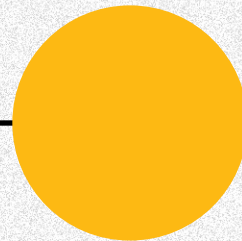
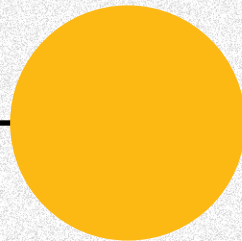
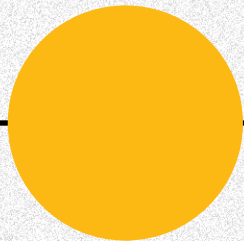


FOCUSED INQUIRY LEARNING LOUNGE

ANNUAL REPORT: 2022-2023



VCU University College
Focused Inquiry

2022–2023 FILL ANNUAL REPORT

1. FILL Usage By Students

2. Consultations with FILL Peer Mentors

3. FILL Peer Mentor Student Employees

4. Support Staff Student Employees

5. Programming

6. Outreach

7. Services to Students and Faculty

8. Professional Service

9. Assessment / Research and Development

10. Looking Ahead

11. University Partners

This report covers activities from May 15, 2022 through May 15, 2023. Note that The FILL was open limited hours in Summer 2022 and staffed with one student Support Worker and one Peer Mentor. Data from Summer 2022 is not included in this report because the number of student visits to The FILL and mentor consultations (in person and online) were negligible.



OVERVIEW & HISTORY

The Focused Inquiry Learning Lounge (FILL) provides resources and programming to support student success and belonging in University College at VCU. While the FILL existed previously as a study space, structured FILL programming began in Fall 2019 with the creation of the position of FILL Director and the hiring of Dr. Hannah Franz in this role. The FILL Peer Mentors program, created and overseen by Dr. Franz, started as a drop-in service in Spring 2020, which soon expanded to mentors being available by appointment and via Zoom. Programming and mentoring continued online during the pandemic.

In Spring 2022, Dr. Matthew James Vechinski, formerly an Associate Professor in the Department of Focused Inquiry, was hired as the Coordinator of Academic Programming for University College, a new position encompassing the duties of the FILL Director with additional administrative responsibilities. At this time, University College's Office Manager, Matt Springer (then and still), became the supervisor of FILL Support Staff student workers while the facilitation of the FILL Peer Mentors program was exclusively administered by the Coordinator of Academic Programming.



1. FILL USAGE BY STUDENTS

Visits to The FILL

During the 2022-2023 academic year, The FILL recorded 597 student check-ins. There were 291 checked-in visits during the Fall 2022 semester and 306 visits during Spring 2023 semester. 160 individual students accounted for all 597 check-ins. Of the total check-ins, 43.1% or 507 check-ins were done by 69 individual students who would visit the FILL on more than one occasion. Most of these visitors checked-in at least 5 times during the academic year. Sixteen students visited 10 or more times. Four students visited 20 or more times. And two students visited 30 or more times during the academic year. (It is important to note that these numbers only include the students who checked-in to The FILL via the check-in kiosk. Some visitors to The FILL do not use the check-in kiosk or have visited the FILL as a class.)

During the fall semester The FILL had 117 class visits and faculty-student meetings. In the spring there were 54. A class visit is defined as any time a faculty member scheduled class time in The FILL for working in groups, practicing presentations, or other class related activities. A faculty-student meeting is defined as any time a faculty member scheduled time with students one on one or in groups outside of regular scheduled class time.



FILL Visitors Enrolled Courses

Fall 2022

Course	Percentage of Visitors
UNIV 111	47.6
UNIV 200	14.9
UNIV 112	13.9
More than one UNIV Course	12.7
UNIV 299	4.9
UNIV 250	3.9
UNIV 301	1.9

Spring 2023

Course	Percentage of Visitors
UNIV 112	35
No UNIV Classes	32.1
UNIV 200	10.2
UNIV 250	8.6
UNIV 111	5.8
More than one UNIV Class	4.4
UNIV 251	0.7
UNIV 299	0.7
UNIV 301	0.7

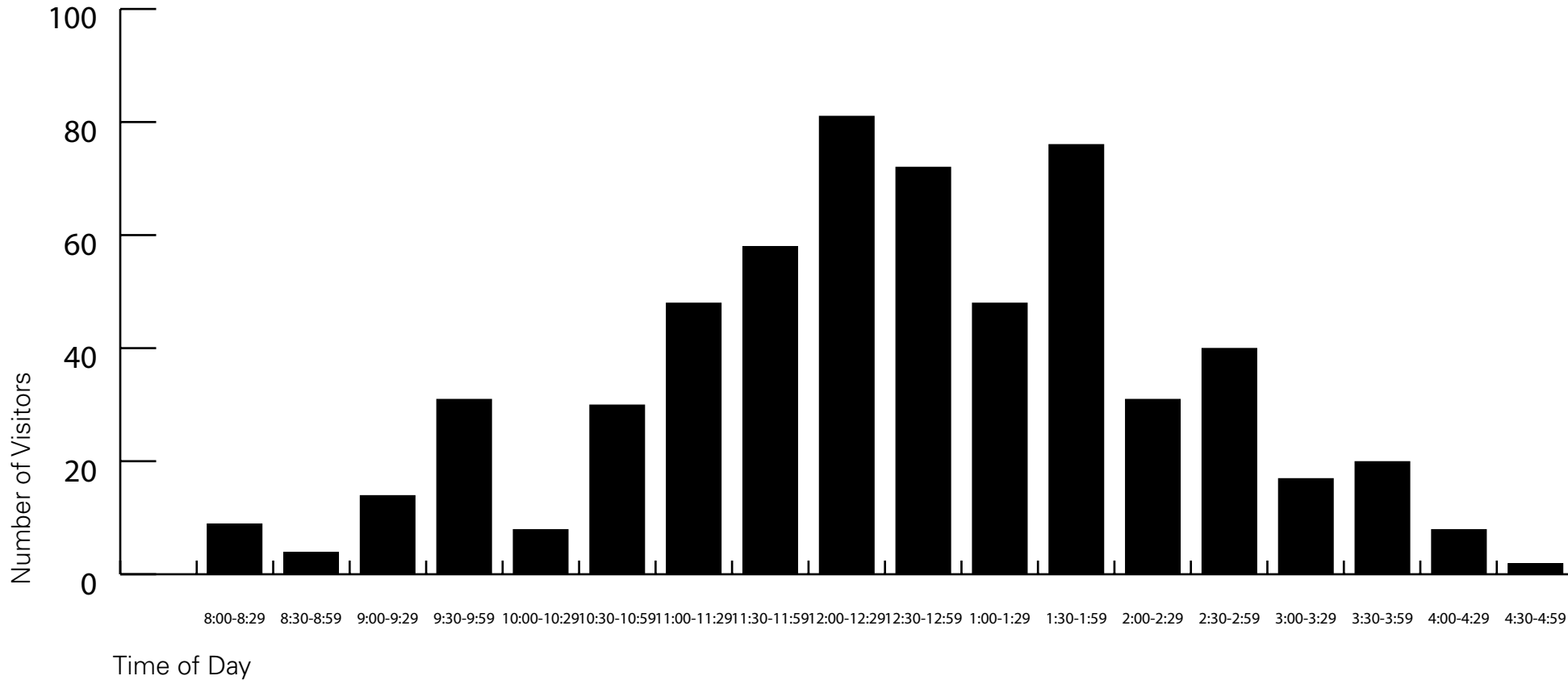
**Data on student usage of FILL services comes from Navigate (the student management system which VCU uses to track student success), Rams-Connect (VCU's student engagement platform for campus life activities), and our internal records. Please email ucfill@vcu.edu with any questions about the data shared in this report or its sources.

Timing of Visits

The month with the most visitations was February 2023 followed by October 2022 and April 2023. The busiest times of day fell between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. As the graph below shows, the FILL saw a roughly normal distribution of visitors across the course of a day and peaked around midday

FILL Visitation Times

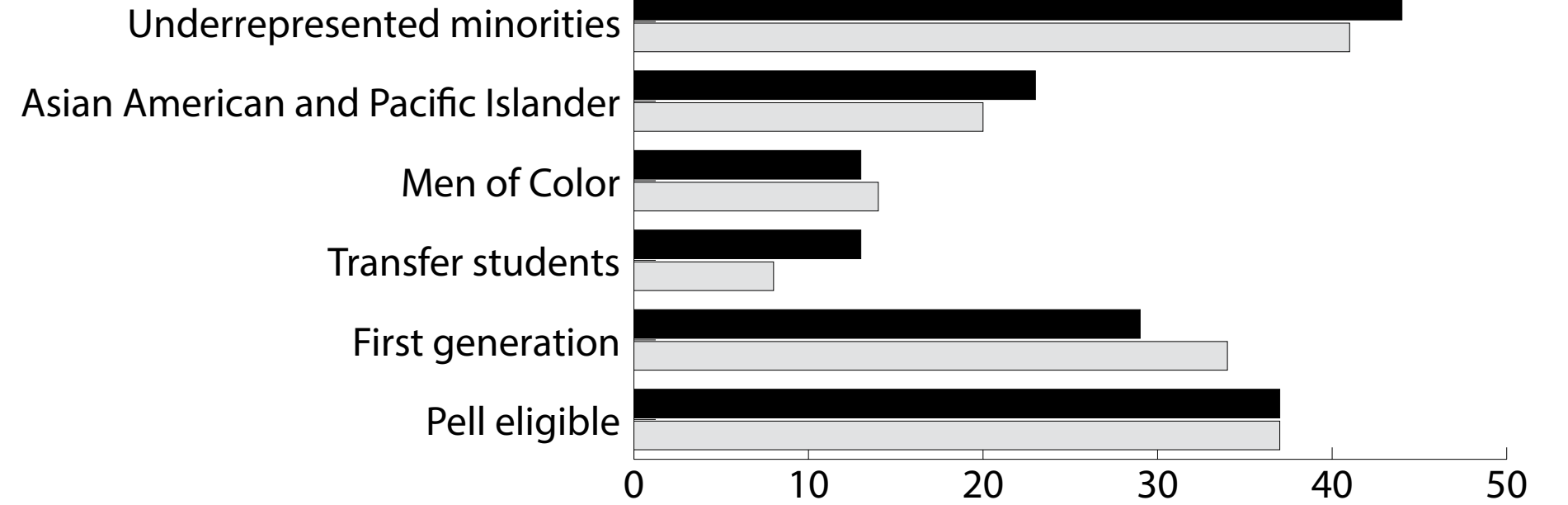
AY 2022-2023



Demographics of FILL Visitors vs. All Focused Inquiry Students

AY 2022-2023

■ FILL Visitors ■ All FI



Demographically, 70 visitors (43.7%) are identified as belonging to an underrepresented minority group; 37 visitors (23.1%) identified as being Asian American or Pacific Islander; 20 visitors (12.5%) are men of color; 21 of visitors (13.1%) are transfer students; 46 students (28.7%) are first generation students; and 59 visitors (36.9%), are Pell eligible. It is important to note that an individual student can fall into more than one of these categories.

2. CONSULTATIONS WITH FILL PEER MENTORS

Number of Consultations

In 2022–2023, our six FILL Peer Mentors held 217 conferences with students (120 in Fall 2022, and 97 in Spring 2023). Consultations on average last 30 minutes, although sometimes sessions are booked for longer. Mentors also had the option to continue their consultations if they do not have other appointments or students waiting. That means that mentors likely spent more than 108 hours working with students in UNIV 111, 112, and 200.

Compared to academic year 2021-2022 consultations with Peer Mentors are up 33% (163 consultations then compared to 217 in 2022–2023).

The cancellation rate for appointments made with FILL Peer Mentor remains very high. Over one in three appointments are canceled by students (113 of 313, or 36%), many within 24 hours of their scheduled times. Despite this, students overwhelmingly preferred to schedule appointments with mentors using Navigate, which they are able to do in as little as one hour in advance. In 2022–2023, there were only 17 walk-ins total. Students can meet with a peer mentor in The FILL in between consultations. We put a sign outside The FILL that indicates when a FILL Peer Mentor is available.

Consultation Modalities

This past year, FILL Peer Mentors offered both online and in-person consultations. 140 of the consultations were in-person (65%), and the remaining consultations were on Zoom. This corresponds to the roughly 2:1 proportion of in-person mentor availability to the availability of Zoom appointments.

The table below shows how course modalities correlate to Peer Mentor consultations. For instance, even though entirely online courses accounted for about 30% of all sections offered for UNIV 111, 112, and 200, about 45% of consultations were from students in online sections. (VCU course delivery definitions [here](#).)

Section Modality	Percent of all sections of Focused Inquiry courses	Percent of all students meeting with FILL Peer Mentors
In-person (RINP)	30%	20%
Hybrid and Hyflex (RONA, RONB, RONC, RONE, RONF)	40%	35%
Online (ROND, RONL)	30%	45%

Students Meeting with Mentors

141 individual students met with FILL Peer Mentors during the academic year 2022–2023. 33 students had more than one consultation, and slightly less than half of those students (15) had three or more consultations.

Demographically, 67 students who met with a FILL Peer Mentor (48%) are identified as belonging to an underrepresented minority group; 34 (24%) identified as being Asian American or Pacific Islander; 18 visitors (13%) are men of color; 10 (7%) are transfer students; 57 (40%) are first generation students; and 63 (45%) are Pell eligible. It is important to note that an individual student can fall into more than one of these categories.

Responses to Satisfaction Survey

Students who had consultations were invited to take a satisfaction survey to share their feedback. Although the completion rate was low—we received only 33 responses to our Google Form (or 15% of all students with consultations)—all were unanimous in their praise of the mentors’ services. 100% of respondents answered the survey questions in the affirmative:

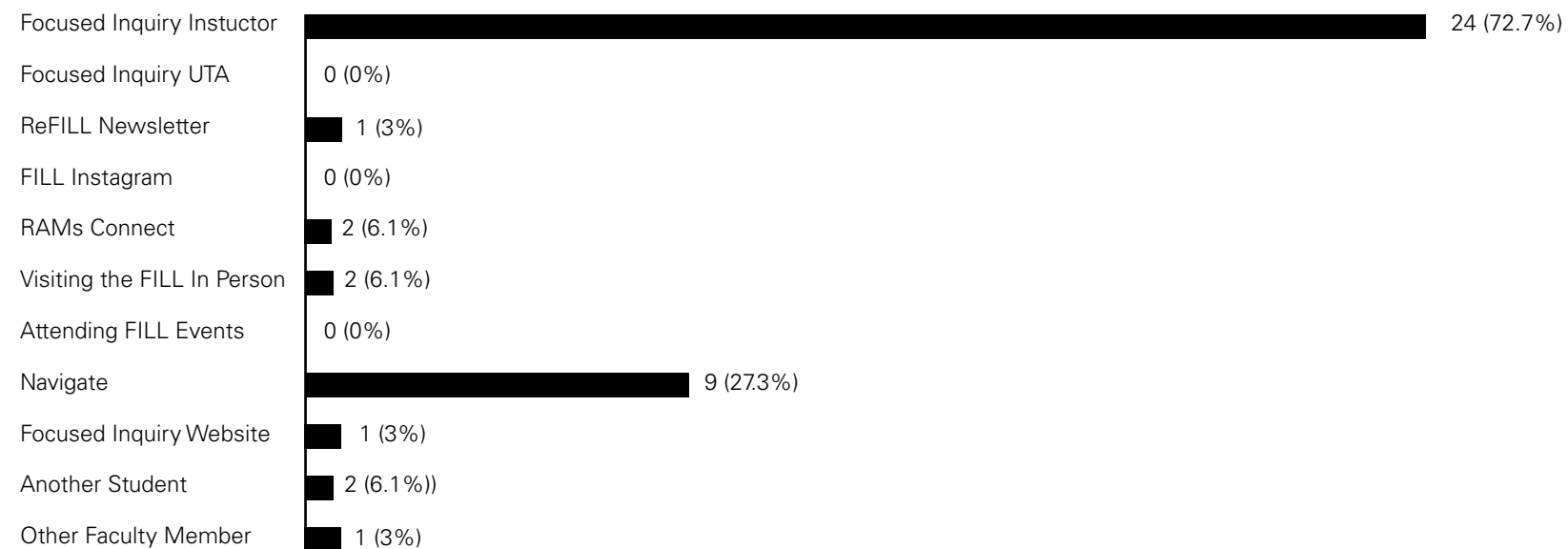
- Were you satisfied with your consultation?
- Do you feel more confident engaging in your Focused Inquiry course as a result of your consultation?
- Will you continue to use the FILL Peer Mentors’ services?

In free-text responses, the words helpful, kind, and patient were used multiple times by different students. One student offered, “I think this facility has helped me a lot during my writing process of an essay assignment. And help me reflect on something after a critique from someone that knows more or sees something different from my eyes. Some tips and help that has helped me become a better writer for an argument or just writing [in general].”

The survey also asked how students learned about the Peer Mentoring program. Overwhelmingly students heard about FILL Peer Mentors from their Focused Inquiry instructors (nearly three quarters). Thank you, FI faculty, for promoting our services! We are happy to notify instructors when their students have a consultation if faculty wants to incentivize or require that they meet with a mentor. We emailed notifications to the instructors of 28 students in 2022–2023.

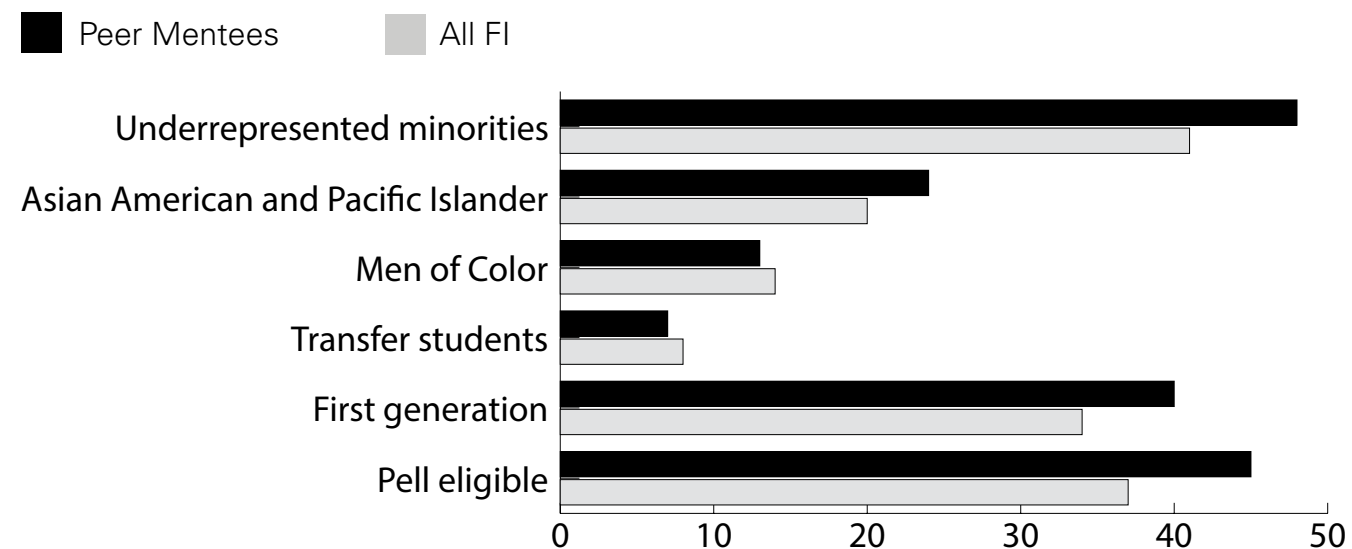


How did you hear about the FILL Peer Mentor Services? (33 Responses)



Demographics of students who met with a Peer Mentor

AY 2022-2023



3. FILL PEER MENTOR STUDENT EMPLOYEES

Six Peer Mentors were on The FILL staff this year; three were returning and three were newly hired in Fall 2023. [Read about our outstanding mentors here.](#) (The FILL was also staffed in Summer 2022 by one of our experienced mentors, Katelyn Harlow.)

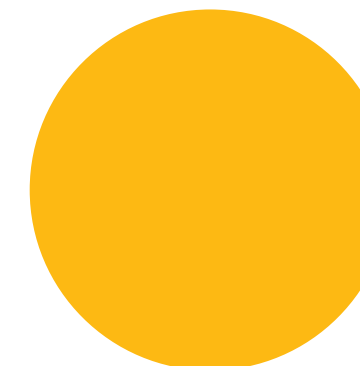
Three of our mentors graduated as well! Katelyn Harlow and Q Hildebrand-Travis have been mentoring since 2021, and Arden Gentry just joined the team this year along with Jasmine Mitchell and Sophie Colley. Venkat Katrapati returned for his second straight year as a mentor.

Dr. Vechinski and the experienced mentors created a comprehensive training program for new mentors involving shadowing and observations. This allowed The FILL to drop the requirement that students take a semester-long course to apply for the role. The handbook for mentors was also completely revised and expanded.

Together all of our mentors logged over 800 hours of work in 2022–2023 as Federal Work Study student workers, providing them with financial support and scheduling flexibility. They made themselves available for student consultations at a wide range of times, working usually three- to four-hour shifts. In Fall and Spring, at least one mentor was available each day of the week for an average of 30 hours a week (some weeks were closer to 35 hours). Mentors provided online appointments scheduled in advance on weekday evenings and weekends when The FILL was not open. In Navigate mentors submit a narrative report after each consultation, which become part of students’ advising records.

When not meeting with students, the mentors participated in training activities, designed and carried out programming, created content for our newsletter and Instagram account, and developed

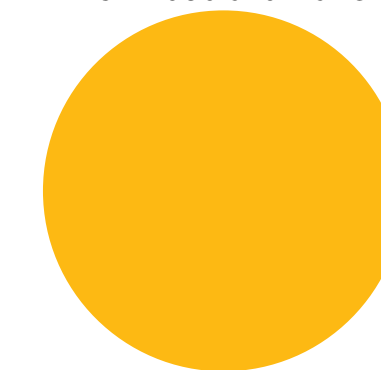
online asynchronous Canvas modules for students. Their achievements are described in more detail later in this report. Team meetings were held every other week, and paid enrichment opportunities throughout the year were offered to staff, including workshops for FI Undergraduate Teaching Assistants and FILL Peer Mentors, facilitated by Jenny Stout of VCU Libraries Student Success. The team began using the project management software Trello to collaborate on projects and document their progress. The FILL increased its presence and use of the [Student Groups platform](#) RamsConnect, on which staff received additional training. It is estimated that mentors spent 8–10 hours each on training this academic year.



Q Hildebrand-Travis



Katelyn Harlow



4. SUPPORT STAFF STUDENT EMPLOYEES

FILL support staff provided front desk support, designed graphics for flyers and digital signage, provided support for UC programming such as FI Expo, and assisted with other UC projects as needed. This academic year our support staff have worked a collective 645.75 hours. Highlight the importance of work study

Support Staff:

- Rushali Barman: hired Fall 2019
- Tsenat Efrem: hired Fall 2022
- Laila Hendricks: hired Fall 2022
- TaKhia James: hired Fall 2022
- Michael Mustachio: hired Fall 2022
- Ginny Marzoratti: hired Spring 2023



Peer Leadership Initiative

This year The FILL joined the Division of Student Affairs' [Peer Leadership Initiative](#); both Peer Mentors and Support Staff are recognized as peer leaders who support student success at VCU. The initiative covers a range of paid and volunteer peer support opportunities across campus, including resident assistants, orientation leaders, RecWell instructors, and academic coaches. This initiative allowed students the opportunity for professional development and networking events as well as eligibility for peer leader awards. (Katelyn Harlow and Q Hildebrand-Travis were nominated and in the running for the Senior Peer Leader of the Year award at the 2023 VCU Student Leadership Awards on April 20.) In addition, the initiative allows students to count their experience at The FILL towards their experiential learning requirement for graduation (REAL Level 3 co-curricular). Students who participate in the initiative must complete an online Peer Leadership course in Canvas which has modules covering the four pillars of peer leadership: Quality Service, Diversity and Inclusion, Self-Efficacy, and Integrative Learning. These modules were integrated into all student workers' regular training this year and represent two hours of ongoing learning for each staff member. During Peer Leadership Appreciation Week (PLAW), FILL student staff participated in a Peer Leadership Showcase and reception (April 19) and an outdoor picnic event with games called the Block Party (April 21).

5. PROGRAMMING

A portion of The FILL's programming is devoted to getting the word out about The FILL space and the resources we offer. Some of these events emphasize social interaction in an effort to foster belonging. Most are targeted at first- and second-year students and students in Focused Inquiry classes in particular.

FILL Open Houses during New Student Orientation sessions: Throughout the summer, VCU Orientation and Transition Programs holds a series of two-day orientations for incoming students with around 400 Freshmen at a time. Orientation leaders were encouraged to bring their groups of 10–15 students to The FILL during a two-hour period. FILL staff welcomed the new Rams and gave them a tour of the space and told them about peer mentoring services for those in Focused Inquiry classes and the Common Book program. We reached just over 350 students over 11 orientations over the course of Summer 2022 and dozens of students' parents, family members, and guests who visited and asked about what to expect in Focused Inquiry.

Game Night at The FILL (August 17 and 22): The Focused Inquiry Learning Lounge (FILL) is a space for students in Focused Inquiry general education courses to congregate and study; it also offers many resources and programs to support student success and belonging, such as peer mentoring and workshops, so that you can thrive in your FI courses and throughout your time at VCU. Come check out the FILL in Harris Hall and stay to play games! You'll make friends with other students and meet the FILL staff and FILL Peer Mentors who offer personalized assistance with your Focused Inquiry courses and help you network, take ownership of your work, build confidence and more.

Welcome to Focused Inquiry (August 25, September 1): Are you taking UNIV 111, 112 or 200 this Fall or Spring? This session will introduce you to the three-course sequence of Focused Inquiry (FI) courses which are central to the general education curriculum at VCU. Actual professors and experienced undergrads will answer your questions about what you will learn in these courses and how you can best prepare for and participate in your FI classes. The session will be held in the Focused Inquiry Learning Lounge (FILL), a space in Harris Hall for FI students to congregate and study. You will be shown the many resources and programs the FILL provides to support student success and belonging, such as peer mentoring and workshops, so that you can thrive in your FI courses and throughout your time at VCU.

A promotional flyer for 'THE FILL IS OPEN' featuring a megaphone icon and the text 'CRUSH YOUR EXAMS!'. The flyer is set against a teal background with a white rounded rectangle containing the main text. The text reads: 'CRUSH YOUR EXAMS!' in large, bold, yellow letters; 'THE FILL IS OPEN' in blue and yellow letters; 'MONDAY – FRIDAY' in bold black letters; 'from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until 12/21' in smaller black letters; and 'Harris 5116' in black letters. The VCU University College Focused Inquiry logo is at the bottom left.

CRUSH YOUR EXAMS!

THE FILL IS OPEN

MONDAY – FRIDAY
from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until 12/21
Harris 5116

VCU
University College
Focused Inquiry

Additional open houses and game nights (November 30, April 4); Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Student Association (BISSA) De-Stressing Session (April 28)

FILL staff created a self-guided FILL tour using explanatory signage which debuted as part of Focused Inquiry Faculty Institute (January 10). This tour was translated into a virtual tour in the form of a Google Slides presentation, one version for faculty and another for students.

See also details on invited tabling events and information sessions in the Outreach section of this report.

Academic Programming for Focused Inquiry Students

We offered several “Lunch and Learn” hour-long workshops for students in the Summer Scholars program across their four-week term, aimed specifically at incoming Freshmen. They were all designed and facilitated by Katelyn Harlow, FILL Peer Mentor.

Communicating with Professors (July 19): Unsure of how to talk to your professors? In this session, we will give you the tools and personalized advice to assist you in communicating with professors, whether during office hours or via email.

How Am I Going To Read All of This? (July 26): In this session, we will give you the tools and personalized advice to assist you with absorbing textual information, as well as skimming, annotating and note-taking.

Demystifying the Hidden Curriculum (August 2): We all know that courses provide syllabi to get an understanding of the skills and texts necessary for completing a course, but what about the skills and ideas you are expected to know that are not explicitly written? The hidden curriculum is a term that refers to the unwritten/undefined lessons, behaviors or ways of being that are expected of you in school or university. This session will provide you with a better understanding of the hidden curriculum, personalized advice from a senior English major, and give you resources and tools for student success.

Organizing Your Life in Time for Fall (August 9): As busy college students, it can be difficult to keep your space—digital and physical—neat and tidy. Trying to stay organized can be an added stressor outside of classwork, but it doesn’t have to be! In this session, The FILL will give you tried and true tips and tricks to get organized in time for the Fall semester. We’ll go over strategies for scheduling, as well as ways to stay organized so that you can feel prepared and ready for whatever comes your way.

This year we organized two events, one workshop and one roundtable discussion, on valuable skills for Focused Inquiry classes and beyond. Each featured Focused Inquiry faculty as co-facilitators.

Growing Your Public Speaking Confidence (November 15), led by Professor Courtney Sviatko: Public speaking is challenging for everyone. This workshop will share best practices for planning and rehearsing your presentations, as well as strategies for managing those nerves so that you can share your ideas with confidence.

Reading: It Gets Better (April 13), with Professor Courtney Sviatko and Chris Jackson as panelists along with Jenny Stout, VCU Libraries Student Success, and Jess Rogers, Writing Center Coordinator: Are you struggling with reading? You’re not alone. Many students face challenges when it comes to understanding and retaining the information they read. That’s why we’re thrilled to announce our upcoming panel, “Reading: It Gets Better,” where professors, students and library staff will provide practical solutions and personal strategies to common reading comprehension issues. During this panel, you’ll have the opportunity to ask our panelists about any reading challenges you may be facing. They’ll share tips and strategies to help you improve your comprehension, retention, and engagement with texts. The FILL is partnering with the VCU Writing Center and VCU Libraries for this event—you’ll learn how FILL Peer Mentors, tutors at the Writing Center and Student Success librarians can offer you assistance!

The FILL was delighted to be the host of a series of simultaneous events for Focused Inquiry Expo on April 5 for the first time. It showcased the amazing work of students in Focused Inquiry courses (UNIV 111, 112, and 200). Nearly 30 FI students shared their insights, research findings, and multimedia projects with the audiences that gather in The FILL, and almost all of them were there in-person to talk about their creative process and respond to questions and feedback. FI faculty nominated students and the Expo Committee put together the schedule with three events running concurrently in different rooms: Multimodal Presentations, Multimodal Project Gallery, and Essays Out Loud. More than 50 students and faculty members attended the Expo.

**Thursday, April 13
at 2:00 p.m. in The FILL
Harris Hall 5116, 5th Floor**

Also streaming live on Zoom!
Register for link:
bit.ly/3Kc6IEw

VCU FILL

**READING:
IT GETS BETTER**

A panel of students and academic professionals talk about their experiences on the way to becoming more confident readers!

VCU University College Focused Inquiry | **VCU** Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success Writing Center | **VCU** Libraries

AN OFFICIAL **WGW** WEEKS OF WELCOME EVENT

LOOKING FOR A WAY TO TAKE A BREAK AND MAKE SOME FRIENDS?

THE FILL INVITES YOU TO:
Fun-FILLED GAME NIGHT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1
6 P.M.

VCU University College Focused Inquiry
HARRIS HALL, ROOM 5116

6. OUTREACH

ReFILL Email Newsletter

The ReFILL newsletter reaches more than 4,000 students each semester via email—all students enrolled in UNIV 111, 112, 200 and 299—along with every Focused Inquiry instructor and a mailing list of over 60 university partners. The content is designed by FILL Peer Mentors using the MailChimp platform. This past academic year, we released nine issues each semester (plus seven in Summer 2022). We began sending out the newsletter to students, faculty, staff, and alumni that are on our RamsConnect contact list (more than 250 additional recipients) and archiving the issues on our [RamsConnect website](#).

Newsletter content ranges from promotion of programming to original reporting, plus information on campus resources and articles sharing tips and tricks. Highlights this year include an [interview with the new Focused Inquiry chair, Katy Hanggi](#) (November 7); [descriptions of J-term Winter 2022 and Spring 2023 UNIV courses \(December 7\)](#); [details on the new Little Ram Pantry outside The FILL \(January 31\)](#); and a [recap of the roundtable discussion on reading practices \(April 19\)](#).

VCU FILL Instagram

FILL Peer Mentors regularly create graphics to post on our Instagram account (@vcufill) to advertise programming and services and share tips with students. There were over 95 posts added in 2022–2023, which is an average of three per week. Our posts reach on average 46 accounts, though individual posts are viewed by between 22 to 184 users. These numbers are a significant improvement over a maximum of 63 accounts reached by Summer 2021. At the end of the academic year, the VCU FILL Instagram account had 202 followers (up from 89 in Summer 2021).

ReFILL Podcast

[The ReFILL podcast](#), dormant in Spring and Fall 2022, was relaunched with three new episodes coming out in Spring 2023 hosted by FILL Peer Mentor Katelyn Harlow:

- Episode 20: Sustainability
- Episode 21: Mindfulness and Meditation
- Episode 22: The Rise of Zines

Two additional episodes were completed but held for next Fall, one by Katelyn and another by Arden Gentry. With the assistance of Billy Lineberry, Senior Communications Specialist for University College, these episodes and most past episodes were uploaded to Kaltura and united on one web page on the Focused Inquiry website. This provides open access to all students, unlike before when the podcasts were distributed through Spotify. Episodes have been captioned and transcripts are available on the web page, where the listener count is publicly displayed as well.

Excerpt from Episode 21: “Hello and welcome to the ReFILL Podcast. My name is Katelyn Harlow and I’m your host and FILL Peer Mentor. In today’s episode, I wanted to discuss the topics mindfulness and meditation, look into their benefits, and give ideas as to how you can incorporate them into your life as a college student. Many of us are balancing schoolwork, student organizations, and internships or jobs, while trying to balance our social lives and interests, which can be incredibly difficult and create feelings of stress and/or anxiety. According to the National College Health Assessment, a study conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA) in Spring 2022, approximately 79% of college students reported moderate to high levels of stress in the last 30 days. With statistics like these, it seems that we are all

in need of healthy coping mechanisms, one of which being mindfulness and meditation. First, let’s define the concepts of mindfulness and meditation. I feel like there are a lot of misconceptions about these topics, so starting off with definitions can help us better understand and clarify any misinformation. In the book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, mindfulness is defined as, ‘the life of awareness: the presence of life...’ Throughout the book, he emphasizes the power of breath, at one point saying, ‘breath is a tool. Breath is mindfulness’ (23).”

RamsConnect

The FILL increased its use of [RamsConnect](#), VCU’s student organization platform, as a way to increase engagement in programming. We posted 22 events through our organization account, which were visible to all users and appeared in the feeds of the more than 250 students, faculty, staff, and alumni that are on our RamsConnect contact list. There were 125 total registrants for this year’s events. Those who used RamsConnect to “check in” to events were invited to complete feedback surveys afterward, although no students submitted responses. The FILL Peer Mentors created a website on RamsConnect to share information about consultation availability and to recruit future mentors. As described above, the RamsConnect website includes an archive of past issues of the ReFILL newsletter.

Information Sessions

The FILL hosted in-person, online, and hybrid information sessions to recruit students for VCU Transform (November 10, February 8) and Dr. Vechinski’s UNIV 391 section on peer mentoring (November 10, November 14, December 1).



UNIV 391: Peer Mentoring in Higher Education

Dr. Vechinski created a new two-credit special topics course which was offered in Spring 2023. This replaced the previous course taught by former FILL Director Hannah Franz to train new FILL Peer Mentors. While taking a course is no longer required preparation for being hired as a FILL Peer Mentor, it provides a pathway to peer mentor opportunities across VCU. To promote the course, Dr. Vechinski collaborated with VCU programs that have peer leadership opportunities, which are included in our partners list. Notably, the You First program allowed its mentors to take the course in place of its enrichment training in the Spring.

Peer Mentoring in Higher Education explores the special power of peer support—students helping other students—emphasizing not only academic assistance but also belonging and community building. Its goal is to offer a better understanding of the challenges undergraduates face and how universities and colleges are trying to address these challenges through peer-to-peer initiatives. In this course students will examine the services and resources offered at VCU specifically from an equity and inclusion standpoint. They will also consider how peer mentoring does shape and could further influence the campus culture. In addition to being introduced to the best practices of peer mentoring, students will apply what they learn and tap into their own interests to design a peer support project intended for VCU undergraduates.

10 students enrolled in the course and created projects ranging from a collaborative video game design codefest to support groups for resident life assistants. 75% of students rated the overall course “very good” or “outstanding,” and 100% rated the instructor “outstanding.” Here are some selected comments from student course evaluations:

“Thanks for a great semester! This class stimulated my interest in peer mentoring, and I am looking to hopefully continue mentoring—whether it be in the FILL with Dr. Vechinski or in other programs he provided resources to.”

“This professor was very caring and helpful”

“Was unsure about this class when I registered, but extremely glad I did! This course was great.”

Invited Tabling Events

The FILL regularly receives invitations to have a table at events connecting students with campus resources. This past year The FILL was present at the following:

- REAL Open House (VCU REAL, Office of the Provost), August 30
- Federal Work Study Fair (VCU Career Services, Student Enrollment Management and Student Success), August 31
- Academic Success Day (First and Second Year Experiences and Transitions, Student Enrollment Management and Student Success), October 28
- Peer Leader and Mentor Fair (First and Second Year Experiences and Transitions, Student Enrollment Management and Student Success), February 1
- First-Year Experience/Second-Year Experience-Palooza (First and Second Year Experiences and Transitions, Student Enrollment Management and Student Success), May 2

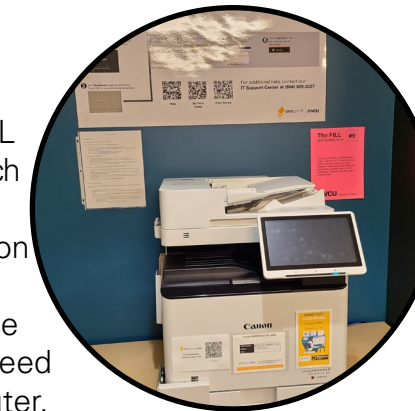
7. SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Technology

The FILL continued to check out equipment, such as noise-canceling headphones, purchased with grants paid for through Technology fees charged with tuition. There was little demand among students for long-term loans of equipment to take outside of The FILL. As reported earlier this year, the FILL can no longer support laptop loans as a result of changes in our service agreement with [VCU Labs and Classrooms Computing](#). Yet our renegotiated agreement brought in four new PCs to The FILL's computer lab and two more in the main area for signing in and printing. All computers in the lab have [Adobe Creative Cloud](#) software installed, which students can use for free after setting up an account tied to their VCU eID. The FILL remains the hub for UC faculty to bring in computers and accessories they're having trouble with. We can help connect instructors with [VCU Desktop Services](#) for troubleshooting, support, and advice and provide loaner laptops when available.

Printing

The printer we used to have in The FILL was on the old Pay4Print system, which is being phased out. At the end of the Fall semester, we received a new Canon color multifunction printer with copy and scan functions that operates on the [VCU OnePrint](#) network and does not need to be connected to a dedicated computer. Students can print from any device and pick up their printouts at any printer or copier on the network. Copies and prints are paid for with RamBucks on VCU Cards. Scanning to email is completely free. In Fall 2022, only 62 pages were printed. This rose to 378 in the Spring, with 183 copies made along with 55 scans. The printer



in The FILL will be the only one in Harris Hall; signage in the Student Financial Management Center and Math Help Center directs students to pick up their prints at The FILL.

Little Ram Pantry

The FILL has partnered with the main [Ram Pantry](#) in the Commons by setting up a Little Ram Pantry outside of the FILL. The Ram Pantry's mission is to ensure food security, human dignity, and well-being on campus by providing in-need VCU students with food. Our FILL support staff have stocked and maintained an inventory of non-perishable goods and hygiene products for all members of the VCU community. The pantry was installed in early December 2022, and over the remaining academic year, 103 items were taken. The FILL promoted the Little Ram Pantry by including it in the UC and ReFILL newsletters, displaying digital signage, and creating a flier to promote the pantry's hygiene products.



Room Reservations

Faculty, staff, and students are able to reserve the Broad St Room, the conference room, the main area of the FILL, and the Faculty lounge for classes, meetings, or events. Reservations are able to be made in-person at the FILL front desk or via email to either Matthew Springer or Dr. Matthew Vechinski.

Textbook Loans

Starting in Spring 2023, the FILL has several copies of the Focused Inquiry textbooks on reserve for students to check out.

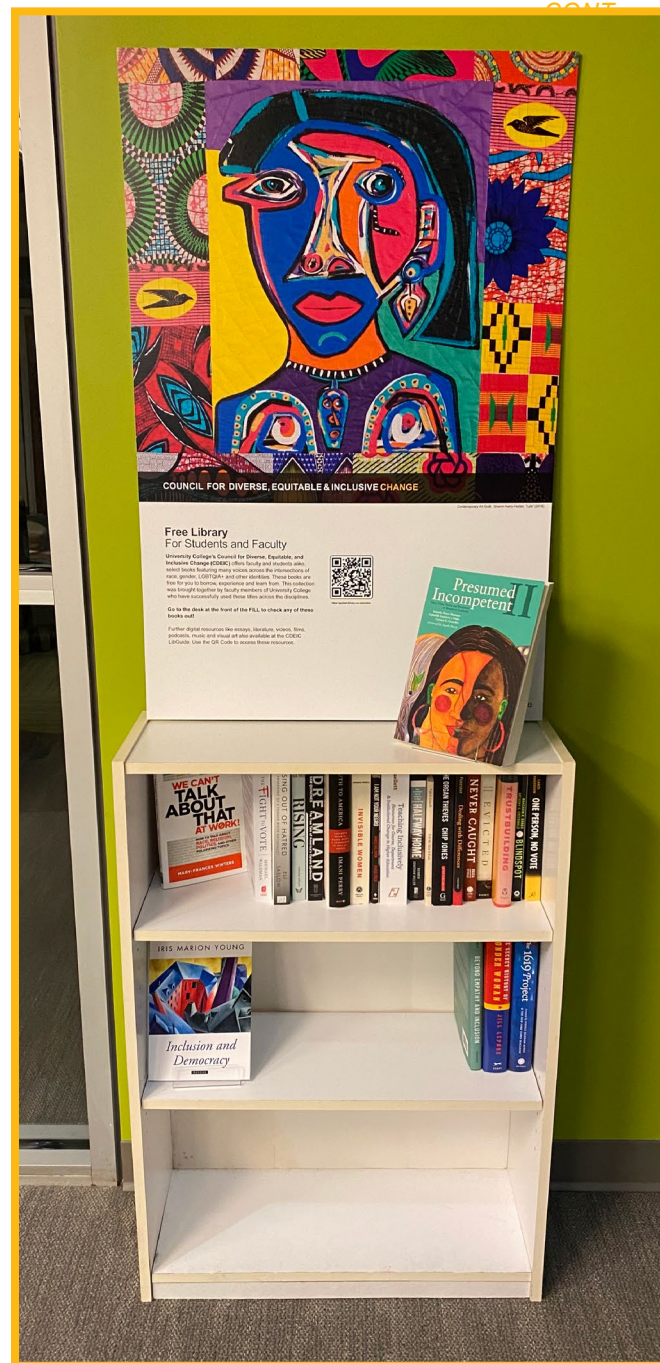
The books on reserve are the current edition of the FI reader, The Curious Researcher, and We Have Always Lived in the Castle. Students can check out a copy of these titles for two hours at a time for use inside or outside of the FILL. The purpose for having these books reserved is for student use while in class or working on assignments.

Book Donations and Book Fair for Faculty and Staff / FILL Free Books Shelves

The FILL in collaboration with the FI Textbook Committee rounded up extra copies of books and texts donated by faculty. Some books that we had in quantity, such as former Common Books, were offered to Richmond Public School teachers ([news article here](#)). We held a book fair for faculty in the faculty lounge in March 2023, setting out over 100 books for them to take for free. Titles that were not academic in nature have been retained for distribution through The FILL's Free Books Shelves for students.

CDEIC Library

In partnership with the UC Council for Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Change, The FILL launched the CDEIC Free Library in Spring 2023. The library offers faculty and students a selection of books featuring voices across the intersections of race, gender, LGBTQIA+, and other identities. This collection was brought together by faculty members of the University College who have used these titles across their disciplines. Books can be checked out at the front desk of the FILL for two weeks at a time.



8. PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

In addition to their work for The FILL, the UC Office Manager, Matthew Springer, and Coordinator of Academic Programming, Dr. Matthew James Vechinski, regularly contribute to initiatives of the College and university.

Service to University College

UC Newsletter

This academic year the FILL team took over editing and publishing the weekly UC Newsletter for faculty and staff every Wednesday morning. The newsletter is used to share upcoming events, opportunities for students and faculty, provide updates from committees, amongst other items. Posts for the newsletter were collected via a Google Form. During the academic year 2023, 31 issues of the newsletter were published. A new addition to the newsletter this year was the inclusion of a section dedicated to updates and events for the CDEIC. [Past issues of the newsletter are archived in this Google Drive folder.](#)

UC Calendar

Dr. Vechinski collaborated with Senior Communications Specialist for University College and other UC leadership to create a new shared Google Calendar, replacing the previous one for Focused Inquiry only. The new calendar brings greater efficiency and data security to the College's scheduling needs. [Read more about the new calendar here.](#)

IDS Graduations

Matthew Springer and the FILL support staff have been assisting with the Interdisciplinary Studies graduation ceremonies. Matthew helped coordinate and prepare for the

event and took over most of the graduation duties during spring 2023. This year IDS moved its graduation from Harris 101 to the Singleton Center for the Performing Arts, which is a large venue. The move of venues came just in time as IDS graduated one of its largest classes, 71 graduates, this spring.

Space Committee

In order to address the office space needs of the University College, Matthew Springer joined with faculty and staff from FI and IDS to look into alternative office space/sharing methods as well as determining the best way to incorporate IDS staff into the current office arrangements. A survey was conducted to gauge both faculty and staff usage of their office space but their openness to alternative arrangements and input on office space needs. The committee was successful in locating space for the IDS staff to move into.

Student Wellness and Faculty Support FLC

Dr. Vechinski was a member of the group which this year revised and updated its [Student Wellness Crises Resources spreadsheet](#) and organized a Campus Connect training through VCU University Counseling Services designed to enhance participants' knowledge, awareness, and skills concerning college student suicide.

Technology Committee

The Technology Committee is now a college-level committee chaired by Dr. Kirk Richardson, and Dr. Vechinski is a part of this group that addresses student and faculty technology needs. This year, in addition to hosting faculty development opportunities, the committee applied for and received funding for a student device charging station in The FILL.

Service to VCU

Academic Success Council

Dr. Vechinski is University College’s representative on the Academic Success Council chaired by Maggie Tolan of Student Enrollment Management and Student Success (SEMSS). This group pulls multiple players across campus together to focus on university resources for student support. Monthly meetings center on reviewing data and metrics and raising awareness about services offered by different campus units.

Quality Enhancement Plan

VCU designs a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)—a future-oriented, time-bound project that allows the university to demonstrate its commitment to the continuous improvement of student learning and success—as a required part of the S.A.C.S.C.O.C. 10-year reaffirmation process. The university sought proposals from units across campus, which were submitted in Fall 2022 for consideration. Dr. Vechinski was part of a design group that included representatives from the Division of Student Affairs, Student Enrollment Management and Student Success, and University College. Their proposal, “Uninhibited: How Belonging, Connection, Engagement Form the Foundation for REAL Experiences at VCU,” was focused on increasing access to peer and faculty mentorship for incoming students. Unfortunately, this proposal did not make the shortlist of options that were shared for public comment. The Office of the Provost selected “Scaling Undergraduate Research at VCU” as the proposal that would inform the

design of the actual QEP beginning in 2023. Dr. Vechinski was invited to be a part of the QEP Planning and Development steering committee and joined the Curriculum and Co-Curriculum Integration work group and has been meeting regularly with those groups beginning in Spring 2023.

REAL Experiential Learning

Dr. Vechinski continues to serve as a University College representative on the REAL Council, the standing committee that serves as an advisory board and a curriculum committee for the REAL initiative, which marks his fourth year of involvement with VCU REAL. This year he moved to the Co-Curriculum subcommittee and assisted with its Faculty Development workgroup. He consulted with co-curricular programs on campus wishing to obtain a REAL classification, reviewed their applications, and contributed to information sessions on REAL levels and benefits of classification.



9. ASSESSMENT / RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Focus Groups with Students and Faculty

Dr. Vechinski met with three different groups to talk about how The FILL is meeting the needs of all UC students: Focused Inquiry faculty who teach online sections (February 13), UNIV 299 faculty (February 15), and students in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Student Association (BISSA) (February 27). All discussions touched upon potential new services and programming The FILL could offer key populations.

UNIV 299: The consensus at this meeting among the UNIV 299 instructors present was that there was not a need to expand mentoring services to students in their courses, which would be difficult in any case because of instructors’ differing priorities. Next year we may experiment with mentors providing student workshops on demand and expand The FILL’s promotion of UNIV 299 by hosting a panel with faculty and students talking about their experiences with the course.

Online Focused Inquiry courses: The instructors present suggested many new strategies. Notably, they asked for more asynchronous online resources and recordings and written recaps of workshops for students who couldn’t attend in real time. Videos of mentors talking about overcoming challenges and the importance of self-care, they believed, would help build confidence among online students.

BISSA: We discussed how The FILL could serve as a venue for programming that IDS already offers, such as weekly

information sessions explaining how to declare the BIS major and workshops on self-promotion and job searches facilitated by VCU Career Services. New programming for IDS students might include a “welcome back to campus” event at the start of each semester and a how-to session on compiling a portfolio.

Common Book Assessment

Dr. Vechinski and Carver Weakley organized in-person and online focus groups to solicit feedback from students who had attended 2022 Common Book programming (December 1 and 5). Though a handful of students registered to participate, none attended the sessions.

IDS Assessment and Research

In order to better understand the students we serve and the support we provide them, Matthew Springer aided IDS by coordinating data collection with IRDS. The purpose of this project is to track the success and outcomes of students who have entered the Interdisciplinary Studies program. As the IDS program grows, we are looking to see how students are progressing academically and to see if there are any populations that pursue this degree program. As well as identifying trends or populations among our students that may need resources that will aid in degree completion. The areas of interest for this project include the number of semesters it takes students to complete their degrees, if students are not completing their degrees is it due to change of majors or are they stopping out of the university, how does joining the IDS program impact student GPAs, and how do these factors compare demographically.

10. LOOKING AHEAD

Charging Station

In coordination with the UC Technology Committee, the FILL team has organized and established a complimentary charging station for FILL visitors, supported by a \$1,400 grant funded by VCU student technology fees. The charging station includes phone chargers as well as computer chargers for both Mac and PC. Students can also borrow rechargeable battery packs. The charging station will be available at the start of the Fall 2023 semester.

IDS Move

The Interdisciplinary Studies program officially moved to the 5th floor of Harris in June 2023. Four people were moved from the 818 West Broad Street location. IDS leadership and advisors were found space by the UC Space Committee. Matthew Springer helped coordinate the move by working with IDS and the Facilities teams to move equipment and office furniture to the new location. Going forward, The FILL will be a hub not only for Focused Inquiry students but also for students in the IDS program, and we will be expanding our services and programming to address both populations.

Audio/Visual Upgrades

The FILL sought and obtained over \$17,000 in funding from the Virginia Higher Education Equipment Trust Fund (HEETF) administered by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). This money was earmarked for audio/visual upgrades in The FILL. The conference room will have a huddle cam and ceiling microphones, optimizing it for Zoom meetings. (Recently new smartboard monitors purchased with the previous year's HEETF

request were put up in the conference room and faculty lounge.) The Broad Street room will also get ceiling mics and an automatic tracking camera at the back of the room for capturing the speaker at the podium. Given that much of this equipment is on backorder due to supply-chain shortages, some technology will not be installed until the 2023–2024 academic year.

Planned Programming

We intend to expand the FILL Student Resource Center Canvas site and make other resources available online especially for the benefit of students taking online sections of Focused Inquiry courses. We will pursue the programming recommendations for UNIV 299 and IDS students as well. The FILL expects to continue its partnership with the Writing Center and VCU Libraries Student Success and develop more programming on reading skills, building on the discussion panel we hosted at the end of Spring 2023.

11. UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

Thank you to our university partners for their support and collaboration!

[ACE-IT in College](#), Rehabilitation Research and Training Center and School of Education

[Business Student Ambassadors](#), School of Business

[Campus Learning Center](#)

[da Vinci Center](#)

[Federal-Work Study at VCU](#), Student Financial Services

[First and Second Year Experiences and Transitions](#)

[Health Sciences Academy Mentorship](#), Division for Student Engagement and Impact

[Labs and Classrooms Computing \(LCC\)](#), Technology Services

[VCU Libraries Student Success](#)

[Office of Multicultural Student Affairs](#) (OMSA)

[OnePrint](#), Technology Services

[Orientation and Transition Programs](#)

[Peer Health Educators](#), [Recreation and Well-Being](#) (RecWell)

[Peer Leadership Initiative](#), Office of Peer Leadership and Engaged Learning

[Ram Pantry](#)

[VCU REAL](#) (Relevant, Experiential and Applied Learning)

[Residential Life and Housing](#)

[Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Success](#)

[Summer Scholars Program](#), Summer Studies

[Student Media Center](#)

[Transfer Center](#)

[VCU Transform Living-Learning Program](#)

[University Student Commons and Activities](#)

[You First](#)

[The Workshop at VCU Libraries](#)

[Writing Center](#)

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