Student Success at VCU

Faculty Senate, December 3, 2019

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Overview

- Key Milestones
- Retention and Graduation Rate Trends, Goals
- What do successful institutions do to increase student success?
- What has VCU been doing to increase student success?
- DFW Rate: Courses & Students affected
- How we can make a difference

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"We must build partnerships across campus. Student success takes the collaborative efforts of all members of the campus: faculty, staff, and administration."

Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College*

Key milestones of VCU's student success initiative

2006

University College

(Part of Vision 2020)

Transfer Center Founded

Transfer success grants and expanded orientation are offered to support transfer students when they join VCU.

2008

Undergrad Tuition Restructured

Changed undergrad tuition structure from block tuition to fee per credit. Do the Math educated students about education expense.

2010

Increased Financial Grant Aid

Implemented a grand completion program (RAM Retention Fund) and increased aid to reduce student debt.

Hired Additional Faculty

Hired additional faculty and transformed part time adjuncts into full time term faculty to help with bottlenecks caused by course availability.

2010

Living-Learning Programs

Coordinated coursework and applied experiences for themed LLPs around globalization, community engagement, and entrepreneurship.

2012

2013

Established SEM

Established Strategic Enrollment Management to handle admissions, enrollment, financial aid, and other issues contributing to student success.

2012

Student Success Unit

VCU invested over $2.3M to focus on enhanced academic advising, early alert, major maps, career advising, and more.

2017

Curricular/Course Transformation

Established a General Education Task Force and Course Redesign work groups to focus on high rates of DFWs. Worked with expert consultation from NCAT to redesign.

2017

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Relevant Experiential and Applied Learning (Part of Quest 2025)

2017

Revamped Course Scheduling

Added additional resources to help students access courses, including more buildings, labs, and classrooms and a common course schedule.

2017

Fall 2019 Enrollment Highlights

4,450 FRESHMEN

- Consistent diversity and quality
- 10% out-of-state
- 31% First-Generation
- 32% Pell eligible
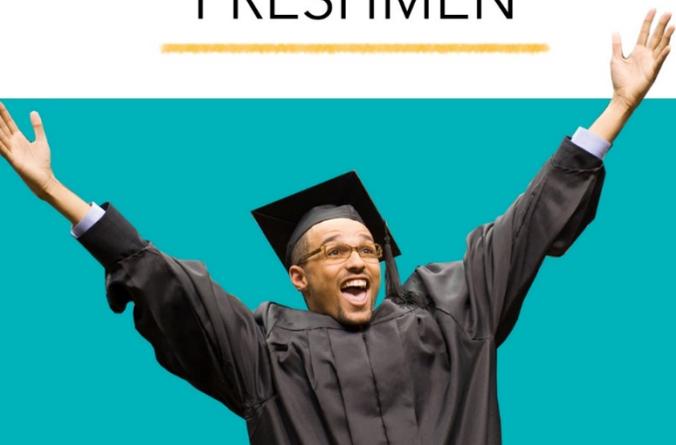
GRADUATION RATES
AT ALL TIME HIGH

4 YEAR	6 YEAR
47%	**67%**

DOCTORAL ENROLLMENT
(Largest in VCU history)

1,722

*As of Census I

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Increase Retention

Increase Undergraduate One-Year Retention to 90% by 2025 and Eliminate Gaps

83%
Overall 2019

Pell Recipients
81%

Males
81%

First-Generation
80%

Out-of-State Students
75%

90%
2025 Goal
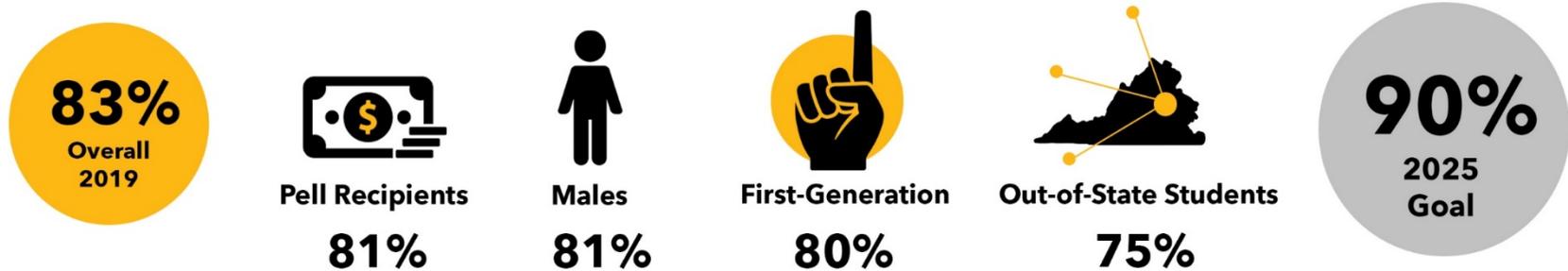
Increase Undergraduate Two-Year Retention to 84% by 2025 and Eliminate Gaps

75%
Overall 2019

Pell Recipients
72%

Males
71%

First-Generation
71%

Out-of-State Students
72%

84%
2025 Goal

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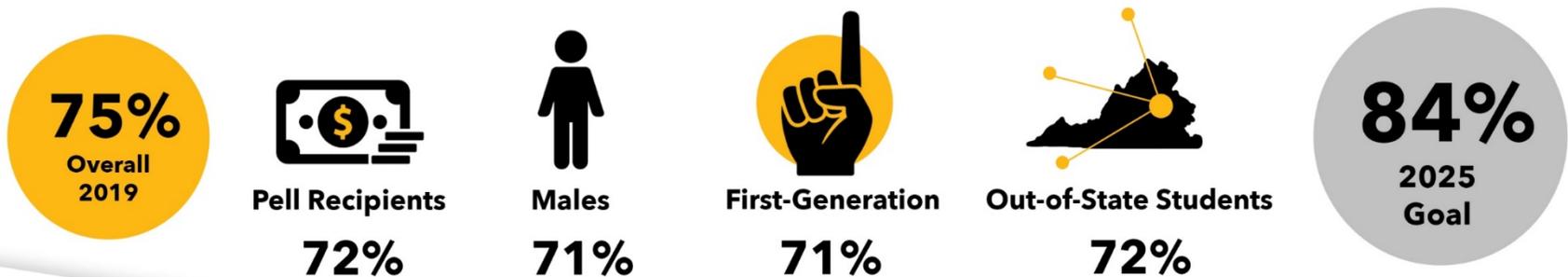
VCU's 1st year retention rates have plateaued

First-Year Retention Rates*
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Freshman and Full-time, Transfer
Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2009 through 2018

Freshman: 85.5%, 85.9%, 85.4%, 86.7%, 86.5%, 85.8%, 86.4%, 83.0%, 84.7%, 83.1%

Transfer: 82.0%, 80.9%, 84.3%, 82.4%, 83.1%, 84.8%, 84.7%, 84.8%, 84.4%, 84.0%

Fall 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018

―●― Freshman   ―●― Transfer
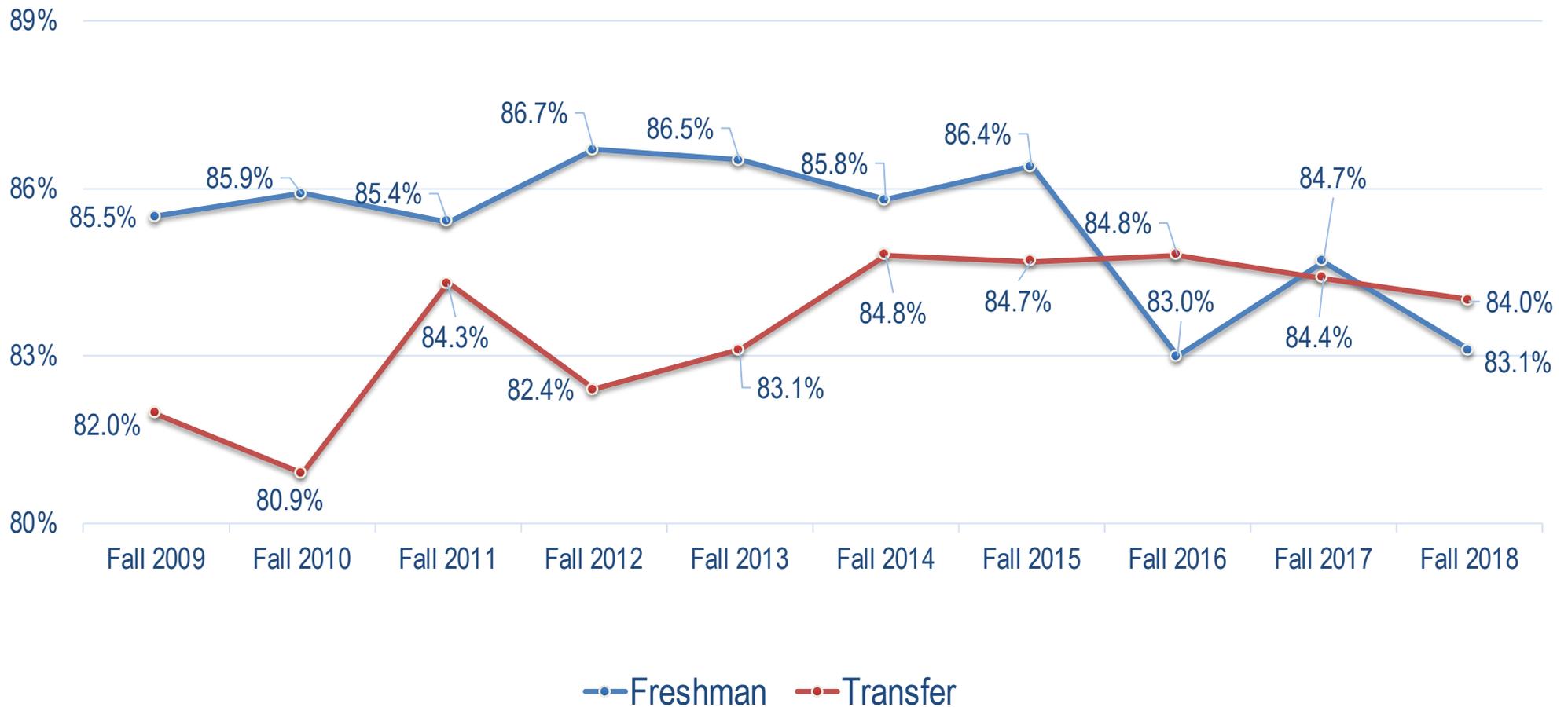
whereas second and third year retention of freshmen achieved gains over the same period, but we can do better!

2- and 3- Year Retention Rates*
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2007 through 2017

- —●— 2-Year Retention Rate
- —●— 3-Year Retention Rate

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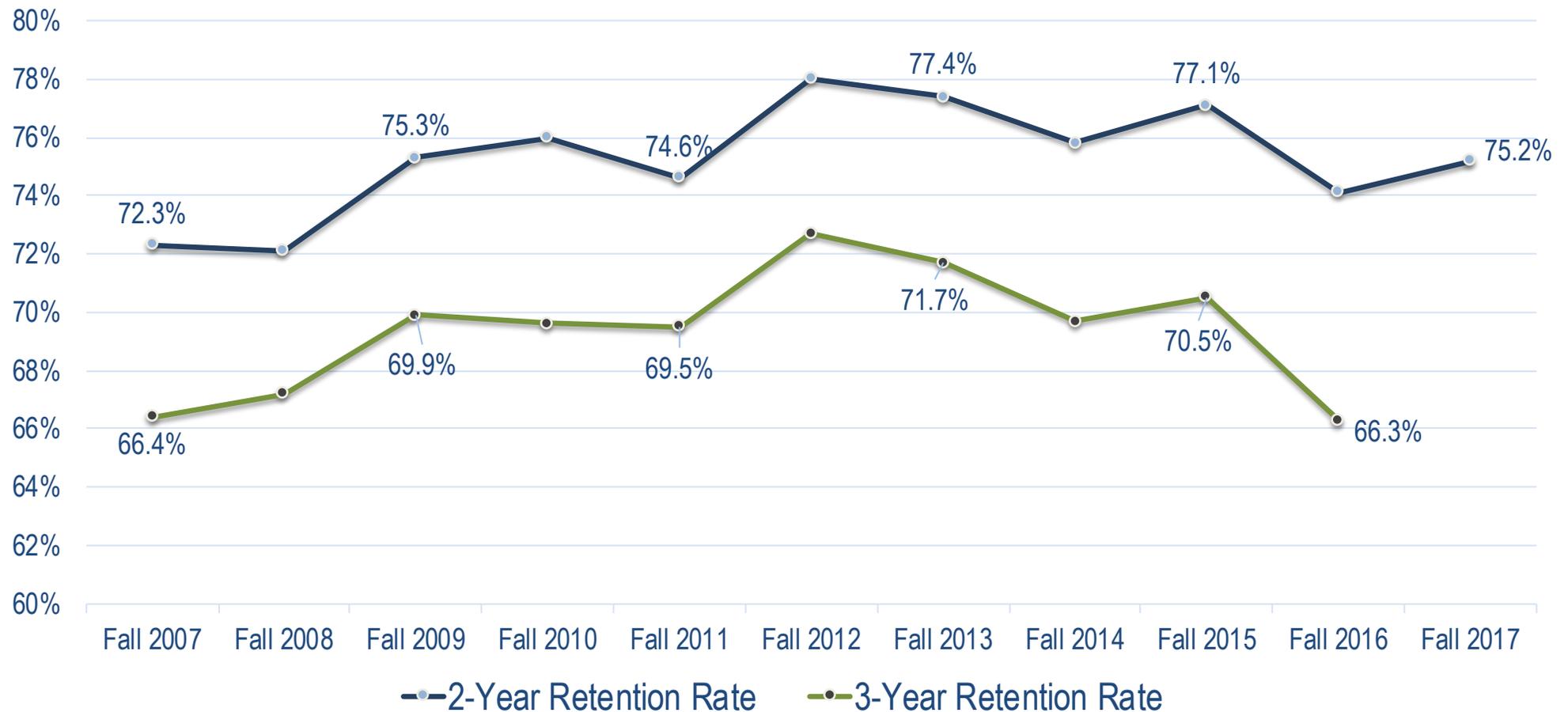
VCU has demonstrated significant gains in its 4-year graduation rates for first-time full-time freshman over the past decade …

4-Year Graduation Rates*
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2003 through 2015

VCU 4yr grad rate values: 25.0%, (Fall 2004), 27.3%, 30.2%, 30.2%, 34.2%, 36.9%, 35.7%, 39.9%, 44.9%, 45.3%, 44.5%, 48.1%

National 4yr grad rate values: 23.3%, 24.3%, 25.3%, 26.0%, 27.0%, 28.6%

Legend: VCU 4yr grad rate — National 4yr grad rate
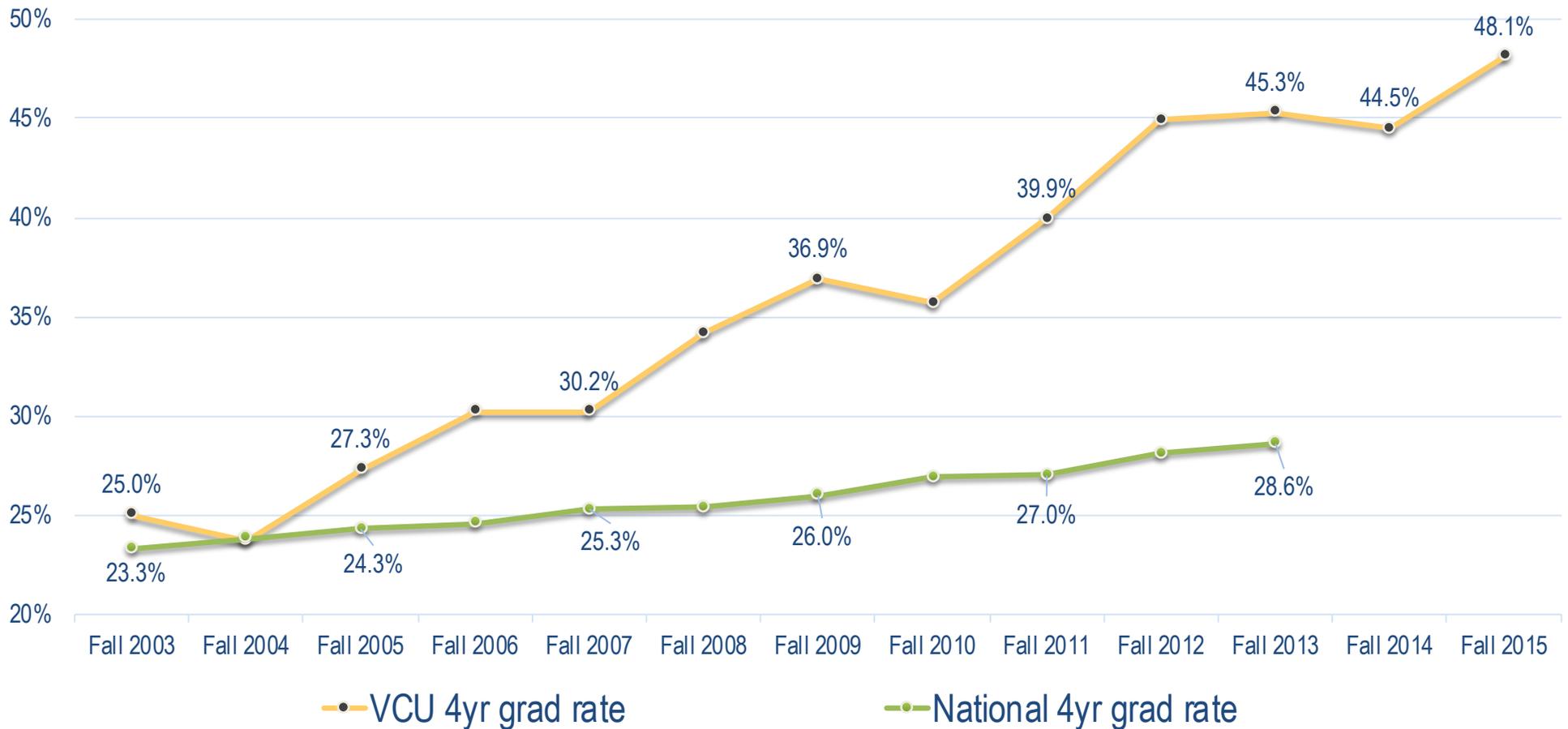
* As of Census II Oct 2019

National represents all 4 year public US institutions
Source: IPEDS

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VCU has demonstrated significant gains in its 6-year graduation rates for first-time full-time freshman over the past decade ...

6-Year Graduation Rates*
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2003 through 2013

VCU 6yr grad rate: 51.0%, 53.9%, 57.0%, 62.3%, 62.9%, 67.4%, 67.6%

National 6yr grad rate: 46.5%, 47.1%, 47.6%, 48.1%, 48.8%

X-axis: Fall 2003, Fall 2004, Fall 2005, Fall 2006, Fall 2007, Fall 2008, Fall 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Fall 2014

— VCU 6yr grad rate   — National 6yr grad rate

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VCU's transfer students are also graduating at higher rates

3- and 5-Year Graduation Rates*
Transfer, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2004 through 2015

Legend: 5-Year Graduation Rate; 3-Year Graduation Rate

5-Year Graduation Rate data labels: 57.3%, 59.3%, 62.3%, 67.6%, 67.2%

3-Year Graduation Rate data labels: 33.5%, 35.8%, 39.9%, 49.2%, 54.3%, 53.1%

X-axis: Fall 2004, Fall 2005, Fall 2006, Fall 2007, Fall 2008, Fall 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Fall 2016

Y-axis: 30%, 37%, 44%, 51%, 58%, 65%, 72%
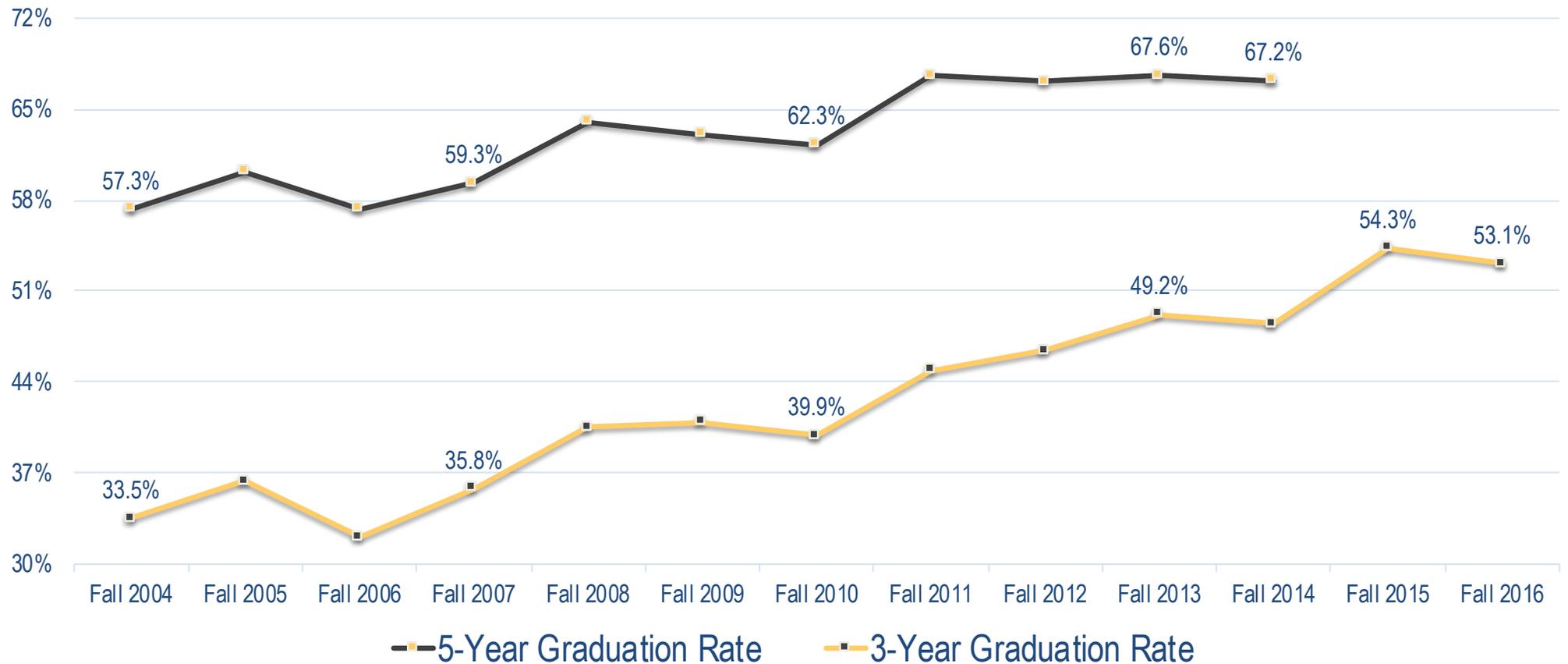
* Census II as of Oct 2018

And these gains yielded VCU the <u>Highest 10 year Percentage Point Increase</u> in the 6-year graduation rates among VA Public Research Institutions

6-Year Graduation Rates – VA Public Research Institutions
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2003 through 2013
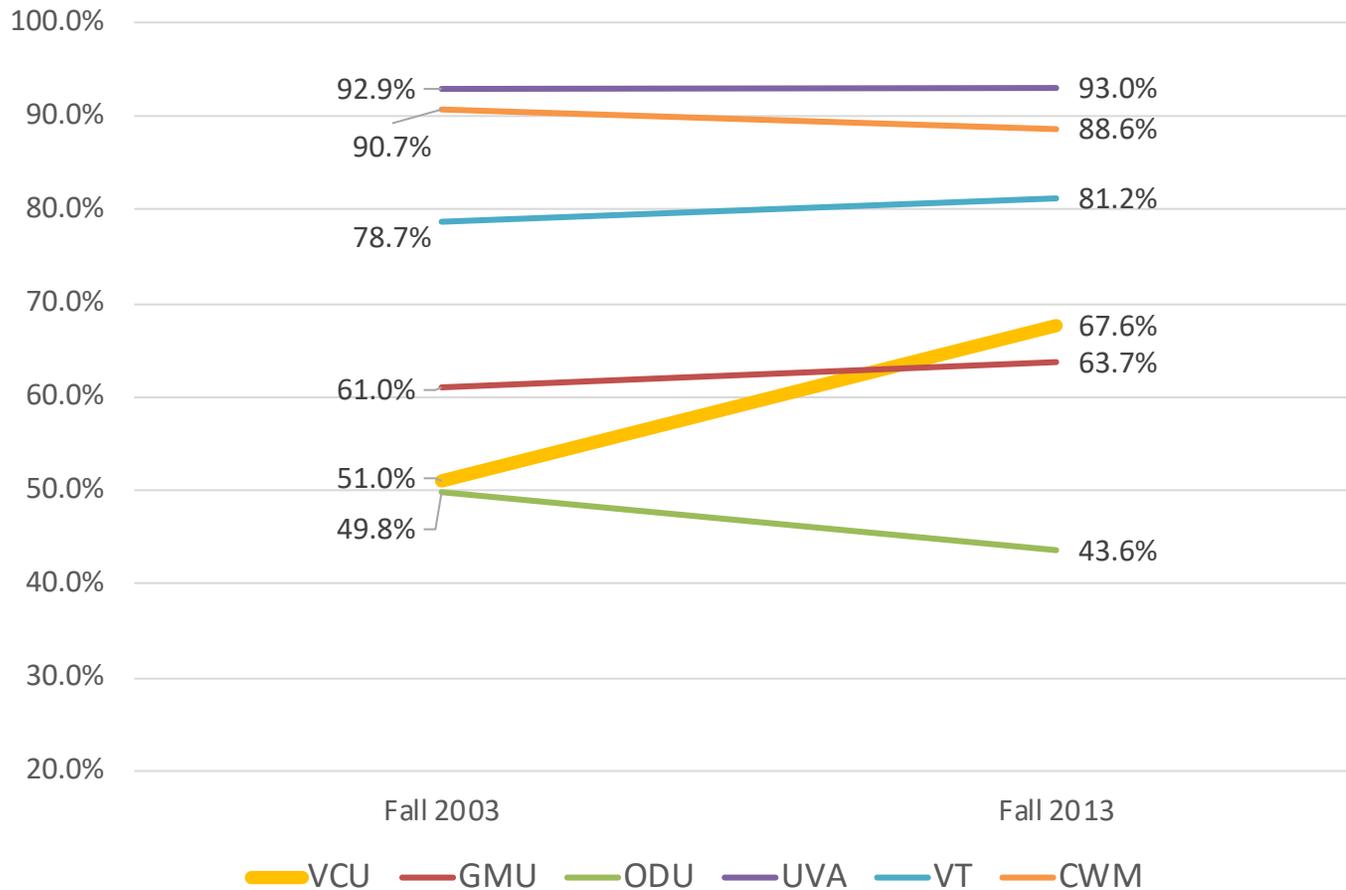
VCU percentage point change = +16.6 points

GMU   +2.7 points
ODU   -6.2 points
UVA   + .1 points
VT   +2.5 points
CWM   -2.1 points

Chart data points:
- UVA: 92.9% → 93.0%
- CWM: 90.7% → 88.6%
- VT: 78.7% → 81.2%
- VCU: 51.0% → 67.6%
- GMU: 61.0% → 63.7%
- ODU: 49.8% → 43.6%

Legend: VCU — GMU — ODU — UVA — VT — CWM

Fall 2003   Fall 2013

We are making strides…but how can we do better? The gap is closing on URM 6yr grad rates but the gender gap is larger

6-Year Graduation Rates
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2011 through 2013

11.5 points

	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
Female	66.4%	72.8%	72.2%
Male	58.1%	59.6%	60.7%

■ Female ■ Male

	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
URM	60.1%	63.4%	63.9%
Not URM	64.0%	69.7%	68.9%

■ URM ■ Not URM

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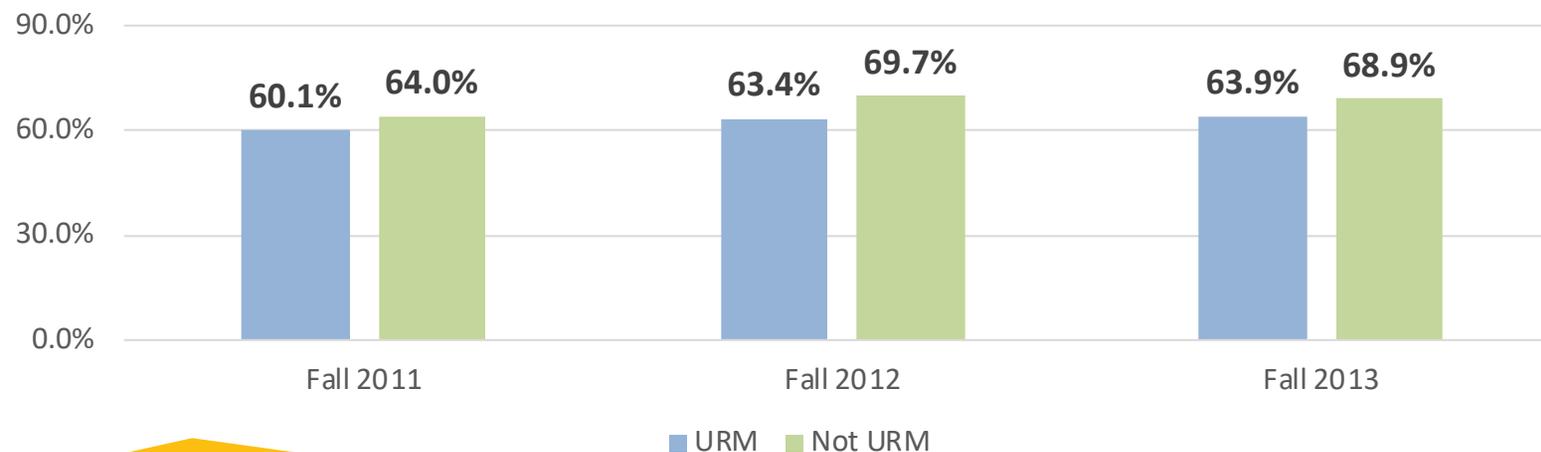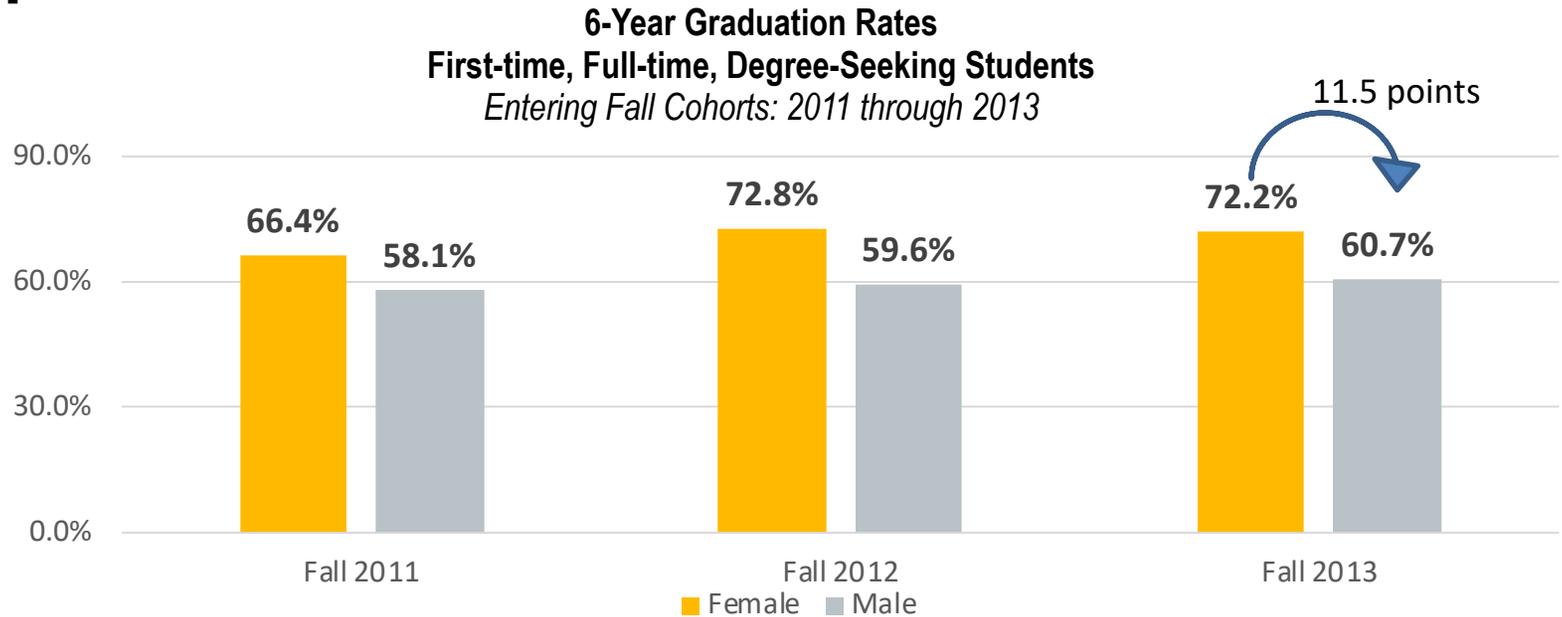
We are making strides…but how can we do better? Gap between Black/African American males compared to all <u>other</u> males is closing

6-Year Graduation Rates
First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking Students
Entering Fall Cohorts: 2011 through 2013

Bar chart showing 6-year graduation rates:

- Fall 2011: Black/African American Male 55.1%, Male All Other 58.7%
- Fall 2012: Black/African American Male 46.1%, Male All Other 61.3%
- Fall 2013: Black/African American Male 58.0%, Male All Other 61.1%

Legend: ■ Black/African American Male ■ Male All Other
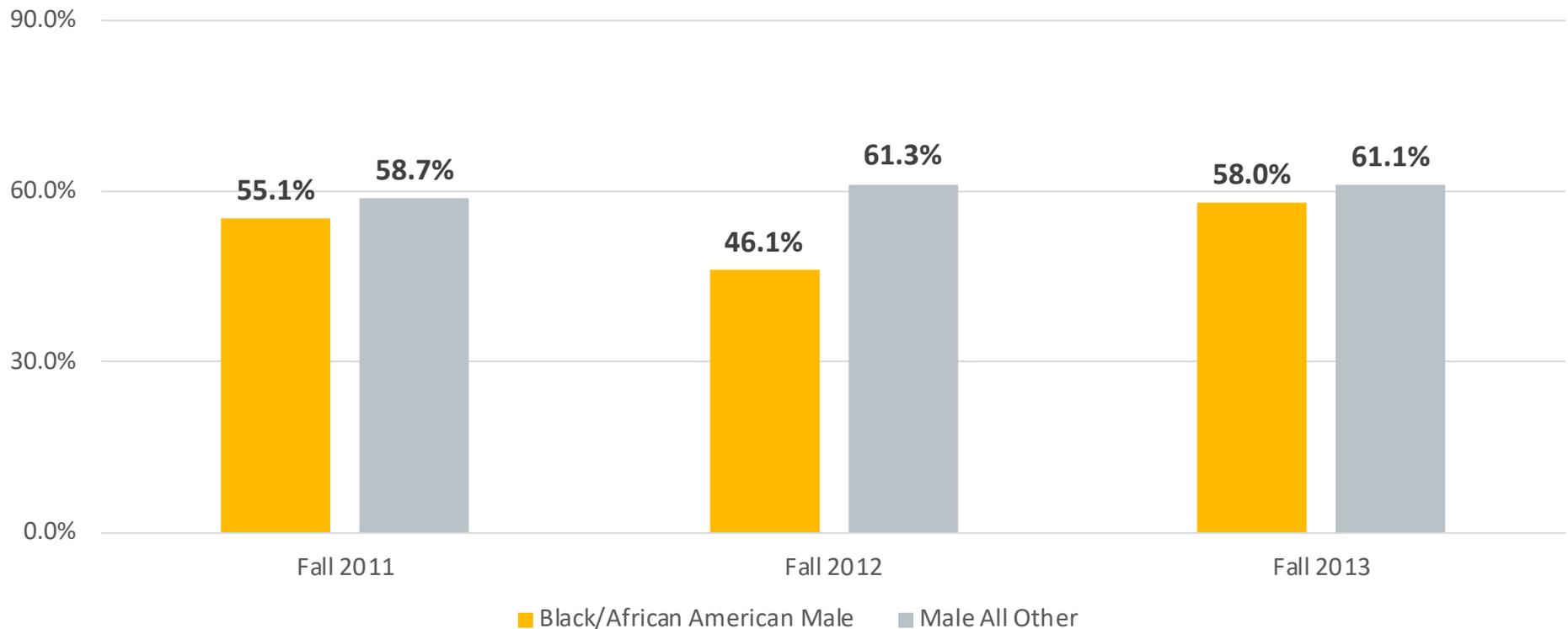
What else do successful institutions do? (from Education Trust)

- **Make student success a campus-wide priority**
  - Improving student success isn't all— or even mostly—about programs. It's about institutional culture that values success and that accepts responsibility. *Faculty are involved as problem solvers and staff from around the University are significantly involved as well (not just those in academic affairs).*
- **Look at data and act**. Successful institutions create clear, structured pathways to success for students.
  - Use of disaggregated data to spot problems and frame action
  - Successful institutions don't just aim at the final goal—graduation—they concentrate on each step along the way, especially the early ones
  - Create Major maps, etc. -- roadmaps for successful course sequences.
  - Create predictable schedules for students; offer flex start sections a month into the semester; assign Instructors to courses a year in advance.
- **Take on introductory and gateway classes**. (this is often tackled FIRST)
  - Identify and intervene with high DFW courses -- e.g., Course Redesign
- **Successful institutions don't hesitate to demand, require. They ask "where else can the data take you?"**
  - A lot of institutions know what works. And more and more of them are advising students to do those things. But it turns out that **"students don't do optional."**
  - Making services, supports more coherent
- **They bring back the ones they lose** or **they don't let student "stop out" at all.**

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Academics & Advising at VCU: We are working on...

- **Major Maps** integrate degree planning, building cultural competence, gaining relevant experience, and building social capital – all with an eye for life after college. Maps provide strategic guidance to faculty, staff, and students and encourages exploration in early years.
- **Living/Learning communities** and other academic experiences to enhance student academic and social integration & success
- Increasing the number of **Service Learning** sections of all VCU courses.
- Hiring more **full-time faculty** to accommodate demand for classes
- We will be adding **buildings and lab classrooms** to further accommodate demand
- Developing a more comprehensive and responsive **summer session** so that students will take courses needed to catch up and stay caught up
- Attending to **gateway courses with high DFW rates** and aftermath for students ***
  - ensure that our best Instructors teach freshmen and beginning majors
  - look at those courses where low grades more often result in dropping out and intervene accordingly
  - adopt proven methods for enhancing instruction, e.g. expand supplemental instruction for gateway courses and require it where indicated
  - Work with NCAT and employ COURSE REDESIGN strategies to improve learning outcomes and reduce costs
  - BUILD awareness of academic quality of VCU and VCU students on the part of potential students, their parents & the **community**

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Greater focus on DFW rates: Courses and Students Affected

Number of Courses with DFW Rates > 20% and Number of Students Receiving Ds, Fs, or Ws
Fall 2018
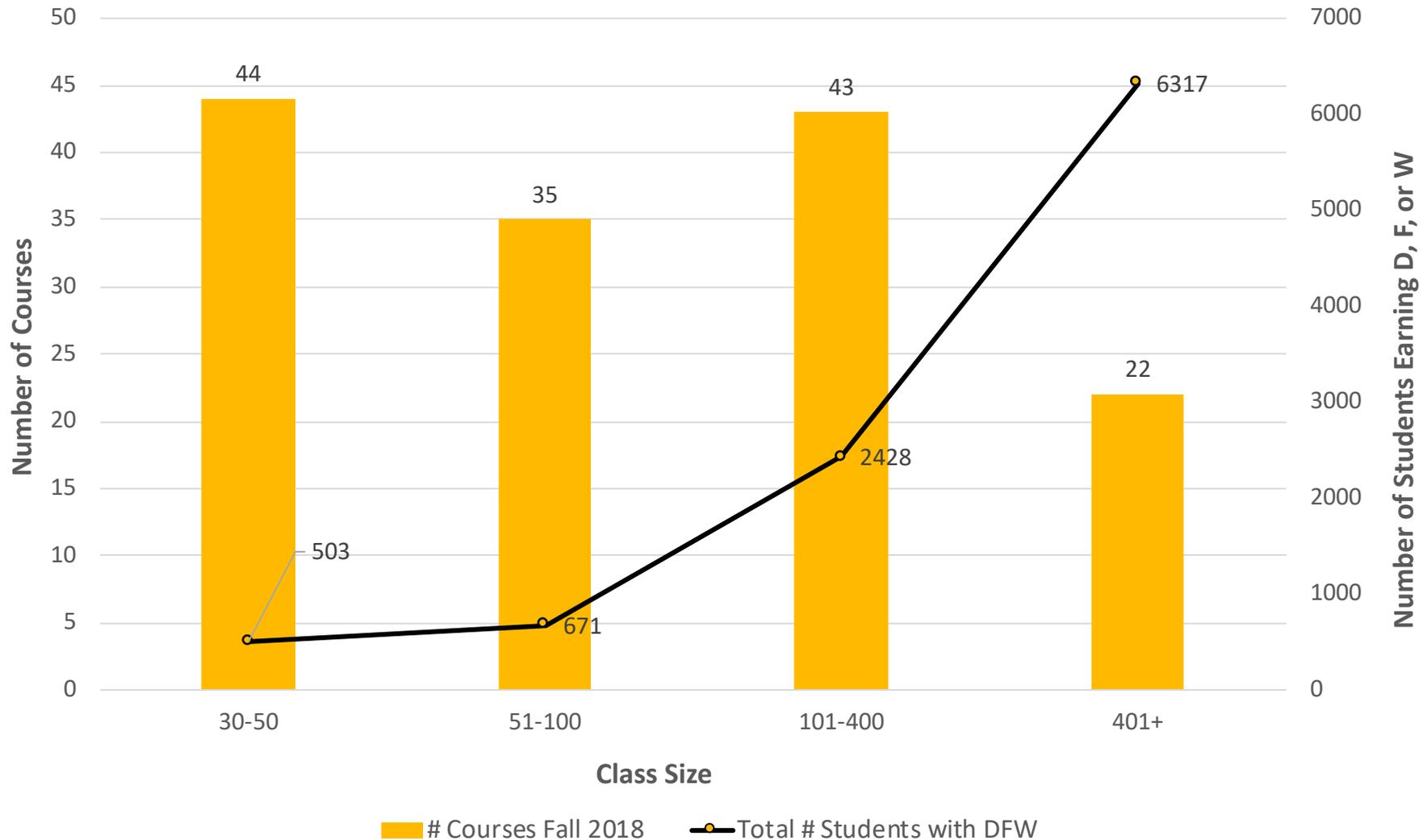
Other UG retention strategies

Faculty initiatives

- Mid term grade reporting
- Early alert
  - *RAM Attend (in pilot phase)*

Branded message & campaign for VCU UG students

- VCU Connect & complete
  - *"Do the Math 2.0": encourage students to register full time every semester – saves money and accelerates progress towards graduation*

Focus on student needs

- Student financial services redesign
  - *counseling on totality of financial wellness*
  - *Create student financial management center*
  - *tuition & fee simplification*
- Course Scheduling redesign
  - *optimize scheduling*
  - *Develop multi-year schedules*

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Student Success and Transfer Students: primary focus on Community College Transfers

- Build **robust dual admission/dual enrollment programs** with Community Colleges (CC)

- Develop **majors maps** for transfer students that not only show pathway courses but also strategic career planning

- Work with CC advisors and faculty to **plan academic, career and social events every semester** to ensure that CC students feel a part of VCU long before transferring

- Create annual discipline specific **Articulation Task Force** meetings between VCU and CC faculty

- Offer **University transition courses and expanded orientation** for CC transfers

- Transfer success grants such as Mellon; HHMI; Lumina & Kresge; NIH Bridges to the Baccalaureate, etc.

- Promote reverse transfer opportunities for associate degree completion

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What faculty can do

1. Continue your excellent work with your students!!!!
2. Look at your department/School student data to identify issues and possible solutions
3. Look at your departmental major maps and make sure they are kept up to date
4. If you are not already doing so, work on long term scheduling for your majors
5. Participate in early alert, including monitoring attendance; absences can signal developing problems
6. Modify courses, if necessary, to include early assignments to provide early feedback on performance
7. If you are offering a course that has a high DFW rate, analyze what is causing the high DFW rate, address causes, and/or redesign the course
8. Encourage your students to take a full load (15 credits) each semester to graduate in a timely manner
9. Encourage students to make use of resources available to them on campus – tutoring, financial counseling, scholarships, academic advising, etc.
10. Reach out when you need advice about how to help a student. Academic Affairs, SEM, Student Success, Student Affairs – we are all here to assist you in your work!

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Research Literature

There are at least 3 decades of research on student retention & graduation. For more information see:

Relevant Education Journals (e.g., Journal of Higher Education; Student Affairs Journals; College Student Development Journals; Research in Higher Education, Review of Higher Education, American Educational Research Journal, Journal of College Student Retention, etc.)
Relevant Psychology Journals
National Survey of Student Engagement

Also see research on student success in college, postsecondary student success, student retention, student persistence, completing college, college student dropout, first year student success, as well as dozens of books on these topics.

Q&A, Discussion?