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# FOCUSED INQUIRY YEAR IN REVIEW 2015-2016

# Letter from the Chair

The Department of Focused Inquiry has had a very good year for both our students and our faculty, as the data and stories in this year-end report illustrate. I'd like to highlight a few more student and faculty accomplishments here. In addition to the Departmental student contest winners featured on the next page Evan Tuten, a student in UNIV 200, was a recipient of the Phi Kappa Phi 2016 Robert G. Davis Undergraduate Writing and Research Award for an essay he wrote in his UNIV 200 class. Seven faculty members were promoted: Bonnie Boaz, Meriah Crawford, Nicole Anderson Ellis, Zach Hilpert, Jeffrey Murray, Kristin Reed, and Ginni Totaro. Instructor Thaddeus Fortney was selected as a Generation Study Abroad Fellow and Director of Student Success Micol Hutchison was chosen to participate in the Grace E. Harris Leadership Development Program. Collectively, the Department of Focused Inquiry faculty gave over 30 academic conference presentations and published 8 peer-reviewed articles, 13 other scholarly publications of various types, 7 poems, 4 stories, 9 articles, and 1 book this year, in addition to teaching thousands of students and engaging in a wide variety of Departmental, University, Community and public service. Our faculty also participated enthusiastically in internal and external faculty development opportunities to refresh and refine their teaching practice in order to create a transformative learning experience. Along with the Departmental Faculty Learning Communities, brown-bags, faculty symposia, and two faculty development Institutes, faculty members also participated in the Online Learning Experience and other Faculty Learning Communities through VCU ALT lab, Global Zone training, and Green Zone Training. Further afield, faculty members attended and/or presented at the Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy, Lilly Conferences on College and University Teaching and Learning, the Conference on College Composition and Composition, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the Institute on Sophomore Student Success, the Teaching Matters Conference and the Teaching Professor Conference. Last May, Associate Chair Patty Strong and Assistant Professor Jessica Gordon participated in the Digital Media and Composition Institute at the Ohio State University. Follow us on Twitter (@VCU\_FI) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/FocusedInquiryVCU](http://www.facebook.com/FocusedInquiryVCU)) to learn more about the exciting work our faculty and students are doing. We are looking forward to another great year of teaching and learning in 2016-2017!

-Melissa Johnson, Chair and Associate Professor

## Enrollment Data

Number of students taught in Fall 2015 and Spring 2016

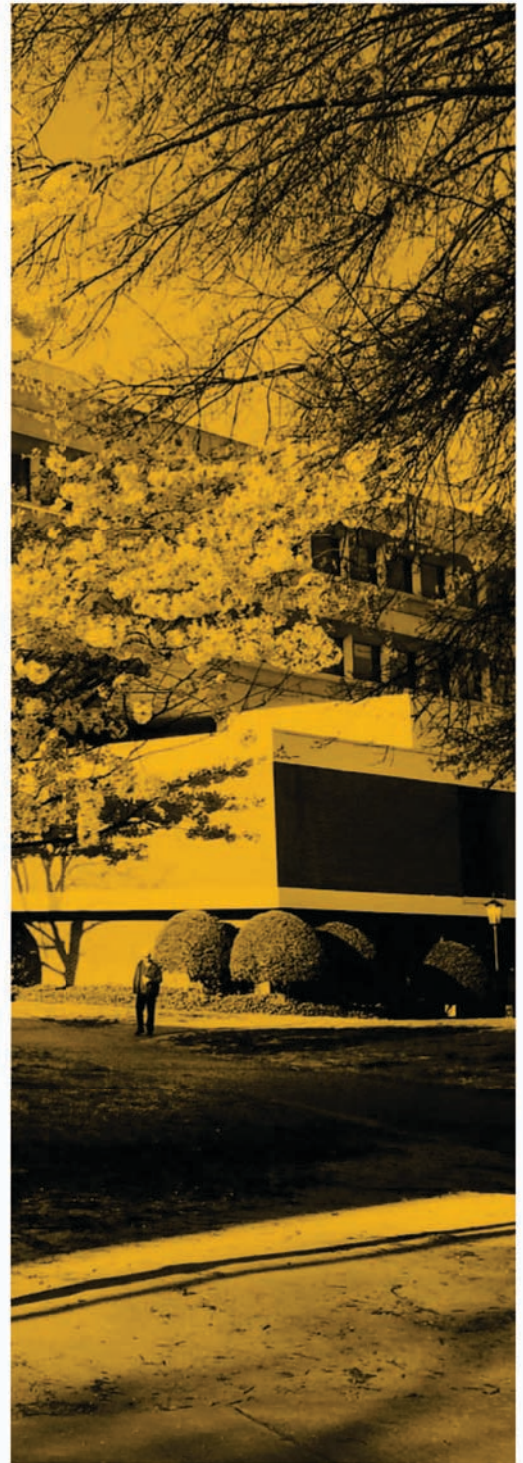
Course	Fall 2015	Spring 2016
UNIV 111	2282	266
UNIV 112	1096	2316
UNIV 200	2073	1422
UNIV 250	122	79
UNIV 251	44	66
UNIV 350:	11	10
Tier 2s (211, 213, 217, 222, 299)	207	77
Total:	5835	4236

2015-16 AY Grand Total **10,071**

## About FI

As part of the core curriculum at VCU, the Department of Focused Inquiry offers small, seminar-style classes for first- and second-year students. Our interdisciplinary faculty strives to foster curiosity about the world at large through inquiry-based, experiential, and community-engaged learning.

[focusedinquiry.vcu.edu](http://focusedinquiry.vcu.edu)



# Curricular Innovation

The Department of Focused Inquiry is housed in VCU's University College. The University College's mission is to enhance student success through curricular innovation and support for teaching and learning excellence. FI instructors come from a variety of fields, such as sociology, philosophy, law, English and creative writing, music, and American Studies, but they all share an interest in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL). All of our faculty are committed to teaching excellence, and many conduct research in the field of teaching and learning in addition to their home fields.

## The Focused Inquiry Expo

The Focused Inquiry Expo takes place in the spring semester of the academic year, typically on the first reading day, and highlights student work from UNIV 111 and UNIV 112 through academic poster presentations, multimedia projects, and VC-UTalks. The Expo brings together thousands of students, faculty, and administrators to discuss student work and features a plenary session with an FI alumnus and college graduate who discusses how the core skills taught in Focused Inquiry have proven vital to his or her success. The Expo culminates in an awards ceremony which showcases the winners of the Focused Inquiry essay and cover design contests.

## 2015–2016 Student Essay Contest Winners

Focused Inquiry Textbook Cover Design  
**Catherine Labarca**

Focused Inquiry Textbook Introduction  
**Eliana Avery**

Narrative/Personal Essay  
**Kaitlin Kutchma & Meagan Higbee**

Synthesis/Analysis  
**Hunter Madden**

Ethical Reasoning Argument  
**Lily Carlisle Hamilton**

UNIV 200 Researched Argument  
**Emma MacDonald**



## Recruitment Inclusive Champions and the Institute for Inclusive Teaching

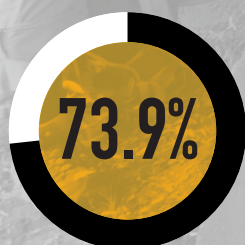
Department of Focused Inquiry faculty member Dr. Mary Sheldon served as a Recruitment Inclusive Champion and a planning committee co-facilitator for the Institute for Inclusive Teaching for the 2015-2016 school year. The Recruitment Inclusive Champion program works to strengthen VCU's faculty recruitment efforts by building a cohort of knowledgeable champions from units across the university. The 2016 Institute on Inclusive Teaching is organized by the Inclusive Institute Planning Committee in partnership with University College and Online Learning, the Division for Inclusive Excellence, the Office of the Vice President for Health Sciences, and the School of Education. A major goal of the Institute on Inclusive Teaching is to expose VCU faculty members, staff members, and graduate students to a range of opportunities, strategies, and techniques for addressing the inclusiveness of their courses, curricula, programs, and services.

## Education Trust Reports

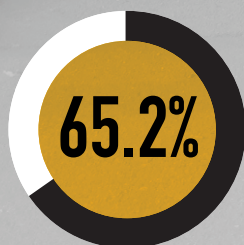
Virginia Commonwealth University has again been named by The Education Trust among "Top-Gaining Four-Year Public Institutions" for gains in undergraduate student retention and graduation. VCU saw particular gains for retention of underrepresented minorities at the undergraduate level. This recognition follows The Education Trust's 2012 report, "Advancing to Completion: Increasing degree attainment by improving graduation rates and closing gaps for African-American students," that profiled the University College and its year-long seminar-model Focused Inquiry sequence as essential to the improved retention rates among minority students at VCU.



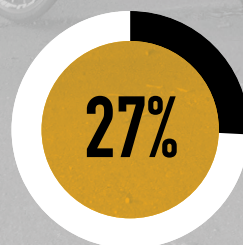
## Faculty With Inclusivity Training



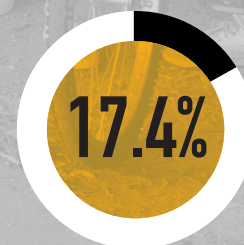
Safe Zone



Green Zone



Institute for  
Inclusive Teaching



Global Zone

# Peer-to-Peer Mentoring in FI

The UTA Program has:

# 31

Faculty Members

The Undergraduate Teaching Program (UNIV 250/251) provides successful Focused Inquiry students the opportunity to engage in experiential education and real world applications of their FI coursework through collaboration, mentorship, and reflection. UTAs (undergrad teaching assistants) work in the Focused Inquiry classroom, modeling successful student behavior and adding a crucial layer of support that helps both their students and their faculty mentors.

Upon completing a year of service in the UTA program, UTAs may apply to the Peer Leadership Seminar (UNIV 350). This application-only seminar offers its student a three-fold approach to leadership: they practice leadership through the mentorship they offer UTAs in the 250/251 sequence; they study leadership through the model of the Richmond Metro Region; finally, they meet regional leaders.

# 163

Undergrad TA's

## Guests during academic year 2015-16 have included

<b>Parker Agelasto</b>	Richmond City Council (5th District)
<b>Elizabeth Fraizer</b>	Owner, Richmond Raiders
<b>Jeff Bourne</b>	Chair, Richmond School Board (3rd District)
<b>Derek McDaniels</b>	President, Nehemiah Community Development Corporation
<b>Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto</b>	Defenders of Freedom, Justice, and Equality
<b>Betsy Carr</b>	Delegate, 69th District
<b>Sarah Meier</b>	Richmond Public Schools teacher
<b>Luther Mitchell</b>	returning citizen
<b>Ben Campbell</b>	author, Richmond's Unhealed History
<b>John Moeser</b>	Senior Fellow, Bonner Center for Civic Engagement
<b>Shonda Harris-Muhammed</b>	Richmond School Board (6th District)
<b>Nick Marfing</b>	Co-Founder and Executive Producer, Altamira Film Co.
<b>Chris Dovi</b>	Co-Founder, CodeVA
<b>Sara Conlon</b>	Executive Director, Opportunity Alliance Re-entry of Richmond
<b>Sarah Mullens</b>	Co-Founder and Executive Director, Unbound RVA

# 10

3rd Year UTA Mentors

In the 2015-2016 school year, **163** students completed **3260** hours of peer-to-peer mentoring

# Service Learning in the Department of Focused Inquiry:

## Kristin Reed

2015-2017  
ASPiRE Faculty Fellow

For the 2015-2017 school years Dr. Reed is partnering with VCU ASPiRE to advance student understanding of the issues surrounding mass incarceration. Students attended film screenings, lectures, and reading groups on VCU's Monroe Park Campus and the Richmond City Justice Center. This year's programming will culminate in an open panel discussion on alternatives to incarceration led by community leaders from around Virginia.

## Lindsay Chudzik

2015-2017  
VCU Service Learning Faculty Fellow

For the 2015-2017 school years Professor Chudzik will participate in VCU's Service Learning Faculty Fellows Program, which works to foster community-engaged work throughout the university. She has hosted a brown bag for Focused Inquiry faculty, organized an informational session for FI students about service learning options, and visited sections of UNIV 112 to talk about service initiatives on campus. Two of Professor Chudzik's courses explored the school-to-prison pipeline; those students are partnering with Carver Promise, Church Hill Activities and Tutoring, Opportunity Alliance Reentry, Fan Free Clinic, Safe Harbor, and Diversity Richmond.

## Beth Kreydatus

2015-2016  
Council for Community Engagement  
Currents of Change Award

The 2015-16 Council for Community Engagement award for exemplary partnership in teaching went to VCU Peer Mentoring at the Villa. The program reflects a partnership between the Department of Focused Inquiry and St. Joseph's Villa in Henrico County. Dr. Kreydatus's students provide sustained peer mentoring to students enrolled at St. Joseph's Villa. In the first two years of this program 43 of Dr. Kreydatus's students have donated over 1,600 hours of community service to middle and high school students enrolled at the Villa.

In the 2015-2016 school year, 219 Students will contribute 6060 Student Service Hours From SL Courses in the FI Dept

## Community Organizations that Partnered with Focused Inquiry Classes in 2015-2016:

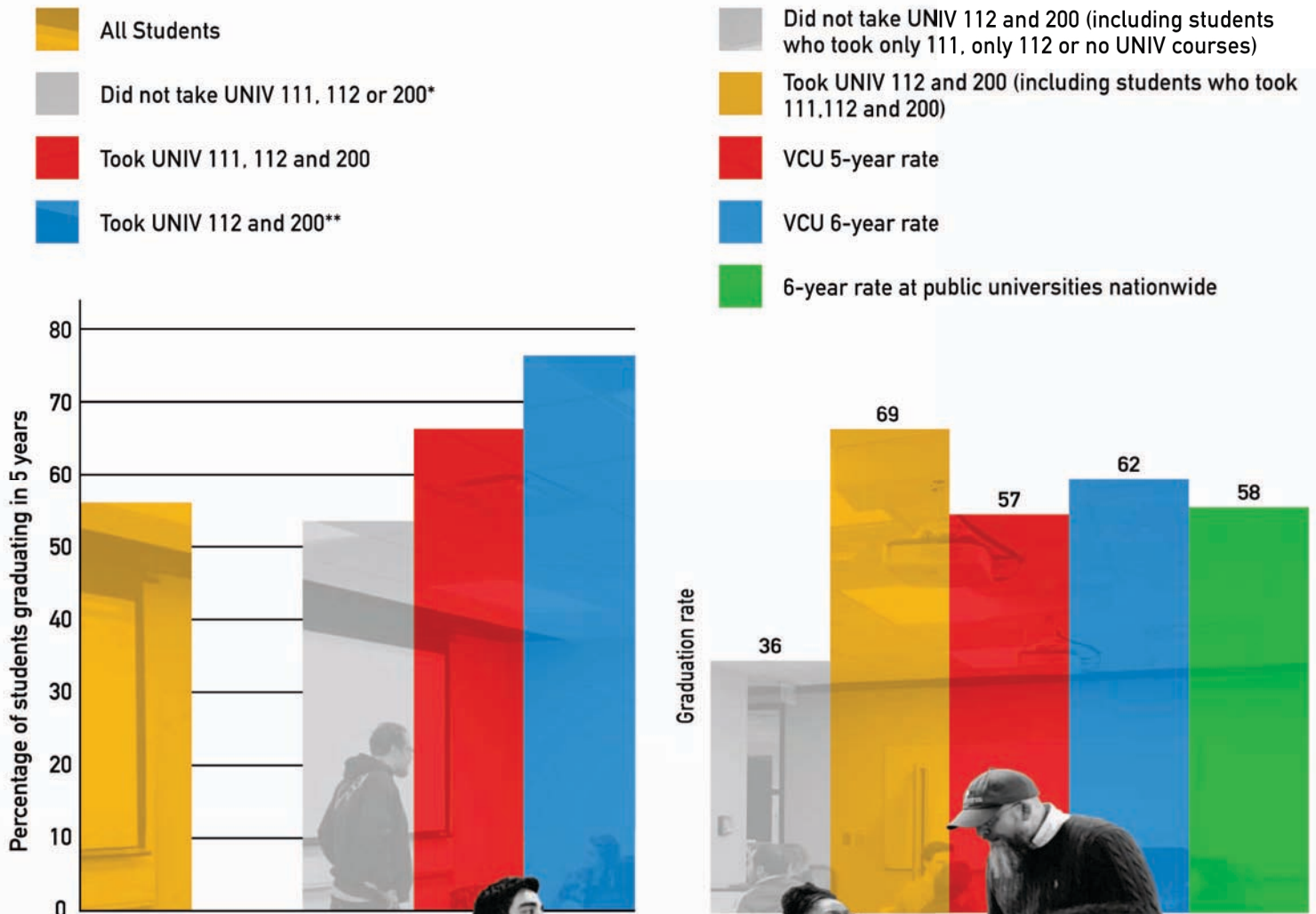
Richmond Public Library, Red Cross, Holley School Historic Site, East End Cemetery, Sportable, Imperial Plaza, Opportunity Alliance Reentry, Fairfield Middle School Community Garden, Food Not Bombs, Episcopal Church Soup Kitchen, Central Virginia Food Bank, St. Joseph's Villa, Shalom Farms, East District Family Resource Center, Richmond Salvation Army, Ram Pantry, Celebration Outreach Ministry, Carver Promise, Church Hill Activities and Tutoring, and St. Andrew's Elementary School.

# Focused Inquiry and Student Success

The 5-year graduation rate for first-time freshmen students beginning Fall 2010 who took all 3 of our courses (UNIV 111/112/200) is 66.45% compared to an overall 5-year graduation rate of 56.63% and a rate of 60.71% for students who took none of our courses. Of those students who took none of the courses and who are not in the honors college, the

5-year graduation rate was 53.69%, a 12.75% difference. The 5-year graduation rate for those who took UNIV 112 and UNIV 200 only (based on AP and IB credit) is 76.53%. In comparison, VCU's 6-year graduation rate is 62%, compared to the 5-year rates detailed below. All data provided by the Office of Planning and Decision Support at VCU.

## 5-Year Graduation Rate First-Time Freshman in Fall 2010



\* Excludes Honors College students who are not required to take UNIV courses

\*\* UNIV 111 Waiver through AP/IB credit



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