learn more about the needs of first-generation students at VCU and how they engage with You First.

CONFIDENTIALITY Information that you give us will be kept as confidential as possible by storing it in secure databases accessible only to the following people: study personnel and authorized people at VCU or VCU Health System who oversee research.

Appendix F

Putting You First Study Participation Raffle

Putting You First Study Participation Raffle

Thank you for participating in our study! Please provide your name and email below to be entered into our drawing for a \$25 Visa gift card.

If you have any questions, please contact Brittany Gracik at gracikbm@vcu.edu.

[Sign in to Google](#) to save your progress. [Learn more](#)

What is your name?

Your answer

What is your email address?

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside of Virginia Commonwealth University. [Report Abuse](#)

Google Forms

Appendix G

First-Generation Student Survey Code Dictionary

<u>ID</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	BFG_CHALLENGE	This code identifies challenges (e.g., disconnect from others, financial stress, pressure to succeed, the need for self-navigation, limited social capital) expressed by FG students when asked what being first-generation means to them.
2	BFG_FAMILY	This code identifies how family (e.g., honor, pride, validation of family/parental sacrifice/struggle) connects to what being first-generation means to FG students.
3	BFG_FIRST	This code identifies how being "first in the family" to attend or graduate from college connects to what being first-generation means to an FG student.
4	BFG_POSHE	This code identifies the positive impact of higher education (e.g., breaking barriers or cycles, better future or increased opportunities, the chance to role model for others) expressed by FG students when asked what being first-generation means to them.
5	BFG_POSVIEW	This code identifies positive views (e.g., connection to others, gratitude, pride, assets, honor, validation of sacrifice/struggle) expressed by FG students when asked what being first-generation means to them.
6	BTRSUPT_ACCESS	This code identifies how You First could better support FG students with easily accessible programs, services, and information.
7	BTRSUPT_COMM	This code identifies how You First could better support FG students with communication, early promotion of resources, and information for FG students.
8	BTRSUPT_CONNECT	This code identifies how You First could better support students in making connections with other FG students.
9	BTRSUPT_EVENTS	This code identifies how You First could better support students with events (e.g., FG students events, social events).
10	BTRSUPT_FINAID	This code identifies how You First could better support students with financial aid support (e.g., scholarships, internships).
11	BTRSUPT_GOODJOB	This code describes how You First is doing a good job providing support to FG students.
12	BTRSUPT_	This code identifies how You First could better support FG

	MAJOR	students in navigating programs of study, career planning, and post-graduation transitions.
13	BTRSUPT_ NOTINVLV	This code identifies FG students' lack of awareness of or involvement with You First.
14	VCU_ADVISIN G	This code identifies academic advising as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
15	VCU_CAREER	This code identifies career development support (e.g., career advising, using Handshake) as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
16	VCU_CONNEC T	This code identifies relationships and connections to others as one of the most helpful types of support the FG students received at VCU.
17	VCU_IDENTITY	This code identifies identity-based support (e.g., support specific to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, Greek life) as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
18	VCU_MENTOR	This code identifies mentoring as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
19	VCU_MHS	This code identifies mental health support as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
20	VCU_NOSUPPO RT	No VCU support, event, information, or service listed.
21	VCU_ORIENT	This code identifies orientation as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
22	VCU_PROGRA M	This code identifies programmatic support (e.g., TRIO, tutoring, counseling, academic coaching) and/or course content as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
23	VCU_TOPICAL	This code identifies topical information (e.g., events or communication on specific topics) as one of the most helpful services the FG students received at VCU.
24	YF_COMM	This code identifies the types of communication (e.g., email, newsletters) the FG students found most helpful from You First.
25	YF_CONNECT	This code identifies relationships and connections to others as one of the most helpful types of support the participant received from You First.
26	YF_EVENTS	This code identifies You First events as one of the most helpful services the FG students received from You First.
27	YF_MEN TOR	This code identifies mentoring as one of the most helpful services the FG students received from You First.

28	YF_NOTAWARE	This code identifies the FG students' lack of awareness of You First.
29	YF_NOTINVLV	This code identifies the FG students' lack of involvement with You First.
30	YF_RELATION	This code identifies the supportive relationships that You First has provided as one of the most helpful types of support the FG students received from You First.
31	YF_RESOURCE S	This code identifies the resources that You First has provided or connected the FG students with as one of the most helpful services the FG students received from You First.
32	YF_TOPICAL	This code identifies topical information (e.g., events or communication on specific topics) as one of the most helpful services the FG students received from You First.
33	YFK_BARRIER	This code identifies the barriers and difficulties related to accessing available support that FG students wish You First knew about.
34	YFK_HELPED	This code identifies FG students who have already been helped by You First.
35	YFK_INTERSEC T	This code includes data related to an identity or experience other than being an FG student or intersectionality.
36	YFK_NEED	This code identifies the need for resources or information (limited social capital) that FG students wish You First knew about.
37	YFK_PAY	This code identifies data related to paying for college that FG students wish You First knew about.
38	YFK_PRESSUR E	This code identifies the pressure to succeed as an issue that FG students wish You First knew about.
39	YFK_STRNGTH S	This code identifies assets and strengths that FG students wish You First knew about.
40	YFK_TIMEMG MT	This code identifies the overwhelming nature of time management as an issue that FG students wish You First knew about.
41	YFK_UNAWAR E	This code identifies that FG students wish You First knew that they did not know how or where to get support and/or were unaware of You First.

Appendix H

Focus Group Email Invitations

Email to Participants Familiar with You First

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for completing our VCU First-Generation survey and indicating an interest to participate in our focus group sessions. We truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences as a first-generation student. Your participation will help our research team understand VCU's first-generation student population and how You First can best support you through specific activities and services.

Below are the dates and times of three focus group sessions that you may sign up for. Sessions will be recorded so that we may accurately document the information you share. This [consent form](#) should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you can leave at any time.

Tuesday, November 16: 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM (In-Person: [Snead Hall, Room B3189](#))

Tuesday, November 16: 7 PM - 8 PM (Zoom)

Friday, November 19: 2 PM - 3 PM (Zoom)

To sign up for a focus group, please click here: [Google Calendar Signup](#). After signing up, you will receive a confirmation email with more information.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Brittany Gracik at gracikbm@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Adams
Brittany Gracik
Rochelle Jordan
Yeimar Lopez

Email to Participants Non-Familiar with You First

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for completing our VCU First-Generation survey and indicating an interest to participate in our focus group sessions. We truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences as a first-generation student. Your participation will help our research team understand VCU's first-generation student population and how You First can best support you through specific activities and services.

Below are the dates and times of three focus group sessions that you may sign up for. Sessions will be recorded so that we may accurately document the information you share. This [consent form](#)

should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you can leave at any time.

Friday, November 12th: 11 AM - 12 PM (Zoom)

Saturday, November 13th: 11 AM - 12 PM (In-Person: [Snead Hall, Room B3189](#))

Saturday, November 20th: 11 AM - 12 PM (Zoom)

To sign up for a focus group, please click here: [Google Calendar Signup](#). After signing up, you will receive a confirmation email with more information.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Brittany Gracik at gracikbm@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Adams
Brittany Gracik
Rochelle Jordan
Yeimarie Lopez

Email to Participants in UNIV 191 students, YF mentors/mentees

Good morning/afternoon:

We are contacting you today to ask for your advice on how to build upon the services of You First, VCU's central support hub for first-generation college students. As doctoral students in VCU's Educational Leadership Program, we are working with VCU's You First team to identify the activities, services, and opportunities that first-generation students most want. We value your time and ideas and are especially interested to learn how You First can better serve you and support your success.

As a first-generation undergraduate student enrolled at VCU, we are inviting you to participate in a focus group session. Below are the dates and times of three focus group sessions that you may sign up for. Sessions will be recorded so that we may accurately document the information you share. This [consent form](#) should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you can leave at any time.

Tuesday, November 16: 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM (In-Person: [Snead Hall, Room B3189](#))

Tuesday, November 16: 7 PM - 8 PM (Zoom)

Friday, November 19: 2 PM - 3 PM (Zoom)

To sign up for a focus group, please click here: [Google Calendar Signup](#). After signing up, you will receive a confirmation email with more information.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Brittany Gracik at gracikbm@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Adams
Brittany Gracik
Rochelle Jordan
Yeimarie Lopez

Email Confirmation to Focus Group Participants

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for signing up for a focus group session with our doctoral team. We truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences as a first-generation student.

Please refer to the information below for your focus group session.

Session Date/Time:

Location/Zoom Link:

In-Person: [Snead Hall, Room B3189](#)

Zoom Link

Sessions will be recorded so that we may accurately document the information you share. This [consent form](#) should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you can leave at any time.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Brittany Gracik at gracikbm@vcu.edu.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Adams
Brittany Gracik
Rochelle Jordan
Yeimarie Lopez

Appendix I

Focus Group Consent Form

STUDY TITLE: Putting You First: First-Generation Student Perceptions, Needs, and Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY (VCU) RESEARCHERS:

Jennifer Adams, EdD Student and CollegeTracks College Success Director,
adamsj11@vcu.edu

Brittany Gracik, EdD Student and Associate Director for the VCU Business Executive MBA Program, gracikbm@vcu.edu

Rochelle Jordan, EdD Student and Coordinator of Strategic Analytics for the VCU Graduate School, rhjordan@vcu.edu

Yeimarie Lopez, EdD Student and Compliance Administrator for VCU Online, lopezy@vcu.edu

ABOUT THIS CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a quality improvement study. It is essential that you carefully think about whether being in this study is right for you and your situation. This consent form should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you have any questions about this consent form or the study, please contact Yeimarie Lopez at lopezy@vcu.edu.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to identify current perceptions and needs of first-generation students (FGS) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and analyze the engagement of VCU FGS with VCU's You First Office.

PROCEDURE

If you agree to participate in this focus group session, it will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary. If you do participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision not to participate or withdraw at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

RISK AND BENEFITS The focus group questions might make you feel uncomfortable. There is also a small risk that someone outside the study could see or misuse the information you provided. Your participation may help us learn more about the needs of first-generation students at VCU and how they engage with You First.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information that you give us will be kept as confidential as possible by storing it in secure databases accessible only to the following people: study personnel and authorized people at VCU or VCU Health System who oversee research.

Appendix J

VCU First-Generation Student Focus Group Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire below as part of your participation in the VCU First-Generation Focus Group sessions.

Thank you!

Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in a quality improvement study. It is essential that you carefully think about whether being in this study is right for you and your situation. This consent form should help you think about whether or not you want to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to exit at any time by closing your browser window.

- Yes - I freely consent to participate in this study, and by doing so, I have not waived any of the legal rights or benefits to which I otherwise would be entitled.
- No - I do not give consent to participate in this study.

Demographic Information

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to exit at any time. Not all questions are required and you will have the option to skip questions.

Are you a first-generation undergraduate college student?

A first-generation student is a student who has no parents/guardians that have earned a four-year college degree.

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes your family's total annual household income?

- Under \$30,000
- \$30,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000 or higher
- I don't know
- Prefer not to disclose

Please enter the name of the high school you graduated from. For example: Garfield High

School

**Please enter the city where the high school you graduated from is located. For example:
Richmond**

Please select the state or U.S. territory where the high school you graduated from is located.

Alabama	New Mexico
Alaska	New York
Arizona	North Carolina
Arkansas	North Dakota
California	Ohio
Colorado	Oklahoma
Connecticut	Oregon
Delaware	Pennsylvania
Florida	Rhode Island
Georgia	South Carolina
Hawaii	South Dakota
Idaho	Tennessee
Illinois	Texas
Indiana	Utah
Iowa	Vermont
Kansas	Virginia
Kentucky	Washington
Louisiana	West Virginia
Maine	Wisconsin
Maryland	Wyoming
Massachusetts	American Samoa

Michigan	Guam
Minnesota	Northern Mariana Islands
Mississippi	Puerto Rico
Missouri	U.S. Virgin Islands
Montana	Not Applicable-International Student
Nebraska	
Nevada	
New Hampshire	
New Jersey	

Is Fall 2021 your first semester at VCU?

- Yes
- No

Prior to enrolling at VCU, did you attend another college or university?

- Yes
- No

Please select your undergraduate classification. Undergraduate classification is based on earned credit hours.

- Freshman: Completed 0 to 23 credit hours
- Sophomore: Completed 24-53 credit hours
- Junior: Completed 54-84 credit hours
- Senior: Completed 85 credit hours or more

What is your current enrollment status?

- Enrolled for 12 or more credits for Fall 2021
- Enrolled for fewer than 12 credits for Fall 2021
- Not currently enrolled for the Fall 2021 semester

What is your race/ethnicity?

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native American or Alaskan Native

- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races
- Other/Not listed
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your gender?

For more information, VCU's gender identity terms are located at the bottom of the Call Me By My Name website.

- Cisgender Male
- Cisgender Female
- Exploring
- Gender Non-conforming
- Genderqueer
- Non-binary
- Not Listed
- Questioning
- Transgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Prefer Not To Disclose

What is your age?

What is your major?

Accounting	Environmental Studies	Painting and Printmaking
Advanced Media Production Technology	Fashion	Philosophy
African American Studies	Finance	Photography and Film
Anthropology	Financial Technology	Physics
Art Foundation	Foreign Language	Political Science
Art History	Forensic Science	Pre-Clinical Lab Sciences
Arts	Gender Sexuality & Women Studies	Pre-Dental Hygiene
Bioinformatics	Graphic Design	Pre-Engineering
Biology	Health and Physical Education	Pre-Medical Lab Sciences
Biomedical Engineering	Health Sciences	Pre-Nursing
Business	Health Services	Pre-Radiation Sciences

Business Foundation	History	Psychology
Chemical & Life Science Engineering	Health Physical Education & Exercise Science	Real Estate
Chemistry	Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness	Religious Studies
Cinema	Human & Organizational Development	Science
Clinical Laboratory Sciences	Information Systems	Sculpture
Clinical Radiation Sciences	Interdisciplinary Studies	Secondary Education & Teaching
Communication Arts	Interior Design	Social Work
Computer Engineering	International Studies	Social Work-Lower Division
Computer Science	Kinetic Imaging	Sociology
Craft and Material Studies	Library Studies Early & Elementary Education Foundation	Spanish-Eng Translation & Interpretation
Criminal Justice	Library Studies for Early & Elementary Education	Special Education & Teaching
Dance and Choreography	Marketing	Statistics
Dental Hygiene	Mass Communications	Theatre
Early Childhood Education & Teaching	Mass Communications Foundation	Theatre Foundation
Economics	Mathematical Sciences	Undeclared-Engineering
Education	Mechanical Engineering	Undeclared-Humanities & Sciences
Electrical Engineering	Medical Laboratory Sciences	Urban & Regional Studies
Elementary Education & Teaching	Music	Not Listed
English	Nursing	

If you selected "Not Listed", please enter your major below: _____

Appendix K

Focus Group Script

[Before beginning the focus group, let students know that the focus group will be recorded, and confirm that all participants consent to be recorded.]

We are now officially recording this focus group. Welcome and thank you so much to each of you for your participation today. I am a/we are graduate student(s) in the doctoral program for Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University. On behalf of my/our team, I am/we are conducting this focus group as part of our Capstone project, which is similar to a dissertation. Our Capstone project is Putting You First: First-Generation Student Perceptions, Needs, and Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University. This focus group will probably take about 45 minutes to an hour. It will include some questions about being a first-generation college student here at VCU. The purpose of this study is to identify current perceptions and needs of first-generation (FG) students at VCU, and analyze the engagement of VCU FG students with You First. As students who may be the first in your families to graduate from college, we want to understand your experience.

At this time, I/we would like to remind each of you of your written consent to participate in this focus group. I/we will call upon each of you to confirm once again that you consent. [Ask each participant to confirm their consent].

Even though you have consented, if at any time you wish to leave this focus group, you may do so freely and willingly, and without any consequence by clicking “leave” on the bottom right of Zoom/leaving the classroom.

I/we may jot down a few notes throughout this session in case I/we need to ask follow-up questions for clarification. If you need to stop or take a break, feel free to do so. Once again, your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

Because this may be your first time participating in a focus group for many of you, I/we will briefly explain what will happen. I/we will be present the entire time and will ask several questions. Please feel welcome to speak to each other, not just to me. If someone says something, feel free to share how your experience has been similar or different. There are no right or wrong answers; they're your experiences and opinions, and we're interested in hearing those. If it makes you more comfortable to raise your hand, I/we can call on you, but otherwise, feel free to speak up. Are there any questions I/we can answer before we begin?

[Answer any questions students may have.]

Let's get started. The first few questions are related to your experience as a first-generation college student. Many of our survey respondents indicated that being a first-generation student impacted their experience at VCU.

1. How does being a first-generation student impact your experience at VCU? How is your experience different from students who aren't first-generation?

In our survey...

2. Many students described balancing the pride of being a first-generation student with the pressure to succeed. How can You First help you find that balance?

Research indicates that students are more likely to be successful if they develop relationships with their professors. Many of our survey respondents indicated that they did not have meaningful relationships with faculty/professors.

3. How would you describe a meaningful relationship with your professors? What keeps you from having a meaningful relationship with your professors?

The next several questions will help us learn more about connecting first-generation students with You First.

4. What would be the most effective way(s) to learn about You First and their events?
5. What would make participating in You First events/services easier for you? How else could You First support you that wouldn't cost you time?
6. Since You First is the hub for services that support first-generation students, ideally, what services should they offer?
7. Given that family is such a strong source of support, what could You First do to include/involve your family more?
8. Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?

You all shared great information with me/us today. I/We may have follow-up questions and will contact you via email. If you do not wish to be contacted, please stay on and let me/us know. Otherwise, thank you so much and have a good day!

Appendix L

First-Generation Student Focus Group Code Dictionary

<u>ID</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	AWARE_EMAIL	This code describes how email communication affected or can affect FG students' awareness of You First and its events.
2	AWARE_GAP	This code describes systemic/broad gaps that prevented FG students' awareness of You First and its events.
3	AWARE_NONYF	This code describes how tFG students found out about You First from non-You First staff (e.g., advisors, instructors).
4	AWARE_PHYSPRES	This code describes how the physical presence of You First staff or promotions affects FG students' awareness of You First and its events.
5	AWARE_SOCMEDI A	This code describes how social media affected or can affect FG students' awareness of You First and its events.
6	AWARE_TIMING	This code describes how the timing of You First promotions affected or can affect FG students' awareness of You First and its events.
7	EASYPART_ ACCESS	This code identifies modalities and timing that could make programs, services, and information easily accessible to FG students.
8	EASYPART_ COMM	This code identifies how You First could better support FG student participation with communication, early promotion of resources, and information related to FG students.
9	EASYPART_ GOODJOB	This code identifies how You First is doing a good job supporting FG student participation.
10	EASYPART_ UNSURE	This code identifies the uncertainty that FG students expressed with what would make participating in You First easier.
11	EXP_CHALLENGE	This code identifies the challenges (e.g., disconnect from others, financial stress, pressure to succeed, the need for self-navigation, limited social capital) expressed by FG students when describing how being first-generation impacts their experiences at VCU.
12	EXP_FAMILY	This code includes data identifying how family (e.g., honor, pride, validation of family, parental sacrifice/struggle) impacts FG students' experiences at VCU.
13	EXP_FIRST	This code identifies how being "first in the family" to attend or graduate from college impacts FG students' experiences at VCU.

14	EXP_POSVIEW	This code identifies positive views (e.g., connection to others, gratitude, pride, assets, honor, validation of sacrifice/struggle) expressed by FG students when describing how being first-generation impacts their VCU experiences.
15	FAM_BARRIERS	This code identifies prohibitive barriers to a FG student's family's participation in VCU family events.
16	FAM_DEF	This code identifies who is included in FG students' families.
17	FAM_EVENTS	This code identifies the desire for FG student family-specific events at orientation and family weekend.
18	FAM_HEVALUE	This code identifies FG students' need to demonstrate and explain the value of higher education experiences to family members who may not be aware of this value.
19	FAM_NOINTRST	This code identifies what causes a lack of interest on the part of FG students' family members regarding family participation in family events at VCU.
20	RELFAC_AVAIL	This code describes how faculty members' availability builds relationships with FG students.
21	RELFAC_BARRIER	This code describes the barriers that keep FG students from developing relationships with faculty members.
22	RELFAC_BEYOND	This code describes how faculty members went above and beyond their teaching roles to establish and maintain relationships with FG students.
23	RELFAC_COMM	This code describes how different modalities in communication and classrooms affect meaningful faculty/FG student relationships.
24	RELFAC_INTEREST	This code describes how faculty members showing interest in FG students builds relationships.
25	YF_BARRIERS	This code identifies the barriers that kept FG students from seeking support from You First.
26	YF_COMM	This code identifies the types of communication (e.g., email, newsletters) from You First that supports FG students.
27	YF_CONNECT	This code identifies relationships and connections with You First that supports FG students.
28	YF_EVENTS	This code identifies You First events that support FG students.
29	YF_MENTOR	This code identifies You First mentoring that supports FG students.
30	YF_NOTAWARE	This code identifies FG students' lack of awareness of You First.
31	YF_PRESSURE	This code identifies pressure described by FG students of being first-generation.

32	YF_RESOURCES	This code identifies the resources that You First provide/connect to that help support FG students.
33	YF_TOPICAL	This code identifies topical information (e.g., events or communication on specific topics) that supports FG students.
34	YFHUB_ADVISING	This code identifies academic advising as a service that You First should offer FG students.
35	YFHUB_CAREER	This code identifies career development support (e.g., career advising, internship help, using Handshake) as a service that You First should offer FG students.
36	YFHUB_CONNECT	This code identifies opportunities to build relationships and connect with other FG students as a service that You First should offer.
37	YFHUB_MENTOR	This code identifies mentoring as a service that You First should offer FG students.
38	YFHUB_MHS	This code identifies mental health support as a service that You First should offer FG students.
39	YFHUB_NAVIGATE	This code identifies support that You First should offer to help FG students navigate university processes and systems.
40	YFHUB_PAY	This code identifies information and resources on how to pay for college as a service that You First should offer FG students.
41	YFHUB_TOPICAL	This code identifies topical information (e.g., events or communication on specific topics) as a service that You First should offer FG students.