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.