

VCU STUDENT SATISFACTION FALL 2015: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the fall of 2015, VCU students were surveyed to assess their satisfaction across many facets of their university experience. All students were invited to participate in one of two Ruffalo Noel Levitz surveys: the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) or the Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS) (Table 1). This document provides a summary of key findings from those surveys¹. Additional information and analyses are available upon request.

TABLE 1: KEY ASPECTS OF RUFFALO NOEL LEVITZ STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS

ASPECT	DESCRIPTION
MEASURES	Importance and satisfaction ratings; performance gaps, strengths and challenges; composite scores for groups of related survey items (scales)
TOPICS	Advising, financial aid, campus life, campus climate, service excellence, instructional effectiveness, academic/support services, registration effectiveness, etc.
POPULATION(S)	Undergraduate (SSI); Graduate & First Professional (ASPS); Qatar (SSI)
USES	Planning and setting priorities; Demonstrating Effectiveness; Recruiting/marketing
TYPES OF ANALYSES	Comparisons across institutions; Comparisons across sub-groups; Changes over time
OCCURRENCE	Every three years in the fall, beginning in Fall 2009
CUSTOMIZATION	Up to 10 items on the SSI and 20 items on the ASPS can be customized by VCU; a customized comparison group can be selected from participating institutions

As with any survey, the ability to draw inferences about the broader population and sub-groups of students depends on the level of student participation. In 2015, 13 percent of undergraduates and 16 percent of graduate/first professional students responded to the surveys (these response rates are similar to other participating institutions).² Based on known characteristics of the student body, respondents are similar but not identical to the general population.³ Data from other institutions can provide context for interpreting VCU's results; however, there were a limited number of participating institutions that were similar to VCU with respect to size, location, and other characteristics, especially for the graduate survey.⁴

¹ Differences and trends highlighted in this report were statistically significant.

² Assuming a random sample, the estimated sampling errors at VCU are +/-1.6% and +/-2.6%, respectively.

³ Among undergraduate respondents, response rates were higher for female, full-time, and freshmen students and among graduate/first professional students, response rates were higher among white, international, female and graduate students.

⁴ VCU selected seven participating institutions as a comparison group for the undergraduate results: Towson U., Mississippi U., Montclair State U., Stephen F. Austin State U., U. of Cincinnati Man Campus, Virginia Tech, and U. of Missouri – Kansas City. The comparison group for VCU graduate/first professional students consists of all adult graduate/professional students at other participating institutions.

Strengths and Challenges

Students' importance and satisfaction ratings can be used identify areas of strength and challenge for the institution (Table 2).⁵

TABLE 2: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES BY STUDENT LEVEL, FALL 2015

	Strengths	Challenges
Undergraduate	Diverse students welcomed & students made to feel welcome	Quality of instruction and timely feedback from faculty
	Commitment to racial harmony* & freedom of expression	Content of courses & quality of instruction in major (in some schools)
	Faculty are knowledgeable & available	Reasonable billing policies and few conflicts when registering for classes
	Good variety of courses offered	Campus is safe for all students
	Education prepares students for future goals*	Adequate financial aid, timely information & helpful financial aid counselors
	Students experience intellectual growth	Tuition is worthwhile investment
	Advisors are knowledgeable & approachable	VCU shows concern for students as individuals
	VCU has a good reputation*	Campus staff are caring & helpful*
	Health services staff are competent	Student activity fees are put to good use
	Security staff respond quickly*	
Campus is well maintained		
Graduate/First Professional	Diverse students welcomed*	Quality of instruction (in some schools)
	Faculty are knowledgeable, available, & keep pace with trends in field	Content of courses (in some schools)
	Major requirements are clear & reasonable	Insufficient options in program of study
	Education leads to commensurate employment opportunities	Adequate financial aid
	Advisors are knowledgeable, accessible, & concerned about student success*	Tuition is worthwhile investment
	Registration processes are reasonable and convenient	Security staff respond quickly in emergencies
	VCU has a good reputation	Getting the "run-around" when seeking information
	Classroom locations are safe and secure	

Notes: Asterisk (*) denotes new areas of strength/challenge in 2015 (compared to 2012). Blue text indicates areas of distinction compared to other institutions. Red text indicates unique areas of challenge at VCU compared to other participating institutions.

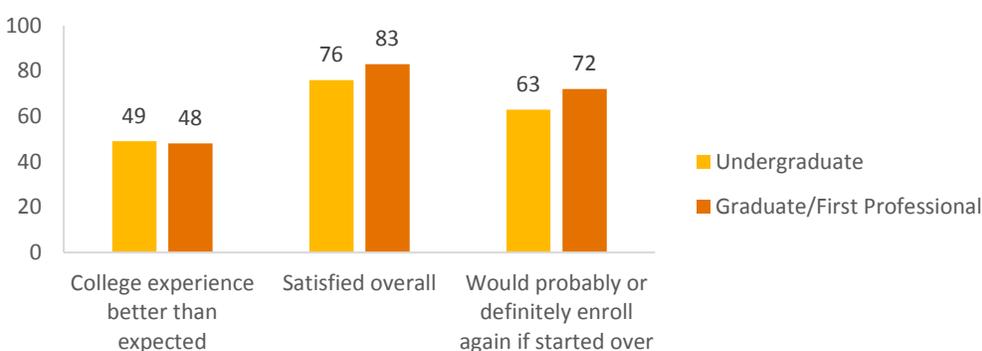
⁵ Strengths have high importance (above mid-point) and high satisfaction (top quartile) scores. Challenges have high importance scores and low satisfaction (bottom quartile) and/or large gap scores (top quartile). A performance gap is the difference between the importance and satisfaction scores.

Overall Satisfaction

In several important ways, student experiences at VCU appear to affirm their decisions to enroll at VCU. For instance, 76 percent of undergraduate students and 80 percent of graduate/first professional students reported that VCU's academic reputation was an important or very important consideration when deciding whether to enroll at VCU, and 80 and 88 percent, respectively, were satisfied that VCU has a good reputation within the community.⁶ Graduate and first professional students rated employment opportunities as their most important enrollment factor, and 85 percent were satisfied that their education would lead to commensurate employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the vast majority of undergraduate and graduate/first professional students reported being satisfied with their experience at VCU (Figure 1). In fact, nearly half reported that their college experience exceeded their expectations, and most reported that they would probably or definitely enroll at VCU again if they had to do it over.

FIGURE 1: MOST STUDENTS SATISFIED AND WOULD ENROLL AT VCU AGAIN IF STARTED OVER



Nevertheless, cost and financial aid were very important enrollment factors for students, yet many reported being unsatisfied with their tuition, fees, and financial aid. Undergraduate students rated cost and financial aid as their most important enrollment considerations, yet only 60 percent of undergraduate respondents were satisfied that tuition paid was a worthwhile investment and 54 percent were satisfied that student activities fees were put to good use. Furthermore, many VCU students reported a lack of adequate financial aid (discussed below).

Students Report an Inclusive Climate

VCU is committed to a climate of inclusion, and VCU students reported a welcoming and inclusive climate in the fall of 2015. "Students of different races, ethnicities, and national backgrounds are welcomed at VCU"⁷ was an area of strength, and was among the survey items with the highest satisfaction ratings for both undergraduate (91 percent) and graduate/first professional (91 percent) students. A strong commitment to racial harmony (84 percent), freedom of expression is protected on campus (84 percent), and students are made to feel welcome (82 percent) were other areas of strength for VCU undergraduate students as a whole and among many sub-groups (Table 3). The vast majority of

⁶ Includes students who were somewhat satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied (5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point satisfaction scale).

⁷ This was a customized survey item contributed by VCU.

graduate/first professional students were also satisfied with having opportunities and activities that promote multicultural understanding (85 percent)⁸ and feeling welcome on campus (83 percent).

TABLE 3: INCLUSIVE CLIMATE WAS AN AREA OF STRENGTH (✓) FOR MANY GROUPS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

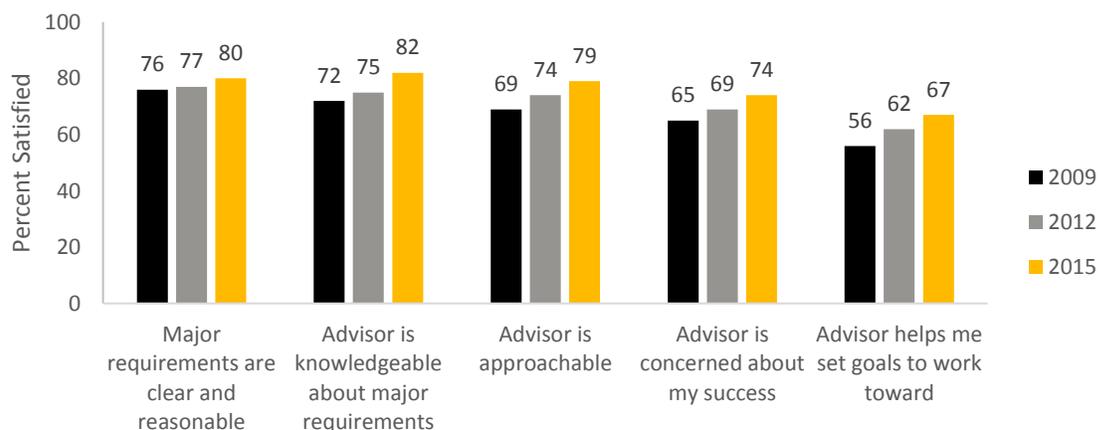
Item	Asian	Black / African American	Hispanic	International	Two or More Races	White	Female	Male	LGBTQ
Students of different races, ethnicities, and national backgrounds are welcomed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
There is a strong commitment to racial harmony	✓	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Freedom of expression is protected	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Students are made to feel welcome	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Absolute levels of satisfaction were similar for these students but this was not a strength due to differences in relative importance or satisfaction scores.

Undergraduate Satisfaction with Advising Has Improved

High quality academic advising remains an important focus of VCU’s Quest for Distinction, and a number of strategies have been implemented to improve advising at VCU. Among the broad areas assessed by the survey, advising was tied with instruction as the highest priority for undergraduate students. As shown in Table 2, several aspects of advising were identified as institutional strengths in 2015. Furthermore, student satisfaction has improved since 2009 (Figure 2), and was similar to student satisfaction at comparison institutions in 2015. First-year students continue to report higher levels of satisfaction than other class levels.

FIGURE 2: SATISFACTION WITH ADVISING AMONG DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE SEEKING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS CONTINUES TO IMPROVE



⁸ This was a customized survey item contributed by VCU.

Financial Aid Continues to Fall Short of Student Expectations

By contrast, financial aid is an area that continues to fall short of students' expectations. As shown in Table 2 above, three aspects of financial aid were identified as challenges for undergraduate students. Furthermore, satisfaction with these items decreased since 2012 (Figure 3). While nearly all undergraduate students reported that adequate financial aid was important to them in 2015 (93 percent), less than half were satisfied. Among graduate/first professional students, 94 percent reported that adequate financial aid was important to them and 63 percent were satisfied.

FIGURE 3: SATISFACTION WITH FINANCIAL AID AMONG DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE SEEKING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS DECREASED IN 2015

