

Orienting First Year, First Gen POLI Majors Toward Student Success



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By the numbers:

196 First Gen POLI majors (**29%**) as of Spring 2023

- **74%** of our POLI First Gen students identify as a member of at least one racial or ethnic minority group
- **34%** of our POLI First Gen students identify as men

By the numbers:

\$7,500 from YouFirst@VCU Student Success Research Grant

\$2,000 from Dean Ingrassia (CHS)

\$9,500 TOTAL to fund this semester-long pilot course

By the numbers:

15 out of 30 first-year First Gen POLI students in this incoming class
(**50%** of the incoming cohort)

Zero-credit **Pass/Fail** course

Level **3** REAL course -- Hands-On, Mentorship, and Reflection

Met **one** time a week (Fridays) from **9:30-10:50**

\$500 incentive to get them to participate in the course (~**80%**
successful recruitment rate)

REAL 399: Student Success in Political Science

Co-taught on a rotating basis: **two instructors** per week between Amanda, Allie, Nathan and Jen

With the assistance of our **three** Federal Work Study (paid) **peer-mentors** who are all First Gen themselves

REAL 399: Student Success in Political Science

Adoption of an all-hands approach to orienting students to POLI

- All **3** POLI **staff** members participated in the course
- **17 faculty** members participated in at least one way:
 - Scavenger hunt
 - Pre-recorded videos offering helpful hints
 - Mentoring meals
 - End-of-the-semester celebration

REAL 399: Student Success in Political Science

Inclusion of **4** POLI **alumni** in mentoring meals & our celebration



Claire Dunn ('22), Erika Misseri ('22), Gonzalo Aida ('11), and Catherine Ford ('18)

REAL 399: Student Success in Political Science

12+ external **guest speakers** from around VCU visited at the end of each class for **5** minute elevator pitches; including :

- SAEO
- Academic Coaching, Writing Center, Library
- RecWell, Rams in Recovery, RamPantry
- Office of Student Conduct & Academic Integrity
- GEO, UROP, Baldacci Experiential Learning fellowships
- Career Services & the POLI Alumni Caucus
- Student clubs and organizations

TAKEAWAYS SO FAR...

Running a successful course of this nature...

- Is **complex**
- Is **time consuming**
- Requires **buy-in** from colleagues

But is also **doable!**

Basic structure of Experiential Learning in this course:

Hands-On Learning

- Individual Assignments & Activities: **reflection**-based and **application**-based
- Group Assignments: designed to build **soft-skills** and **community** within our classroom; also to **familiarize** students with the department, our campus, and the city of Richmond in order to build a sense of **belonging**

Basic structure of Experiential Learning in this course:

Mentorship

- Peer mentors: led **small-group discussion**, arranged **study hours & hang-out hours**, provided an **informal communication channel** through GroupMe
- Alumni & Faculty mentors: **off-campus breakfasts** (in small groups) that broke down walls, informed, and inspired

FINAL TAKEAWAYS...

Not only is running a course like this **doable**, but it is also **impactful!**

- Preliminary evidence suggests a sizeable impact on students' **confidence** in their ability to succeed, sense of **purpose**, ability to **navigate** campus bureaucracy and **comfort** seeking out help, sense of **connection** with POLI students and faculty & sense of **community** on campus and within RVA.

Our goal is to **scale it up** to include all POLI First Gen majors and, eventually, to all POLI majors.