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**Review of Student Engagement, Assessment, and High-Impact Practice Implementation by
Common Book Programs in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education**

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth
University

by

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April 2021

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Acknowledgements

Our team would first like to thank our chair, Dr. Tomika Ferguson. Her feedback and guidance were invaluable throughout this project. We would also like to thank our committee members, Dr. Michael Flanigan and Dr. April Wynn for their insights and commitment to our project. Thank you to our client for sponsoring this project and being responsive to our questions. We would also like to thank our cohort and professors who have guided us throughout the program.

Raymond (Wes) Hillyard

I would like to thank my wife Michele and our children Ali, Noah, and Ethan for their support, encouragement, and sacrifice to allow me the time and space to engage in my doctoral studies. Your unconditional love and support helped me to balance my commitments to family, work, and school and provided the love and support necessary to complete this journey. In addition, I would like to thank my team and colleagues at the University of Mary Washington who supported and challenged me to grow as a professional and student over the past three years. I could not have done this without each of you and for that, I am truly grateful!

Carrie Newcomb

First, I would like to thank my husband Chris for his support and positivity over the last three years. There were days I doubted I could finish, but you rooted for me the whole way. Next, I would like to thank my family, who taught me the value of education, and for their love and encouragement. A special thank you to all my friends and colleagues who cheered me towards the finish line. To the capstone team, I could not have chosen a better group of people to go on this journey with; thanks for sharing your talents, strengths, and sense of humor.

Richard M. Pantele

I wish to acknowledge the constant guidance and support given to me by my Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, who saw me through this process and helped me traverse the many obstacles that were presented to me along the way. Without His guiding hand, this process would not have been possible. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"- Philippians 4:13. I also wish to acknowledge the incredible support and loving care that my family has shown to me over the past three years. My family is my rock, and I would not have been able to accomplish this feat without their support, endless encouragement, incredible

patience, and unwavering love. Specifically, to my mom, dad, sister, grandparents, godparents, and many cousins, thank you for all that you have done to support me over the past three years. Additionally, I wish to thank my many mentors and colleagues in the Office of Student Affairs at Hampden-Sydney College, who have all helped support and encourage me. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the memory of my grandparents Demetrios and Mary Pantele, Dr. Victor Cabas, Harry W. Robertson, and Beverly Anne Klein, who were all important guideposts in my life. Their love, support, and example served as a powerful source of inspiration. May their memory be eternal.

Andrea M. Perseghin

Words cannot express my appreciation to my husband and son for their unwavering support throughout my doctoral journey, without them this dream would not have come true. To my parents, sister, and extended family for cheering me on. To my fellow cohort members, friends, and colleagues who helped keep me going. Thank you for everything – whether big or small – that you did to support my journey. Last but not least thank you to the Capstone team for your patience and perseverance throughout the last year. I will forever be grateful we ended this journey together.

Leslie Winston

Thank you first and foremost to my family, who supported me through many of life's highs and lows during this journey, without you, I wouldn't be where I am today. To my great husband Justin, who took up all the slack and then some without ever complaining, I could never have reached my goal without your patience, encouragement, and support. To my son Jack, my shining light, I hope my accomplishments encourage you to chase your dreams and become everything you were meant to be. To my special parents for always being there for me, supporting me and providing guidance when I needed it. Particular thanks to my dad who has always pushed me beyond my comfort zone, supported my goals, and saw my accomplishments before I could even dream them, he set the example of what I can only hope to be one day. Appreciation to my boss, Dr. Melanie Green, who gave me the encouragement, understanding, and space to take on this challenge. Thanks to my great group of partners in this journey, Andrea Perseghin, Wes Hillyard, Richard Pantele, and Carrie Newcomb, we quickly gelled and learned how to leverage and appreciate each other's strengths. I value our shared experience. Lastly, special thanks to Carrie Newcomb for being my partner in work and friend in life. I appreciate both immensely.

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List of Abbreviations

AAC&U: Association of American Colleges and Universities

CBP: Common Book Program

CCCSE: Center for Community College Student Engagement

CCT: Campus-Class-Technology Model in Student Engagement

CSEQ: College Student Experience Questionnaire

EdD: Educational Leadership Doctor of Education

FI: Focused Inquiry

FYE: First-Year Experience

FYS: First-Year Seminar

GPA: Grade Point Average

HIPs: High-Impact Practices

IPEDS: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

IRB: Institutional Review Board

NAAA: National Association of Academic Advising

NCES: National Center for Educational Statistics

NSSE: National Survey for Student Engagement

SE: Student Engagement Survey

SEOAF: Student Engagement Outcomes and Assessment Framework

UC: University College

US: United States

VCU: Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Tech: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

REVIEW OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, ASSESSMENT, AND HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION BY COMMON BOOK PROGRAMS IN U.S. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By: Raymond (Wes) Hillyard, Carrie Newcomb, Richard M. Pantele, Andrea M. Perseghin, and Leslie Winston

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021

Director: Tomika Ferguson, PhD, Department of Educational Leadership

Common book programs are widely used by U.S. institutions of higher education to positively impact student engagement and student retention. This capstone project sought to determine the best practices in common book program assessment and high-impact practice implementation. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was employed to answer the research questions. Data was collected utilizing an online survey and interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed using chi-square, in vivo and thematic coding. This project aims to inform common book program administrators and other student engagement stakeholders in improving program assessment, high-impact practice implementation, and first- to second-year student retention rates.

Keywords: assessment, common book, first-year experience, high-impact practice, student engagement, student retention

Chapter One

Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is an urban, public research university located in Richmond, Virginia, comprising two campuses, an academic medical center, 11 schools and three colleges (VCU, 2020). VCU serves 30,103 students and employs 7,233 faculty and staff (VCU, 2020). While a large component of VCU's focus is on graduate education, an area of significant impact remains its undergraduate student experience. Annually, VCU welcomes approximately 23,172 undergraduate students into their community through an impactful first-year experience (VCU, 2020). This experience includes both academics as well as intentional campus and community engagement.

To support VCU's undergraduate student population, the University College (UC) is home to the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Focused Inquiry (FI) Department, and the Common Book Program (CBP). The CBP is one of the largest initiatives of the UC. This university-wide program is designed for first-year students to explore topics related to "complex social issues through an interdisciplinary lens" (VCU University College, 2020, p. 1).

Since the program's inception as the VCU Summer Reading program in 2006 and later as an expanded university-wide VCU Common Book Program in 2015, the focus of the CBP has been on engaging first-year students in the ability to explore complex social issues (Gresham, 2012; F. Williams, personal communication, June 9, 2020). This study will examine best practices of CBPs within the United States (U.S.), including program assessment as well as examine high-impact practice frameworks utilized to support student engagement and retention.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify best practices for the VCU CBP to inform strategic planning and future program evaluation efforts, specifically within a high-impact practice (HIP) framework. VCU CBP is focused on student engagement and skills development to ensure a successful career in college (VCU University College, 2020). For the purposes of this study, an analysis of CBPs and first-year experience (FYE) programs was conducted to identify best practices within a HIP framework. Further, this study reviews best practices and outcomes at institutions across the country to identify promising practices in CBP program evaluation. The deliverables of this capstone project will aid the VCU CBP as it develops a strategic plan and improves future program assessment methods.

There are three major research questions that guided the data collection for this study.

1. What are the assessment practices of CBPs?
2. What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?
 - a. How do the CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?
 - b. How do the CBPs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff and the community?
3. In what ways do peer institutions implement HIP as they relate to the CBP or FYE?

Significance of the Study

The VCU CBP is currently examining its mission, vision, and purpose. A change in leadership within the VCU CBP has prompted a review of the program's practices and outcomes,

with an emphasis on HIPs and student skill development. This study is prompted by an existing gap in the available literature describing best practices and outcomes assessment in CBPs.

Guided by input from VCU CBP, this study informs administration in developing outcomes assessment for first-year student initiatives specific to the CBP. Further, this study examined other CBPs nationwide to explore best practices and assessment practices to aid VCU CBP in program development and assessment efforts. The practical implications and scholarly focus of this project make it well suited for educational leadership doctoral students.

Research related to CBPs is needed to learn how student engagement and HIPs influence student outcomes. Outcomes from research on this topic may also reinforce the benefit of CBPs in developing students who are able to engage emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within a campus community (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). This study is needed to identify best practices CBPs implement to achieve student engagement outcomes. The existing literature demonstrates a connection between student engagement and HIPs as they relate to CBP outcomes (Kuh et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of literature that demonstrates the connection between how program outcomes are defined and what assessment methods should be used to effectively evaluate CBPs. This study aims to improve understanding of how colleges and universities nationwide develop and assess CBP outcomes to address a gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two theoretical frameworks: Campus-Class-Technology model (CCT) (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015) and HIPs (Kuh, 2008). Student engagement theory places an emphasis on the importance of student engagement in generating and ensuring successful student outcomes, of which this study emphasized. This study also considered 11 HIPs, with six that are directly related to common book programs: first-year seminars and experiences, common

intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, service-learning/community-based learning; as well as undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, e-portfolios, internships, capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018).

This study utilized the six relevant HIPs to frame how CBP program activities' practices align with HIPs. Research has demonstrated that HIPs positively impact academic and personal success as well as student perception of learning; however, little formal assessment work has been done to measure effectiveness (Finley & McNair, 2013; Johnson & Stage, 2018; Shavers & Mitchell, 2019). Both frameworks support this study by emphasizing how student engagement affects successful student outcomes, particularly how HIPs relate to first- to second-year student engagement and retention. High-impact practices, including first-year experiences such as CBP, can positively influence student engagement efforts to improve first-year retention rates and enhance student relationships with the institution (Ferguson, 2006; Kuh et al., 2017).

Research Overview

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach (Ivankova et al., 2006) is appropriate in this study to assess CBP outcomes for first-year students and HIP implementation. This mixed-methods approach will incorporate quantitative data and qualitative data, with a core assumption that quantitative and qualitative data analysis together will inform a greater understanding than a single method alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of this mixed-methods explanatory sequential study is to identify the practices utilized by CBPs to engage students and assess program outcomes as well as identify how these practices align with HIPs. Quantitative data was collected through a survey of 545 peer institutions, with follow-up interviews of 15 institutions to further explore these results in greater depth (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). The research design is informed by three theoretical frameworks, including an expansion of the fundamental student engagement theory of Astin (1984), a revision of the CCT student engagement theory offered by Gunuc and Kuzu (2015), and HIPs (Kuh, 2008).

Relevant Terminology

This section will provide additional information related to the terminology used in this study. The following definitions should be used regarding the intended meaning and terms within this document.

- **At-risk students:** students who face circumstances that can influence their ability to be successful academically (Walsh, 2012).
- **Behavioral engagement:** student participation in academic experiences outside of the classroom as well as in-class activities and class attendance (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015).
- **Cognitive engagement:** student investment in and value given to learning ideas, goal setting, planning, and motivation (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015).
- **Disparities:** lack of equality in access to academic and support resources in higher education (Roldan et al., 2020).
- **Emotional/psychological engagement:** student emotional reactions to those they interact with as well as the subject matter they are exposed to (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015).
- **First-year experience:** initiatives designed to support students in the transition from high school to college (Kuh, 2008).

- **High-impact practices:** teaching and learning practices which have been shown to benefit college students (Kuh, 2008).
- **Mixed-methods:** research approach that incorporates qualitative and quantitative data, with a specific research design informed by a theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
- **Retention:** the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).
- **Student Engagement:** represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (Kuh, 2009a).
- **Underrepresented Students:** students who, based on race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, are not represented proportionally within higher education to those considered the majority (Owolabi, 2018).

Conclusion and Organization of Study

Since 2015, VCU has implemented a CBP to support first-year students in the transition to college life. In this fifth year, VCU CBP has an opportunity to create a more dynamic program to help support students in the first year. Findings could also enhance VCU's ability to align the CBP based on best practices utilized by institutions across the country. Social and intellectual opportunities related to CBPs could help enhance first-year students' experiences at VCU and improve first- to second-year retention. Finally, this study could help advance the understanding of CBPs by filling a gap in the existing literature.

The following chapters will provide the structure for examining this problem of practice. Chapter two will consist of a literature review that examines first-year student retention, relevant student engagement theories, CBP best practices, and the relationship of HIPs to these. Chapter three will provide the theoretical framework, the research questions, and the research design methodology for the study. Chapter four will consist of a discussion of the findings of the study, and chapter five will provide practical recommendations based on study findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Common Book Program (CBP) engages over 3,800 students, faculty, and staff facilitators in discussion and study around a common text each year (VCU University College, 2020). The program is at a crossroads of its development, seeking to better understand the impact of these efforts. This Educational Leadership Doctor of Education (EdD) capstone group has been tasked with reviewing the available common book literature to aid in the development of a strategic plan and an assessment tool for the VCU CBP. CBPs were developed within the framework of student engagement theory and high-impact practices (HIPs) to support student retention. This literature review will highlight relevant literature and theories upon which CBPs were developed, beginning with a review of how student engagement theory influences first-year to second-year student retention. It will then narrow the focus to analyze how CBPs incorporate HIPs in order to maximize student retention. The review will conclude with an overview of the VCU CBP.

Student Engagement

Student engagement inside and outside of the classroom is critically important to ensuring student success and student retention (Kahu, 2013). The term student engagement refers to a host of influences within the student experience: engagement in the classroom, interactions and relationships with professors, extracurricular/out of class involvement, perceptions of the student experience, and relationship with the institution (Kuh, 2009a). Alexander Astin (1984) defined student engagement as “the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (p. 528). Astin’s (1984)

theory formulated an important equivalence between student success and the level in which students are engaged and invested in their undergraduate experience. Additionally, student engagement can identify the connection between participation in and out of class activities, which can, in turn, impact various and measurable institutional outcomes like retention (Quaye & Harper, 2015). In summary, the concept of student engagement encompasses a wide range of student participation in curricular experiences, as well as the quantity and quality of those experiences.

Vincent Tinto (1993) also focused on student engagement, as his Student Integration Model purported that students are more likely to be retained when they have a high level of commitment to their institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012). Institutions intentionally build student experiences and programs to help students develop connections with the institution, both curricularly and extracurricularly, starting as soon as students begin the undergraduate experience (Chrysikos et al., 2017). Student engagement is significant during the first year in college because students are more likely to be retained and have greater academic success when they develop close ties to their institutional culture and academics, thereby having increased commitment to the institution (Coates, 2010; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012).

CBPs increase student engagement by providing students with numerous opportunities to develop both academically and socially within the culture of their host institution. In this regard, there are three forms of student engagement: emotional/psychological, cognitive, and behavioral. Emotional/psychological engagement centers on the “emotional intensity” that students experience with their academic work and learning (Kahu, 2013, p. 761). Cognitive engagement focuses on the variety and amount of effective learning strategies that students employ to learn in

an academic environment (Walker et al., 2006, p. 4). Finally, behavioral engagement focuses on student participation and conduct within the classroom setting (Appleton et al., 2006). Student engagement is essential to holistically promote healthy and meaningful relationships between the student and the institution, particularly in a classroom setting and with college peers.

Student engagement has been assessed in several ways. Langley (2006) developed the Revised Student Engagement Index to measure classroom engagement, aligning with the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmarks for success in student engagement (Mandernach, 2015). There are four components of this model: the level of academic challenge, quality of student interactions with faculty, active and collaborative learning, and enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment (Mandernach, 2015). Gunuc and Kuzu (2015) examined the influence of technology on emotional, behavioral and cognitive engagement of undergraduate students and how these three types of engagement affect successful student outcomes. The College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) is designed to help generate an assessment of student learning environments and student outcomes (Mandernach, 2015). Additionally, the Student Engagement Survey (SE) examines student engagement in relation to collaborative learning, cognitive development, and personal skills development (Mandernach, 2015).

For the context of this study, student engagement is significant to identify the best methods to demonstrate a strong relationship between the student and the institution and to assess the quality of their learning experiences through CBP programs. Astin's (1984) initial theory of student engagement emphasized the important role that student engagement has in retaining students. Additionally, Astin's theory emphasized how student learning outcomes and overall student success are affected by the quantity of engagement experiences and the quality of

those experiences (Long, 2012). This study will build on Astin's framework by focusing on how student engagement via common book programs influences outcomes like the development of academic skills, cognition, socio-cultural development, and so forth. (Kahu, 2013).

Student Engagement in Practice

Much of the existing research affirms that high levels of programmatic student engagement, both inside and outside of the classroom, can have a positive effect on student success (Astin, 1984; Caruth, 2018; Kahu, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The research concludes that the level of student engagement in a college setting can be an important indicator/predictor of outcomes like student retention (Burch et al., 2015; Caruth, 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It is critical for college administrators to understand the ways in which student engagement, inside and outside of the classroom, lead to greater student success. Student engagement does not only foster a more well-rounded student experience but may also influence the likelihood that the student will retain from year one to year two (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Karp et al., 2008).

Student Retention

Student retention is one of the most important institutional outcomes in higher education that is influenced by student engagement and is a leading concern facing higher education institutions in the U.S. (Muller et al., 2017; Owolabi, 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), retention is defined as "the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall" (NCES, 2019, p. 12). Adding to the importance of retention is the size of the

undergraduate population approaching 20 million students by 2024 (Barbera et al., 2020).

Degree completion is increasingly considered as crucial to support a stable economic future, but the benefits of holding a degree go beyond individual finances to society at large (Barbera et al., 2020). Society, the institutions themselves, and individual students are all impacted by retention in different yet equally impactful ways.

Student Retention Impact on Society

The impact of student retention reaches beyond the walls of higher education to society with the knowledge-driven U.S. economy, increasing the value of post-secondary education for individuals in securing meaningful employment as well as fulfilling national workforce needs (Martin, 2017; Owolabi, 2018). Society reaps the benefits of a college-educated population through lower rates of unemployment, decreased poverty, less incarceration, increased levels of civic commitment and volunteerism, and a workforce that has the ability to remain competitive in a global, technology-driven market (Barbera et al., 2020). In addition, accrediting bodies, state and federal governments also hold institutions accountable to society by focusing on retention and graduation rates when evaluating institutional outcomes and use retention metrics as a measure of overall institutional effectiveness (Barclay et al., 2018; Manyanga et al., 2017; Owolabi, 2018).

Student Retention Impact on Institutions

Although universities understand the importance of retention, resources to adequately support these efforts are often lacking, as is a strategic framework to support this ongoing work, making retention a key challenge in higher education (Manyanga et al., 2017; Martin, 2017). Enrollment and retention trends have become vital to student success and institutional accountability, serving as metrics for accreditors and decision datapoints for stakeholders

(Owolabi, 2018). Millea and colleagues (2018) found institutions must constantly evaluate strategies to increase student retention, which can be influenced by institutional support and programming as well as external and student-specific attributes. Often the appropriate resources are not dedicated to support strategic retention efforts, which can negatively impact finances when universities fail to retain students, losing thousands of dollars on unrealized tuition revenue and replacement recruiting costs (Barclay et al., 2018; Martin, 2017; Stephenson et al., 2017).

Financial

Martin (2017) examined public, private, and for-profit four-year institutions and found that as much as \$16.5 billion in lost revenue can be attributed to poor student retention rates, averaging approximately \$9.9 million dollars per institution. This is compounded by state and federal funding amounts that are based on the enrollment and size of the student body, meaning increased enrollment and retention leads to an increased level of funding (Martin, 2017).

Retention needs to be addressed across the institution to avoid negative financial impacts as well as negative impacts on overall effectiveness and reputation (Jobe et al., 2016; Martin, 2017; Muller et al., 2017).

Reputation

Retention is also linked to institutional reputation; a university's image and campus morale can be impacted when retention challenges exist (Martin, 2017). Additionally, retention data is used as a metric for institutional effectiveness and a reflection of prestige when comparing universities (Barclay et al., 2018; Martin, 2017). College and university rankings use retention rates as a benchmarking outcome for comparison, and because this information is publicly available, it is one of the most common forms of evaluation by stakeholders, students,

and parents (Barclay et al., 2018; Martin, 2017). Universities must commit to not just recruiting students but to providing the support infrastructure to engage and retain a diverse student body.

Retention Impact on Individual Students

Individual student retention factors are complex and are influenced by student demographics, including socioeconomic status, high school grade point average (GPA), standardized test scores, as well as academic goals, institutional commitment, student support, and academic confidence (Barclay et al., 2018). Students and their families are directly impacted by institutional retention efforts when a student either takes longer than predicted to finish or does not complete their degree (Lane, 2020; Owolabi, 2018). According to Lane (2020), the majority of students at public institutions do not graduate in four years. In his research, Lane (2020) found that only 19% of students graduated on time from public universities, with flagship research public universities' four-year graduation rate found to be higher at 36% (p. 482). This lag in on-time graduation adds to families' financial costs, increases debt, and may ultimately result in decreased earnings and unrealized potential (Lane, 2020; Millea, 2018; Owolabi, 2018). One way on-time graduation rates can be improved is by colleges and universities implementing first- to second-year retention strategies.

First- to Second-Year Retention

First- to second-year student retention is a salient focus in higher education, especially as one third of first-year students do not return for their second year (Martin, 2017; Muller et al., 2017; Owolabi, 2018). Retention for first- to second-year students is focused on continued enrollment from “the second semester of the first (freshman) year to the first semester of the second (sophomore) year” (Muller et al., 2017, p. 4). There is not a singular cause for students not returning for their second year, with Muller et al. (2017) finding that students leave an

institution for three main reasons: a perceived lack of institutional commitment, academic self-efficacy, and sense of belonging, which are often reflected in student engagement levels.

First-year Student Retention Strategies

According to the NCES (2020), undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase from 16.6 million to 17 million from 2018 to 2029. This expected increase in the undergraduate population, coupled with the increase in access by a larger, more diverse population, amplifies the importance of first-year retention (Manyanga et al., 2017). In addition, institutions will face challenges of understanding the diverse needs and providing inclusive support for student success (Hurford et al., 2017; Manyanga et al., 2017).

Muller and colleagues (2017) examined predictors of first-year college student retention and identified collaborative strategies to address retention challenges. Collaborative institutional efforts have the ability to impact the entirety of the student experience and student engagement (Jobe et al., 2016; Muller, 2017). Institutional efforts should also incorporate social and intellectual growth opportunities to support persistence and resilience, in addition to more common retention practices that are limited to study skill development (Barclay et al., 2018; Owolabi, 2018). Recommended institutional investments to improve student retention include institution-driven academic success workshops, first-year experiences, freshman seminar courses, learning communities, peer-to-peer mentoring, academic support through advising, and early alert systems to identify high-risk students (Hurford et al., 2017). Providing a strategic retention framework focused on the frontloading of services is particularly important in understanding student needs and providing support during the first-year and transition to college (Barclay et al., 2018). Considering the barriers students face in transitioning to college is an important piece of the retention framework.

Transition to College

The NCES (2020) estimated that 17 million undergraduate students will enroll in colleges and universities each year over the next nine years. This increased number of undergraduate students will be faced with a myriad of challenges to navigate as they orient to college, interface with new environments, face new social situations, and work to meet academic expectations without immediate social and family support structures (Wilson et al., 2019). According to a study performed by Rickard and colleagues (2018), “First year students grapple with ‘culture shock’ as they experience a loss in confidence and lack of tacit knowledge of learning expectations within the new environment” (p. 42). Institutions need to equip students to manage this culture shock and integrate socially and academically into campus life to positively influence student retention rates (Barclay et al., 2018; Lane, 2020; Muller et al., 2017). This requires the institution to provide support for students in managing challenges and adversity, skills critical to success in post-secondary education (Barclay et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). When institutions are intentional in providing transition support, students are set up for success from the beginning of their enrollment, decreasing the impact of barriers to successful transition.

Transition Barriers

With increased access to post-secondary education, a rising number of students are not equipped to manage the challenges facing incoming students, creating a need for comprehensive support programs to address transition barriers (Connolly et al., 2017; Hallett et al., 2019; Kearney, 2019). First-year students can encounter transition barriers related to the increasing cost of college, learning how to navigate campus services and confusing financial aid procedures (Hallett et al., 2019). These barriers can also lead to difficulty in students being able to manage their emotional well-being and mental health (Hallett et al., 2019).

Goozee (2016) purported that “students are finding it much harder in the transition from secondary education and family life” (p. 324). With a more diverse population entering college, attention needs to focus on access accompanied by success with institutions that provide equitable support that is inclusive of all students' needs (Owolabi, 2018). Understanding how to meet the needs of all students, including underrepresented populations, is essential to help students successfully navigate the unique challenges in transitioning to college (Rolden et al., 2020).

Underrepresented Populations

Historically, marginalized groups, students with low socio-economic backgrounds, and racial minorities have not had equal access to higher education (Owolabi, 2018). Barbera and colleagues (2020) and Owolabi (2018) indicated that underrepresented minorities, first-generation, and low income students are less likely to graduate. In addition, underrepresented groups of students experience added difficulties with sense of belonging or feeling like they belong on a college campus (Ribera et al., 2017; Roldan et al., 2020; Wischusen & Wischusen, 2019). Research by Wischusen and Wischusen (2019) found imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and feeling as if one does not deserve academic achievement have also been shown to negatively impact underrepresented minority students as they deal with transitioning to college life.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often the first in their family to enroll in postsecondary education and are unable to rely on their parents and family members for guidance. In a study conducted by Bayaga and Lekena (2018), over 50 percent of students from financially challenged backgrounds dropped out of college due to the unmanageable direct and indirect costs of their education. In addition, it was found that these students have less time to study, participate in student activities, and/or campus organizations because they must work to

fund their schooling (Bayaga & Lekena, 2018). According to Owolabi (2018), it is because of these factors that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often considered at risk for non-completion of their degrees. It is positive to see an increase in students from diverse backgrounds attending college, but access alone is not the singular solution to equity gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged student populations (McDaniel & Van Jura, 2020). Institutions need to prioritize supporting the transition to college of all students who are now accessing higher education.

Successful Transition

Shared experiences can support the transition, engagement, and retention of first-year students by providing opportunities for interaction and engagement (Kuh et al., 2017; Millea et al., 2018). Kuh et al. (2017) found that focus on attainment of educational objectives, academic achievement, satisfaction, persistence, engagement in intentional educational activities, and achievement of learning objectives focused on preparing students to live a financially self-sufficient, civically responsible, rewarding life supports student engagement and first-year student retention. High-impact practices are one method to incorporate these concepts and promote retention and diminish the gap in achievement between advantaged students and those that have been historically marginalized (Kuh et al., 2017; McDaniel & Van Jura, 2020).

Overview of High-Impact Practices

Postsecondary institutions across the U.S. have embraced HIPs to support student engagement. The phrase “high-impact practices” first appeared in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) article, *College Learning for a New Global Century*, which outlined educational practices that would engage students (AAC&U, 2007, p. 5 and Appendix A). The article ignited a revolution in higher education, focusing initially on ten practices to

support the persistence and academic growth of students (Kuh et al., 2017). The AAC&U defined the “essential learning outcomes,” which expanded on the traditional retention and graduation goals of most institutions (Myers et al., 2019, p. 24). This section will examine the purpose, outcomes, challenges, and assessment of high-impact practices in higher education

High-Impact Practices in Higher Education

The initial ten HIPs by Kuh (2008) expanded to eleven in 2016 with the addition of e-portfolios. HIPs are teaching and learning practices that have been shown to benefit college students (Kuh, 2008). Specifically, HIPs have been proven to enhance student learning and success (Kuh et al., 2017). HIPs include Undergraduate research, Diversity/global learning, E-portfolios, Internships, and Capstone courses and projects, with the additional six practices outlined below as most relevant to common read programs:

First-year seminars and experiences: First-semester activities meant to support the critical thinking, writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills to enhance a student’s ability to persist.

Common intellectual experiences: The idea of a “core” curriculum with opportunities for learning in a group environment, usually connected to a general education program.

Learning communities: Exploring topics outside the classroom that support the integration of learning across courses.

Writing-intensive courses: Courses that emphasize writing across the curriculum. This practice is repeating throughout the curriculum and supports concepts like qualitative reasoning and information literacy.

Collaborative assignments and projects: Students who work collaboratively can develop problem solving skills which enhances self-understanding and the appreciation of differing viewpoints.

Service-learning, community-based learning: Learning that occurs outside the classroom with community based experiences that lead a student to analyze and seek solutions to real life issues (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018).

Researchers have found that students who participate in HIPs achieve both personal and academic benefits (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Finley and McNair (2013) shared that students who participate in multiple HIPs gain a cumulative positive effect on their perception of learning. According to Provencher and Kassel (2019), freshmen and sophomores who participate in at least one of the HIPs are more likely to be retained. HIPs have a positive effect on learning and persistence outcomes when they are implemented with excellence. Excellence can be defined using the “Principles of Excellence” model developed by AAC&U, which states institutions need to be inclusive, innovative, ask big questions, monitor student success, connect knowledge with action, foster ethical learning, and apply learning to complex problems (AAC&U, 2007, p. 26). Institutions should consider including applied, hands-on, integrative learning to ensure quality HIPs. HIPs can have compensatory effects for students from historically underserved populations; and participation in multiple HIPs has a cumulative, additive effect for learning and persistence (Kuh et al., 2017; Provencher & Kassel, 2019). As a result of these outcomes, hands-on experience, integrative and collaborative learning need to be incorporated into HIPs (Kuh et al., 2017).

In addition to positive outcomes related to student persistence, HIPs have been shown to encourage faculty and student interactions. HIPs allow students and faculty to interact for extended periods of time in meaningful tasks (Fernández et al., 2018). Student-faculty interaction is important for the students participating in HIP experiences, especially for transfer students (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). Transfer student populations are increasing on college campuses, with 35% of college students transferring at least once (Simone, 2014). Institutions need to engage and support these students through HIPs (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). Small group activities also allow students to feel more connected to campus and ensure students can connect

with peers. This practice is especially important for underrepresented students who are looking for ways to be seen and heard (Kuh et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, HIPs are not equitable for all groups of students. Students who are first-generation, transfer, Black and Latinx are less likely to participate in HIPs than peers (Kuh et al., 2017, Roldan et al., 2020). Underrepresented student populations could be impacted by limited access, privilege and quality when experiencing HIPs (Zilvinskis, 2019). Race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status can impact first-generation and non-first-generation student success. Participation disparities and lack of equality in HIPs is concerning, especially for underrepresented populations (Roldan et al., 2020). Graduation rates and achievement rates are lower for underrepresented students based on a lack of a sense of belonging, which impacts student retention (Ribera et al., 2017; Thacker Thomas et al., 2018). Institutions should consider how high-impact activities could be adjusted to help support diverse student populations (Zilvinskis, 2019).

Challenges of HIPs

With reduced funding at postsecondary institutions across the country, budget cuts have negatively impacted HIPs. It is important for colleges and universities to ensure funding is secure for HIP initiatives (Fernández et al., 2018; White, 2018). The cost of HIPs can be a factor in implementation, as activities often require significant resources to be applied to first-year programming, which limits institutional spending on engagement practices later in a student's academic journey (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Leaders should provide evidence of how HIPs positively impact student success to secure future funding (White, 2018). This includes institutions identifying defensible and less costly ways to encourage students to participate in HIPs (Roldan et al., 2020). Institutions that can identify HIP challenges related to specific

student populations and develop supportive programming to counter those challenges have higher graduation rates (Thacker Thomas et al., 2018). HIPs have been proven to benefit graduation rates when implemented to support student success and retention (Rolden et al., 2020).

Supporting the staff and daily operations of HIPs is another challenge (Fernandez et al., 2018). This includes gathering support from faculty to integrate HIPs into course teaching and objectives (Fernández et al., 2018). HIPs also need the support of faculty, staff, and leadership to embrace the vision and mission the university has defined for its HIP activities. Fernández et al., 2018). Institutions should focus on providing HIPs that align with the campus goals instead of the number of activities offered (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Reviewing how these practices impact institutional outcomes is important in learning how effective they are compared to other programming offered by the institution (Johnson & Stage, 2018).

Assessment

Shavers and Mitchell (2019) conducted a study reviewing the effectiveness of HIPs. Their findings indicated that “56 percent of the respondents” reported they have a formal system to coordinate high-impact activities; however, only “44 percent have identified outcomes” for student success high-impact activities and only “25 percent have specific outcomes” (Shavers & Mitchell, 2019, p. 10). Assessment has not been used formally in relation to high-impact activities (Shavers & Mitchell, 2019). Inconsistency in the defining HIP expectations can have an impact on desired outcomes (Zilvinskis, 2019). Faculty shared that without an established purpose and strategy for implementing HIPs, it can be difficult to develop measurable outcomes (Shavers & Mitchell, 2019). Only 50 percent of the respondents in the study indicated that the evaluation of high-impact activities is part of the formal assessment process (Shavers & Mitchell,

2019). An established metric for evaluation of high-impact activities would make assessing the value easier and support continued funding (Shavers & Mitchell, 2019).

The AAC&U developed a report titled “Ensuring quality and taking high-impact practices to scale” (p. 10), which outlines the essential characteristics of HIPs: (1) high-performance expectations, (2) students investing a significant amount of time and effort, (3) faculty and peer interaction, (4) integration with diverse people and ideas, (5) extensive faculty feedback, (6) reflective and interactive learning, (7) application of understanding to the real work, and (8) public demonstration of competence. Using these as a guide, institutions can develop student outcomes measures that reflect the eight essential characteristics (Finley & McNair, 2013; Zilvinskis, 2019). Provencher and Kassel (2019) stated colleges and universities considering implementing HIPs need to have a clear and defined outcome related to how they will measure and assess participation in activities. One recommendation is to develop intentional partnerships between assessment offices and faculty researchers to gain insight into HIP outcomes (Provencher & Kassel, 2019).

Outcomes

HIPs are integrated into multiple activities across college campuses, for example, peer-mentoring, capstone, study abroad, and first-year experience opportunities (including CBPs) (Fernández et al., 2018; Johnson & Stage, 2018; Povencher & Kassel, 2019). While these practices result in positive outcomes related to retention and persistence, institutions need to ensure they are assessing the degree to which outcomes and goals are achieved (Zilvinskis, 2019). Mapping outcomes is an effective tool used to understand the links between practices and desired learning outcomes (Zilvinskis, 2019). Included in this process is identifying how diverse students are engaging in HIPs and what additional resources are necessary to meet outcomes

(Roldan et al., 2020; Zilvinskis, 2019). CBPs also need to be assessed with specific outcomes measures, as part of assessment of larger FYE programs.

First-Year Experience Program Overview

HIPs that focus on creating shared experiences to support first-year student integration into the university community lead to increased student engagement and retention (Kuh et al., 2017; Millea et al., 2018; Woolfork-Barnes, 2017). FYE programs are a widely accepted, comprehensive effort to connect students with the institution by orienting students to campus resources, supporting undergraduate learning objectives, enhancing academic skills, and ultimately retaining students from the first- to second year (Young, 2020). The term *first-year experience* describes a series of programs, a specific campus department, and/or a singular course intended to help students successfully transition from high school to college (Gore & Metz, 2017; Wismath & Newberry, 2019). FYE programs also provide a connective thread to other programs like orienting students to campus resources, building a sense of belonging, and providing a curricular anchor for additional high-impact practices (Young, 2020).

The first year of college is critical in establishing student engagement, and institutions spend significant time and resources building impactful FYE programs (Woolfork-Barnes, 2017). This work includes providing the appropriate resources within the first year of college that have been proven to positively impact student success (Wismath & Newberry, 2019; Young, 2020). In order to better understand the importance of the FYE, this section will examine the program's evolution and variety of models that enhance academic preparedness and student engagement.

Evolution of First-Year Experience Programs

Early FYE implementation was limited to traditional students with provided support focused on the first year of college (Gore & Metz, 2017). The influence of increased underrepresented and non-traditional populations of students, expanded focus on institutional accountability, and reduced state funding for public institutions has led to a shift toward more coordinated and comprehensive FYE programs (Gore & Metz, 2017; Owolabi, 2018). Many FYE programs are now designed to support at-risk, underrepresented students (Ahadi et al., 2019). Connolly and colleagues (2017) found that identifying at-risk students early and encouraging them to fully engage in FYE programs has a positive impact on their success. Over time, broader course offerings, targeted programming, dedicated campus departments, and administrative positions have become incorporated into FYE to directly support at-risk students, sophomores, and seniors, as well as adult learners, veterans, and transfer students (Gore & Metz, 2017).

First-Year Experience Program Models

FYE is often used to describe a comprehensive array of academic and student support resources, programs, and services utilized together, as many institutions recognize that a single first-year or freshman seminar course is not sufficient to ensure long-term student success (Gore & Metz, 2107). Most FYE program models fall into two broad categories of either summer-long bridge programs or first year seminars (FYS), although the model may differ by institution (Wischusen & Wischusen, 2019). According to research conducted by Jobe and colleagues (2016), success in all of the program models derives from a strategic approach to engage students early and frequently in a student-centered and institution-specific way. Summer bridge programs can range from four to six weeks and are targeted toward a specific, at-risk student population

and serve a small number of students (Wischusen & Wischusen, 2019). More broad-reaching FYE program models include courses and targeted programs that support a group of students who share an interest, major, and/or living space, for example, learning communities (Gore & Metz, 2017). Learning communities are used to support learning among a group of students with common interests who participate in co-curricular activities together and collaborate on academic pursuits (Gore and Metz, 2017; Mueller et al., 2017). Other FYE models anchor the experience through a focus on a particular class or group of classes (Gore & Metz, 2017). This curricular shared experience helps engage students through a common learning experience, as is the case with first-year courses.

First-Year Courses

For nearly three decades, FYS courses have played an important role in student development, curriculum design, and student outcome goal setting and assessment at postsecondary institutions in the U.S. (Jessup-Anger, 2011; Padgett et al., 2013). Most FYS are designed with small-class sizes, are facilitated by faculty and/or staff members, and offer a range of credit opportunities at the host institution (Jessup-Anger, 2011). Pittendrigh and colleagues (2016) stated that while there are many models for FYS, most tend to focus on “instruction in study skills, some provide an introduction to specific disciplines, or professions, and some are academically oriented and may have either a common syllabus across sections, or a syllabus designed by individual faculty” (pp. 48-49). The overall design of FYS and their associated curricula may differ from one campus to another. However, most FYS are designed to enhance the academic performance and preparedness of first-year students, increase persistence and

resilience, and degree attainment via heightened “academic and social integration” (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006, p. 26; Gore & Metz, 2017).

Academic Preparedness

There is a significant amount of research concerning the role that FYS play in supporting the academic preparedness of students. Some scholars believe that the FYE plays a critical role in the development of academic skills and competencies while engaging students in topics related to diversity and encouraging students to explore career options (Gore & Metz, 2017). This also includes educating students on the resources they have access to while enrolled at the institution (Gore & Metz, 2017). Similarly, additional research offers that FYS assist first-year students in developing the academic skills necessary for higher education success by creating opportunities for and promoting “[...]positive gains in cognitive complexity, critical thinking, and reflective judgment as identified in numerous theories of student intellectual development” (Padgett et al., 2013, p. 136). To strengthen academic success and engagement, programs such as the common book provide an opportunity to enhance the undergraduate academic experience.

Shared Academic Experience

An institution's commitment to an impactful first year provides opportunities for additional ways to build student engagement through a shared academic experience such as the CBP. In a study by Woolfork-Barnes (2017), results indicated that students enrolled in courses tied to a theme, like a CBP, experience significantly higher retention rates. CBPs are an example of expanded efforts of the FYE initiative (Gore & Metz, 2017) and showcase institutional efforts aimed to provide a shared academic experience that occurs before the start of the first freshman semester. Further, the CBP may serve as a foundation for discussion in freshman coursework,

with the intention of providing a shared learning experience among students (Gore & Metz, 2017).

Overview of Common Book Programs

Common book programs are a popular component of the first-year college experience at public and private four-year institutions as well as community colleges (Delwiche, 2017; Ferguson et al., 2014; Randall, 2019). In addition, CBPs serve as vehicles to enhance student engagement and as contributing factors to support first-year to second-year student retention (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Baraclay et al., 2018; Millea et al., 2018) CBPs provide both social and academic engagement opportunities through “a common intellectual experience” (Nicholas, 2012, p. 180). While CBPs often intersect with pre-semester activities such as orientation, an alternative model engages students throughout their first semester (Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012). Regardless of the program model used by an individual institution, the literature supports that institutions leveraging a CBP to engage their first-year students strengthens their first-year to second-year retention rate.

Much of the available literature on CBPs is dated, which exposes a gap in the literature. While current studies consider student retention and engagement, little focus is given specifically to the CBP, despite its popularity. An opportunity exists to contribute new literature to the field in assessment of CBPs. To consider the ways in which the CBP impacts student retention, the following section will review the program’s purpose as it relates to engagement and academic preparedness. Further, various program models will be analyzed to determine how the common book intersects with the FYE as a way to increase first- to second-year student retention.

Program Purpose

The common book serves as a vehicle to help students transition to college through a shared intellectual experience with the campus community (Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012). Specifically, a CBP “brings people closer together as a community by creating common ground for discussion” (Ferguson, 2006, p. 8). According to Thorne (2015), key learning objectives for student participants include building campus connections, establishing academic expectations, facilitating collaborative conversations, promoting social activism, and fostering critical thinking skills. Student participation in a CBP supports social and academic transition to college-level coursework while providing an opportunity to critically think about a shared topic or issue (Nicholas, 2012). Two key areas emerge throughout the literature that shape CBPs: student engagement and academic preparedness.

Student Engagement

CBPs engage participants in small group discussions focused on the selected text, bringing students from different geographic areas and backgrounds together to share new perspectives (Ferguson, 2006). A study conducted by Daugherty and Hayes (2012) supports student engagement in the CBP and found that students who fully participated in the program “reported a stronger connection to the university and had higher academic achievement in college” (p. 38). The study, which included a sample of 97 students, measured the correlation between book readership and the social and academic impact on the student (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012). While some programs focus solely on pre-semester student engagement (e.g. as a part of orientation), other models continue to engage students throughout the first semester (Ferguson, 2006). Continued engagement opportunities may include integrating the text into

first-year seminar curricula, hosting guest speaker visits to campus, service-learning opportunities, and in-class discussions woven into courses that expand on the common book (Thorne, 2015).

Academic Preparedness

CBPs also support students as they begin college-level academic coursework. Specifically, programs foster academic engagement in the first year through cultural awareness, opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, and by connecting the common text within first-year courses to stimulate intellectual conversation (Boff et al., 2007; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018). Steele (2019) reviewed advising best practices shared by the National Association of Academic Advising (NAAA) and found that cognitive development strengthens decision-making skills when students assess new information and “examine the accuracy and consequences of their beliefs” (p. 23). As such, an intentionally designed CBP that exposes students to new ideas and challenges preconceived ways of thinking may lead to increased critical thinking as well as cognitive and critical skill development for student participants.

A 2019 report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) explored how mindset can enhance student learning through the development of self-efficacy and an established sense of belonging through a common book experience. Results of this study support a positive correlation between student mindset, increased engagement levels, and higher reported GPA (CCCSE, 2019). To further consider how a CBP influences student behavior, a study conducted by Kennedy and Boyd (2018) examined how participation in an environmentally themed CBP impacted student behavior. The study found that students who engaged in the program experienced transformative learning as a result of their participation,

which subsequently led to increased personal responsibility and environmental awareness (Kennedy & Boyd, 2018). The literature supports the purpose of the CBP both in terms of student engagement as well as academic preparedness in the classroom.

Program Models

While CBPs differ among institutions, two models emerge in the literature, including the model that focuses on pre-semester activities and the other that integrates the common book text into one or more first-year courses (Ferguson, 2006; Nicholas, 2012). Although both models intersect with the student experience in unique ways, the underlying objective of a shared experience is consistent.

Pre-semester Engagement

Frequently, institutions incorporate CBPs within their orientation or other pre-semester programming, which concludes prior to the start of the academic term (Ferguson, 2006). In this common book model, students are asked to read the text prior to arriving on campus in order to participate in a discussion during orientation or arrival-week activities. These activities may be the first opportunity for students to experience an academic-based discussion with peers or faculty. Further, Angell (2019) provides a case study of first-year success librarians who engage with the CBP. Through a literature review of successful practices as well as first-hand experience at Long Island University Brooklyn, Angell (2019) identified opportunities for librarian partnerships with the CBP. Examples include organizing a CBP around academic majors to engage students in a conversation pertinent to the specific field of study, increased librarian presence at first-year events to promote the common book, and cross-department collaboration around service learning opportunities (Angell, 2019; Boff et al., 2007; Delwiche, 2017).

There are limitations to the pre-semester model despite engaging students with CBPs. First, some students do not have time to read the text prior to arriving at orientation, thereby limiting their ability to fully engage (Ferguson et al., 2014). In addition, Ferguson (2006) highlighted that CBPs that end by the start of the semester may lack purpose and cause students to question participation in the program. Given that students must read the text to fully realize the benefits of a pre-semester model, there are significant limitations on desired outcomes (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012).

Course Integration

The alternative CBP model continues into the academic semester to engage students by incorporating the selected text in both curricular and co-curricular opportunities (Ferguson, 2006). For example, South Dakota State University leverages their CBP in various introductory and general studies classes during the first year. In this model, learning objectives include a focus on current global issues, cultural and social diversity, and community engagement (Nicholas, 2012). According to Ferguson (2006), this supports the ongoing integration of a common book throughout the semester, building meaning into the program and increasing student engagement.

Course integration requires that faculty include the common book text in their courses, which can present a challenge to their content and pedagogy. For students, this can also lead to an inconsistent classroom experience with the common book (Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2014). A study of faculty conducted by Ferguson and colleagues (2018) found that a majority of faculty participants did not consistently realize the benefit of incorporating a common book text into their course. While respondents did note an increase in conversation among colleagues about

how they would incorporate the common book text, it was not enough to raise their self- or collective efficacy; however, the respondents did believe that students benefited from participating in the shared reading and discussion experience (Ferguson et al., 2018). While this model supports the added academic engagement to help students integrate to college-level coursework, outcome data is limited and cannot be broadly generalized.

Opportunities and Challenges

Relevant literature reveals a number of opportunities and challenges that impact successful CBP implementation. Three areas of focus are how the common book text is selected, how to address the mixed level of student engagement with the program, and how to leverage an impactful program structure in order to create a quality program.

Text Selection

Thorne (2015) offered three reasons why text selection is a challenge for many CBPs. These challenges include limiting potential texts to the most accessible option(s), considering only texts with a living author, and using too large of a selection committee. Others advocate for earlier text selection to allow students and faculty additional time to both obtain and read the text prior to arriving on campus (Ferguson, Brown, & Piper, 2014; Strawser & Hume, 2019; Thorne, 2015).

Stawser and Hume (2019) offered several alternatives to enhance the text selection process and increase campus buy-in for the common book. First, involving the entire university community in the selection process is recommended, followed by integrating the text across orientation, co-curricular programs, and first-year courses (Stawser & Hume, 2019). In addition, developing “complementary short works suggested, and created, by the university community” is

recommended to provide alternative avenues for students to read about a shared theme (Strawser & Hume, 2019, p. 257). While Thorne (2015) advised that the selection committee itself should not be too big, others argue that more input from the campus community, including students, staff, and community members, enhances overall CBP support and buy-in (Ferguson et al., 2014; Strawser & Hume, 2019).

Student Engagement

Varying levels of student engagement with CBPs poses a challenge given the known benefits realized when students read the text in full (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012). According to a Johnson (2019) in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “Unless you actually assign a grade for the out-of-class component, students just won’t read it” (para. 32). Students miss connection opportunities and higher academic achievement rates when they do not read the required common book text (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2014). Thorne (2015) also supported this concern and asserted that very few institutions employ a mechanism to test whether the student read the common book text. When students do not read the common text, the likelihood that they will fully engage in the program decreases emphasizing the importance of finding an impactful text that students will express interest in (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2014; Thorne, 2015).

Administrative Structure

The traditional siloed operation of post-secondary institutions creates challenges in facilitating campus-wide coordination of CBPs (Thorne, 2015). Megwalu, Miller, and Haller (2017) found that “purposeful collaboration is one of the most crucial aspects of building a learning community” (p. 450). The integration of support services within a common book

experience helps build student awareness of resources, increase student engagement, and build information literacy (Angell, 2019; Delwiche, 2017; Megwalu et al., 2017). A successful CBP requires campus stakeholder buy-in from faculty, staff, and students (Strawser & Hume, 2019).

CBPs benefit from incorporating campus partnerships with resources such as the library (Boff et al., 2007). Students benefit from early exposure to library support resources, as well as the developing personal connections with support staff who are engaged in the common book (Magwala et al., 2017). Establishing intentional connections with these resources early and often supports students as they persist in academic coursework. The CBP that integrates campus resources enhances the student experience and positively impacts persistence and retention from the first-year to the second-year. CBPs have an opportunity to contribute to institutional student engagement and retention strategies, maximizing the influence of high-impact practices.

VCU Common Book Program Overview

The VCU CBP began as the VCU Summer Reading Program in 2006 and expanded to a university-wide initiative in 2015 (Gresham, 2012; F. Williams, personal communication, June 9, 2020). The purpose of the VCU CBP is to provide a high-impact FYE, focusing on welcoming first-year students to campus, and creating “the opportunity to explore complex social issues through an interdisciplinary lens” (*Common Book*, 2018, para 1; F. Williams, personal communication, June 9, 2020). Through partnerships across the VCU campuses, as well as with community organizations, students are provided opportunities “to explore real-world application and problem-solving” (*Common Book*, 2018, para 1; F. Williams, personal communication, June 9, 2020; VCU University College, 2020). An example of campus partnerships in the VCU CBP is the book selection process.

Book Selection Process

The VCU CBP selection committee is composed of twenty-five faculty, administrative staff, and students representing different disciplines and perspectives (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020; VCU University College, 2020). In its evaluation, the CBP selection committee reviews books that encourage students to consider issues from differing perspectives, stimulate deep thinking and analysis about a current issue, and provide an initial exposure to academic inquiry (VCU University College, 2020).

Consistent with practices outlined in the literature, each November, the selection committee convenes to review nominations from the VCU community and proposals submitted by publishers (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020). The committee recommends two to three books to the provost for final selection by the end of the spring semester (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020). The selected text is then utilized the following academic year (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020).

Administrative Structure

Consistent with other programs detailed in the literature, VCU CBP is structured as a hybrid program, providing students opportunities to engage in discussion groups as part of pre-semester welcome week activities, incorporating the selected book into first-year courses, and hosting events culminating with a visit from the selected book's author on campus each fall (*Common Book*, 2018).

The VCU CBP is organizationally housed within the University College (UC), which also manages Focused Inquiry (FI) courses for first-year students and the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary studies degree (VCU University College, 2019). The VCU CBP is staffed by

the Associate Dean of the UC serving as the Director of the VCU CBP, a Common Book Coordinator, a dedicated graduate assistant, and the assistance of part-time federal work study students (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020; VCU University College, 2020). The UC Department of FI supports the program by utilizing the selected common book text into FYS coursework as well as developing partnerships with community organizations to provide students with opportunities to apply their learning (*Common Book*, 2018; E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020).

Program Activities

Students are first exposed to the VCU CBP in welcome week discussion groups, traditionally held the day before the fall semester courses begin (*Common Book*, 2018). These discussion groups are organized consistent with best practices outlined by Ferguson (2006) and Angell (2019) to foster engagement and build a sense of community with the institution. In 2019, 101 discussion group sessions were held with over 1,700 first-year students and 108 volunteer facilitators, including 33 representing the UC Department of FI (VCU University College, 2020). Fifteen to twenty students are assigned to each discussion group, generally based on their residence-hall floor assignment to foster connection with other students (VCU University College, 2020). Discussion groups are facilitated by a volunteer faculty or staff member with the dual purpose of both introducing students to others on campus as well as to introduce the style of academic discussion used in the FI courses (VCU University College, 2020).

The VCU CBP program hosts several on-campus events tied to the selected text, including an author visit to campus (E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020). In support of the 2019-2020 common book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, the VCU CBP program hosted the author Matthew Desmond over the course of two days

(VCU University College, 2020). The author participated in several small group events, culminating in a keynote address with over 1,000 attendees (VCU University College, 2020).

FI faculty members collaborate with other VCU units and schools, as well as the Richmond community, to produce events tied to the common book theme (*Common Book*, 2018; E. Fagan & F. Williams, personal communication, June 11, 2020; VCU University College, 2020). In 2019, eight other units/schools organized programming around the book's theme, with seven events reaching approximately 400 participants (VCU University College, 2020). Events open to the local community reached approximately 300 participants, hosted by four community partners including the Campaign to Reduce Evictions, Richmond Community Foundation, Richmond Public Library, and Virginia Poverty Law Center (VCU University College, 2020).

Curriculum and Assessment

The Department of FI faculty incorporate the selected text into UNIV 111 and UNIV 112 courses, designed for first-year students “to learn how to think deeply, critically, and analytically about the kinds of large issues they will encounter throughout their academic careers at VCU” (VCU University College, 2019, para 3). Focused inquiry courses are conducted in a small, seminar-style format and required for most students (*About Us & Mission Statement*, 2019, para 1). In the 2019-2020 academic year, 3,247 students participated in 172 sections of UNIV 111 and 112 (VCU University College, 2020; R. Smith, personal communication, July 16, 2020). Consistent with the literature, the VCU Library also creates a research guide for each selected common book to support FI coursework and students (*Common Book Program: One Person, No Vote*, 2020).

Assessment of the VCU CBP has historically been limited to student and discussion group facilitator surveys following the Welcome Week discussion groups. Student surveys focus

on participant's satisfaction with VCU CBP, how much of the text was read, and if they plan to seek further information on the text's theme (VCU University College, 2020). In 2019, 1,573 students completed the post-discussion survey with 96 percent of students reporting the program to be beneficial in terms of helping them to connect with other students, and 93 percent felt the program will be helpful in their transition to college. A copy of the student survey assessment tool is included as Appendix A.

The most recent VCU CBP facilitator survey focused on operational aspects of the program, evaluating the preparation materials and processes, as well as the facilitators' perceptions of student engagement. In 2019, 49 facilitators completed the survey, rating student engagement in the discussion groups to be moderate or high, and 94 percent noted that student engagement with each other to be moderate or high. Of the 23 facilitator respondents with teaching responsibilities, 86 percent (n=20) indicated that they were likely to incorporate the common book into their coursework. A copy of the facilitator survey assessment tool is included in Appendix B.

The VCU UC Assessment Committee conducted an analysis of graduation rates, comparing students who completed FI courses (UNIV 111, 112, 200) to those students who did not (VCU University College, 2019). Consistent with retention and high-impact practice literature, findings indicate that students who complete the three-course sequence have a higher six-year graduation rate than those who do not complete the sequence (VCU University College, 2019). The increased graduation rate was consistent across demographic categories reviewed, including Pell Grant recipients, underrepresented minority students, non-underrepresented minority students, as well as male and female students (VCU University College, 2019).

Chapter Summary

In summary, HIPs like CBPs provide an experience that can have a substantial impact on student success and retention. Foundational student engagement theory supports that the shared experiences generated through CBPs help to effectively integrate students into the academic and cultural aspects of college life. This is accomplished by providing students with the development of cognition and skills, exposure to resources, and preparation for the expectations of college life. While the CBP models employed by colleges and universities are numerous, the existing research concludes that engaging students in these programs can positively affect first- to second-year retention rates. The VCU CBP is a beneficial program for increasing and sustaining institutional and student success. The following chapter will present the methodology informed by the literature review used to assess and inform strategic planning efforts to advance the VCU CBP and positively impact student success.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

This study used student engagement and high-impact practice (HIP) frameworks to explore the ways in which higher education institutions facilitate and assess their common book programs (CBPs). Given the importance of student engagement during the first year, both inside and outside of the classroom, this study was designed to assist VCU CBP in evaluating program outcomes and measuring impact on student engagement. This chapter will begin with an overview of the study's purpose and guiding research questions, as well as the theoretical framework. The research design will then be discussed, which will include an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. Finally, data analysis procedures and limitations will be outlined.

Methodology

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which higher education institutions facilitate and assess their CBPs. The study focuses on student engagement and skill development that enhances college student success among first-year students and considers the HIPs and assessment tools utilized by peer institutions in order to guide the VCU CBP in program evaluation and strategic planning.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the assessment practices of CBPs?
2. What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?

- a. How do the CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?
 - b. How do the CBPs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff and the community?
3. In what ways do peer institutions implement HIPs as they relate to the common book program or first-year experience (FYE)?

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two theoretical frameworks: the Campus-Class-Technology model (CCT) (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015) and HIPs (Kuh, 2008). In Gunuc and Kuzu's (2015) CCT model:

The value given by the students to university life and university education was among the important factors which helped the students have the sense of belonging to university/campus; which allowed them to spend time in the campus; and which resulted in an increase in class engagement (p. 115).

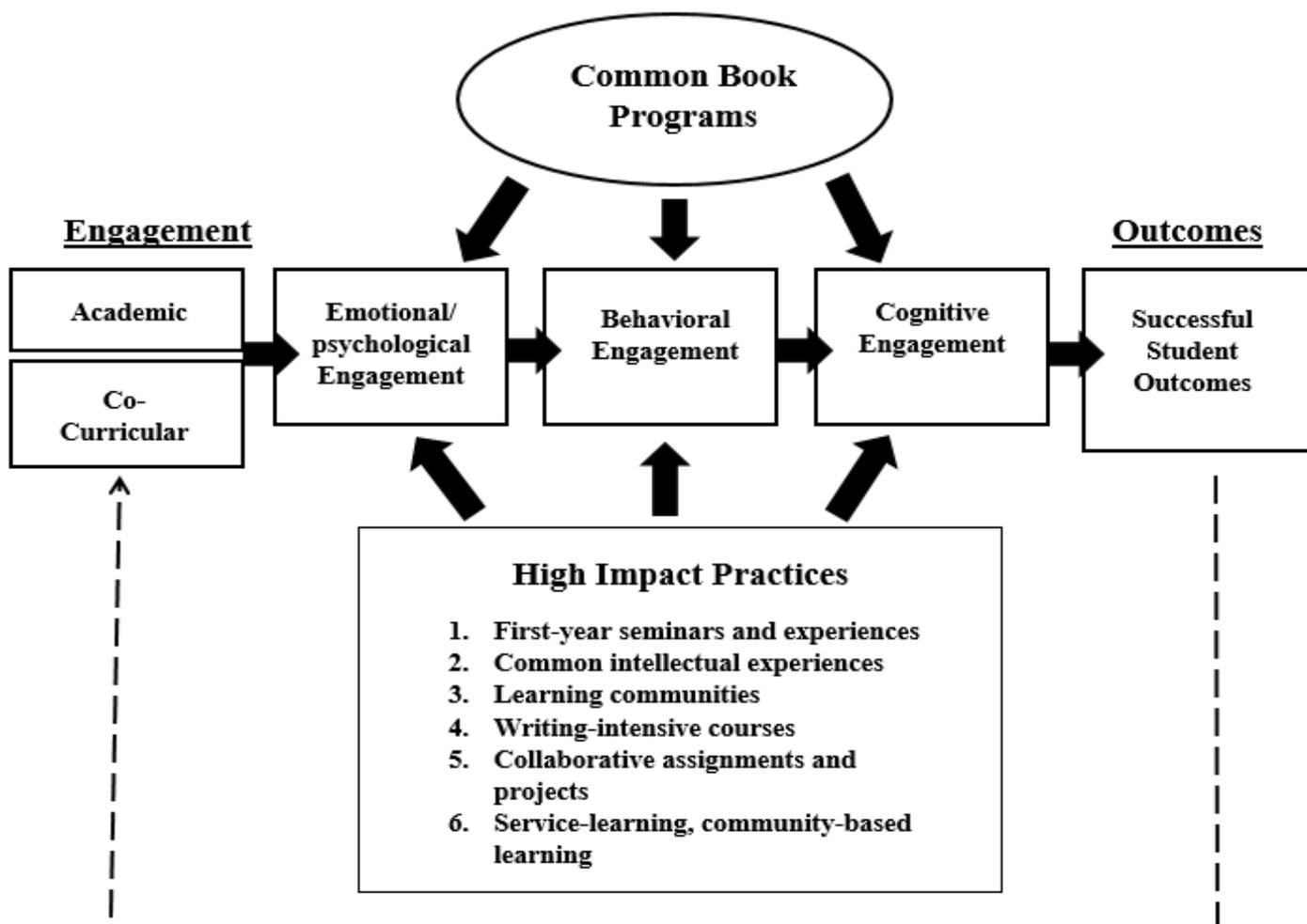
Further, the authors' model expanded on this concept and offered that higher levels of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement are found in students with high levels of access and comfort with technology (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Student engagement theory places an emphasis on the importance of student engagement in generating and ensuring successful student outcomes, which this study also emphasized.

In the Gunuc and Kuzu (2015) model, student comfort with technology is used to measure emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, key factors that can impact student academic success. In order to measure how the CBP impacts engagement, this study adapts Gunuc and Kuzu's (2015) CCT model and examines students' experiences with CBPs rather

than technology (Figure 1). CBPs serve as an effective replacement for technology in this model because, like technology, these programs serve as a tool for achieving successful student outcomes.

Figure 1

Theory of Student Engagement Through Common Book Programs



The theoretical framework and model for this study, as shown in Figure 1, centers on the understanding that students who participate in CBPs experience three types of engagement that lead to successful student outcomes: emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. For the purpose of this study, emotional/psychological engagement refers to

students' emotional reactions, "... including their attitudes, interest, and relationships," to those with whom they interact and the subject matter to which they are exposed (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015, p. 114). Behavioral engagement refers to participation in academic experiences outside of the classroom, participation in classes, and attendance (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015, p. 115). Finally, cognitive engagement refers to students' investment and value placed in learning, motivation, goal setting, and "self-regulation and planning" (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015, p. 114). These three types of student engagement are accomplished through two primary types of engagement opportunities that can result from participation in CBPs: academic (in class) and co-curricular (out of class). Within each area of student engagement, students are exposed to six of the primary HIPs proposed by Kuh (2008).

By utilizing this model, this study not only aimed to identify how HIPs identified by Kuh (2008) are utilized to achieve student outcomes but also aimed to identify additional commonly used best practices and HIPs that are currently utilized by CBPs at U.S. colleges and universities within the framework outlined in Figure 1. Further, this model is used to identify common learning outcomes that are achieved through emotional/psychological engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement in CBPs.

The framework informs the research questions, survey instrument, interview protocol, and recommendations generated by this study. Specifically, examining what practices CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community. In addition, understanding how CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills as well as foster student connections with the campus community. Survey questions were designed to align with the three major categories of engagement being analyzed in this study. Survey response data was then used to inform the

follow-up interview protocol. The interview protocol gathered specific information related to the proposed student engagement theory and HIPs.

High-Impact Practices

HIPs have been implemented in postsecondary institutions across the U.S. to support student engagement (Provencher & Kassel, 2019). Kuh (2008, 2017) defines HIPs as specific activities that support student learning and success. HIPs include: undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, e-portfolios, internships, and capstone courses and projects. There are six HIPs most relevant to common book programs (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018).

First-year seminars and experiences: First-semester activities meant to support the critical thinking, writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills to enhance a student's ability to persist.

Common intellectual experiences: The idea of a "core" curriculum with opportunities for learning in a group environment, usually connected to a general education program.

Learning communities: Exploring topics outside the classroom that support the integration of learning across courses.

Writing-intensive courses: Courses that emphasize writing across the curriculum. This practice is repeating throughout the curriculum and supports concepts like qualitative reasoning and information literacy.

Collaborative assignments and projects: Students who work collaboratively can develop problem solving skills which enhances self-understanding and the appreciation of differing viewpoints.

Service-learning, community-based learning: Learning that occurs outside the classroom with community based experiences that lead a student to analyze and seek solutions to real life issues.

This study utilizes the six relevant HIP's to frame how CBP practices align with HIPs. Research has demonstrated that HIPs positively impact academic and personal success, as well as student perception of learning; however, little formal assessment work has been done to

measure effectiveness (Finley & McNair, 2013; Johnson & Stage, 2018; Shavers & Mitchell, 2019). This study informs how institutions planning to implement and assess HIPs should determine the purpose, strategy, and desired student outcomes measures (Shavers & Mitchell, 2019; Provencher & Kassel, 2019; Zilvinskis, 2019). Once the purpose, strategy, and desired outcomes are articulated, Provencher and Kassel (2019) recommended that institutions partner with assessment offices and faculty to assess HIP outcomes.

Student Engagement and HIPs

The proposed model for student engagement through CBPs (Figure 1) serves as the framework that guided this study by examining academic and co-curricular engagement related to emotional/psychological, behavioral and cognitive engagement in relation to student outcomes. In addition, based on the model for Theory of Student Engagement through Common Book Programs that is used in this study, researchers determined how CBPs use established HIPs to support student engagement and outcomes. While the literature on student engagement and student engagement theory is vast, there is a gap in the literature, specifically concerning CBPs and assessment of programmatic effectiveness.

Research Design

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach is appropriate to assess CBP outcomes related to student engagement theory as well as how these efforts align with HIPs. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design consists of two distinct phases: first a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. The rationale for using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach is that quantitative data alone is insufficient to fully understand the research problem, and that the qualitative data will further inform researchers through exploring participant experiences in greater depth

(Ivankova et al., 2006). Figure 2 (Subedi, 2016, p. 573) outlines the explanatory sequential design process that begins with a quantitative data collection and analysis, which then informs a subsequent qualitative data collection.

Figure 2

Mixed-methods Sequential Explanatory Design



The core purpose of this mixed-methods sequential explanatory study is to identify the practices utilized by CBPs to engage students as well as to assess program outcomes by obtaining quantitative results from a survey of 545 peer institutions, with follow-up interviews to further explore these results in greater detail (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006).

The first quantitative phase of this study focused on the institution's CBP program assessment practices, student engagement practices, and program administration. Institution profile information was also collected during this phase, including the size and type of institution and the intended student group(s) its CBP is designed to engage. Quantitative data was used to inform the second phase: a qualitative interview where investigators invited administrators to participate in interviews to further explore the CBP model, how outcomes are defined and assessed, and how students are engaged in the program. Institutions that have discontinued their CBP were also invited for an interview to describe potential barriers to program administration, assessment, and student engagement. The mixed-method approach provided an initial opportunity to address the research questions through the quantitative survey followed by qualitative interviews to gain deeper context and perspective based on experience at key

institutions. Table 1 summarizes the data collected in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study, which will be described in detail in the following sections.

Table 1

Data Collection Methods Correlated to Research Questions

Research Questions	Methods of Data Collection		
	Document Analysis	Peer Institution Survey	Peer Institution Interviews
What are the assessment practices of Common Book Programs?		X	X
What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?		X	X
How do the CBP programs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?		X	X
How do the CBP programs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff, and the community?	X	X	X
In what ways do peer institutions implement high-impact practices as they relate to the common book program or first-year experiences?	X	X	X

Quantitative Phase

The goal of the quantitative phase of this study was to survey a broad cross section of four-year institutions in the U.S. that currently administer, or recently administered, a CBP. Within the sequential explanatory framework, this phase yields numerical data to address the research questions of the study and informed the subsequent qualitative research (Ivankova et al., 2006; Subedi, 2016). The research team reviewed institution CBP and FYE websites in order to

identify participants for the survey. In addition, the team collected information about the practices these programs utilized in fostering connections and implementing HIPs. *Survey*

The primary purpose of the Common Book Program Survey instrument (Appendix C) was to collect quantitative descriptions of the trends in the administration of CBP programs, including institutional information including size, location, and type of institution, as well as CBP administration, assessment, funding, and student populations supported. As Ivankova and colleagues (2006) and Subedi (2016) affirmed the quantitative survey guided the research team in establishing a broad understanding of the ways in which CBPs leverage student development theory to enhance academic and cognitive development in the first year of college. Survey questions measured how programs are designed to encourage student engagement on campus through an onboarding program (i.e. student orientation) or through a formal FYE. Further, by collecting information on how and where CBP programs are facilitated, this study considered how different program environments engage students emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively.

The self-developed Common Book Program Survey (Appendix C) is cross-sectional, collecting information at one point in time via the Internet (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using the QuestionPro online survey tool to distribute the survey allowed researchers to distribute to institutions quickly and efficiently, in a short time frame, and at no cost (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lefever et al., 2007). The online format also created a streamlined experience requiring a shorter time commitment for respondents (Lefever et al., 2007).

The Common Book Program Survey (Appendix C) consists of 27 total items, including four institution demographic questions and 16 questions focused on the CBP administration. The initial institution demographic questions allowed the respondent to select the response that best describes their institution. The CBP section of the survey consists of five open-ended response

questions and four select-all-that-apply response questions to gather information related to how the institution engages students. Table 2 connects survey questions to the research questions proposed in this study.

Table 2

Common Book Survey and Interview Questions

Research Question	Items on Common Book Survey	Items on Interview Script	HIP Elements	Proposed Student Engagement Elements
1. What are the assessment practices of CBPs?	8, 9	5a, 5b, 5c, 9		
2. What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?	11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18	1, 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	E/P, B, C
2a. How do the CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?	11, 12, 13	6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	E/P, B, C
2b. How do the CBPs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff, and the community?	14, 15, 16, 17, 18		1, 2, 4, 5	E/P, B, C
3. In what ways do peer institutions implement high-impact practices as they relate to the common book program or first-year experience?	12, 14, 15	1, 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	E/P, B, C

Note. HIP elements include First-year seminars and experiences (1), Common intellectual experiences (2), Learning communities (3), Writing-intensive courses (4), Collaborative assignments and projects (5), Service-learning and community-based learning (6). The Proposed Theory of Student Engagement Through Common Book Programs elements include Emotional/psychological Engagement (E/P), Behavioral Engagement (B), Cognitive Engagement (C).

Qualitative Phase

Interviews

Quantitative data collected in the first phase was analyzed and used to inform the second phase, consisting of individual qualitative interviews with an intentionally selected subset of institutions. This approach afforded the research team the opportunity to further examine the intricacies of individual CBPs, including program structures, outcomes assessment, and operational challenges. The sequential explanatory approach strengthened this study given that phase one informed phase two, which allowed the team to consider key attributes such as institution size, program design, current program status, and outcomes as a way to select participants for interviews (Ivankova et al., 2006). As Subedi (2016) stated, phase two allows for the research team to “refine, extend or explain the general picture” of CBPs (p. 572). The qualitative format provided deeper exploration of student engagement across the model elements (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional/psychological) as well as CBP program assessment.

Survey respondents were asked if they are willing to participate in a follow-up interview as part of the survey questions. The interview protocol included semi-structured questions to facilitate conversation and were conducted via Zoom video conferencing. Each interview lasted no more than 30 minutes and was recorded and transcribed using Zoom features. The interview protocol was piloted with a peer institution and question prompts were updated based on feedback.

Participants

Analysis of documents and websites were conducted to identify CBP stakeholders at four-year institutions in the U.S. to participate in the survey and subsequent interviews. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described document analysis as the review of public and/or private

documents that provide the researcher with an unobtrusive source of data. The researchers reviewed the CBP websites of institutions listed in Randall's (2019) *Beach Books 2018-2019: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* report. Randall (2019) compiled a listing of 732 CBPs in 47 states that provided a robust sample for this study.

The initial survey invitation email was sent to 545 CBP stakeholders identified in the website analysis in November 2020 (Appendix C). An initial invitation was also sent to 3,547 subscribers to the FYE listserv managed by The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Subsequent invitation reminders were sent to the CBP stakeholder and FYE listserv within two weeks of the initial invitation email through early December 2020 (Appendix C). The survey remained open for four weeks, with 218 individuals initiating the survey, 67 drop outs, and the average time to complete being eleven minutes. The data was scrubbed to remove incomplete submissions, leaving a total of 151 submissions (69%).

Sixty-four respondents volunteered to participate in an interview. The research team selected institutions of different sizes and with active and inactive CBPs to provide a diverse sample population. Researchers also selected volunteers to invite for interview who were cited in available common book research (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2018; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018; Nicholas, 2012; Strawser & Hume, 2019) as well as identified by the VCU CBP director (F. Williams, personal communication, August 26, 2020).

As shown in Table 3, a total of 15 institutions scheduled interviews, with 12 active CBPs and three inactive CBPs. The majority (seven) of institutions with active programs were large, public institutions, which are similar to VCU. Three interviewed private institutions represented small institutions with the other two considered medium in size. All of the institutions with

inactive CBPs were considered peer institutions to VCU by the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia (VCU Institutional Research and Decision Support, 2017).

Table 3

Institution Types and Sizes Interviewed

	Type	Size	Location	CBP Status
Participant 1	Public	Large	Rural	Active
Participant 2	Public	Large	Suburban	Active
Participant 3	Public	Large	Suburban	Active
Participant 4	Public	Large	Suburban	Active
Participant 5	Public	Large	Urban	Active
Participant 6	Public	Large	Urban	Active
Participant 7	Public	Large	Urban	Active
Participant 8	Private	Small	Rural	Active
Participant 9	Private	Small	Urban	Active
Participant 10	Private	Small	Suburban	Active
Participant 11	Private	Medium	Suburban	Active
Participant 12	Private	Medium	Suburban	Active
Participant 13	Public	Medium	Rural	Inactive
Participant 14	Public	Medium	Suburban	Inactive
Participant 15	Public	Large	Rural	Inactive

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

In this section, data collection and analysis procedures will be described. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory data collection and analysis design was selected to allow quantitative data collection to inform later qualitative data collection instruments (Ivankova et al., 2006). In this study, quantitative survey results informed later qualitative methods.

Survey

The Common Book Program Survey (Appendix C) was distributed via email to 545 institutions with CBPs identified by document and website analysis, as well as the FYE listserv

managed by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. At the time of distribution, the FYE listserv consisted of 3,547 subscribers. The survey data collected focused on the following areas as they relate to student engagement practices: CBP assessment techniques and outcomes, integration with other HIPs, learning experiences, and information about discontinued CBPs. Survey participants were also provided an opportunity to opt-in to a follow-up interview.

The 27 question survey (Appendix C) was built using skip logic so that respondents were directed to applicable questions based on previous responses. The maximum number of questions a respondent was asked to answer was 24. QuestionPro, an online survey platform licensed to VCU, was used to create and distribute the Common Book Program Survey. QuestionPro is an online survey software that allows for creation, distribution, and analysis of online surveys (QuestionPro, 2020a). Additionally, QuestionPro holds multiple information security certifications, including ISO 27001 and is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, making surveys accessible to people of all abilities (QuestionPro, 2020b).

Interviews

Interviews consisted of seven scripted questions and were facilitated via Zoom video conference (Appendix D). Two additional questions were asked of institutions that had suspended or cancelled their CBP. A minimum of two members of the research team were present for each interview. Roles were assigned to research team members to identify who would lead the questioning and who would take notes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom video conference transcription feature.

Quantitative Data Analysis

According to Subedi's (2016) recommendations for explanatory sequential research design, quantitative data must be analyzed first. Quantitative survey data was analyzed using chi-square tests. The results from the chi-square provided further understanding of the relationships between categorical variables collected in the Common Book Program survey (Appendix C). Consistent with the purpose of the explanatory sequential design, results of the chi-square yielded a "general picture of the research problem" (Subedi, 2016, p. 572). For this study, broad data allowed for a macro view of CBPs in the U.S. while also illuminating key areas of further exploration during the subsequent qualitative phase of the study.

Coding of open-ended responses in the Common Book Program Survey was done using in vivo coding procedures following Tesch's coding procedure as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). When employing in vivo coding, researchers do not develop expected codes in advance, rather create codes based on the survey responses (Benaquisto & Given, 2008). Researchers used this survey data to further refine interview questions to gain an in-depth understanding of how CBPs influence student development emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by Zoom recording and transcription functions. Interview transcriptions were then coded by several members of the research team to identify themes using predetermined codes based upon themes identified in the quantitative survey and literature review. Codes were determined by reviewing the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs framework, HIP framework, the literature review, research questions and survey

questions. Appendix E includes the qualitative handbook used for coding the interview transcripts.

Following each interview, researchers first read through the interview transcript one time before beginning any coding, then began coding in the second review, noting themes that emerged. Once all researchers coded the data individually, a cross-check of codes was conducted to add to the validity of the research findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the process of cross-checking codes allows for verifying intercoder agreement, determining whether another coder would assign the same or similar code to a particular section of text. In this study, cross-checking was implemented by assigning at least one researcher who was not involved in the interviews to also code the interview transcript (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Following the individual coding of each interview, codes were aggregated using the Nvivo coding software. The Nvivo software provided researchers with a thematic analysis and identification of key concepts in the data. Data collected through thematic analysis was analyzed through the student development lens in order to gauge, on a micro level, the ways in which select CBPs foster emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive student engagement.

Limitations

There are two limitations that impact this study and the data collection process. First, the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in March 2020 and continued through data collection had an impact on CBPs across the country. As such, survey response rates were impacted, affecting the overall sample.

Second, the research team used information provided on institutions' websites to identify the CBP and FYE primary contact information for the quantitative survey invitations. In cases where information was outdated, meaning the primary contact had changed or the email address

was incorrect, the survey was not successfully delivered to the correct contact, thereby indirectly removing the institution from the respondent pool.

Ethical Considerations

This study focused on program evaluation and did not require institutional review board (IRB) approval prior to conducting the study. Researchers maintained participant confidentiality with the quantitative survey by not collecting individual identification data unless the participant volunteered to participate in an interview. Further, the minimal risks of participation were shared with prospective participants prior to beginning the survey (see Appendix C).

Researchers also addressed positionality to reduce bias in the data collection and analysis.

Positionality

Positionality is defined by Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) as “the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group” (p. 2). Positionality is an imperative ethical consideration in this study because all of the researchers are higher education professionals, though not directly responsible for CBP or HIPs at their institutions. The researchers are considered insiders compared to the population studied, which influenced the study design and data analysis (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). In order to minimize the influence of positionality in this study, researchers ensured the responses to the surveys were anonymous to reduce bias toward any one institution. In addition, the interviews were conducted with pairs of researchers, and a third researcher who did not observe the interview coded the transcripts to further reduce bias.

Trustworthiness

In order to mitigate researcher bias, multiple research team members shared in the coding and analysis of the data, particularly during the phase two interviews. In addition, triangulation was used to evaluate the mixed-methods data and to link the theoretical and methodological purposes of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Turner et al., 2017). As such, triangulation aided the research team in identifying key themes that emerged across institutions in order to avoid limit bias. Coding and thematic analysis was conducted by a team member who was not present for the interview itself. Further, triangulation was used to identify themes that emerged across institutions in order to avoid limit bias. The research team also assessed findings based on potential bias related to their backgrounds in higher education student affairs. The next chapter will present the study's data analysis and research findings.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the mixed-methods sequential explanatory study examining best practices of common book programs (CBPs) within the U.S. supporting student engagement and retention. The purpose of this study is to identify best practices for the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) CBP to inform strategic planning and future program evaluation efforts, specifically within a high-impact practice (HIP) framework. There are three major research questions that guided data collection:

1. What are the assessment practices of CBPs?
2. What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?
 1. How do the CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?
 2. How do the CBPs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff and the community?
3. In what ways do peer institutions implement HIPs as they relate to the CBP or first-year experience (FYE)?

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was utilized to answer these research questions. The design included an initial quantitative phase consisting of website analysis to identify CBP stakeholders who were then invited to participate in an online survey, followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Institution websites listed in Randall's (2019) *Beach Books 2018-2019: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside*

Class? report were reviewed to identify the names and email addresses of stakeholders to invite to participate in the survey.

The subsequent qualitative phase consisted of interviews to further investigate the research questions by exploring participant experiences in greater depth (Ivankova et al., 2006). Interview participants self-identified as volunteers in the survey. In addition, interview invitations were extended to stakeholders representing institutions cited in available common book research (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2018; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018; Nicholas, 2012; Strawser & Hume, 2019), as well as identified by the VCU CBP Director (F. Williams, personal communication, August 26, 2020). Researchers selected institutions of different sizes and those with inactive CBPs to provide a diverse sample population.

Quantitative Phase

Data Collection

The Common Book Survey (Appendix C) utilized QuestionPro online survey software for data collection. The survey instrument consisted of a maximum of 24 questions designed to collect data to better understand (a) CBP assessment practices, (b) how CBPs engage students, (c) how CBPs foster critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills development, and (d) how peer institutions implement HIPs.

The initial survey invitation and two subsequent reminder emails were sent to 545 CBP stakeholders identified through website analysis and to 3,547 subscribers to the FYE listserv managed by The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition between November and December 2020 (Appendix C). The survey remained open for four weeks, with 218 individuals initiating the survey and 67 dropouts. After scrubbing the data for incomplete submissions, researchers analyzed responses from 151 completed

surveys. Raw survey response data was analyzed utilizing features available in QuestionPro as well as Microsoft Excel. The text analysis feature in QuestionPro was utilized to code open-ended response data. All other data was exported into a Microsoft Excel file for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section will highlight the survey data analysis organized by the guiding research questions to examine the correlation between institutional characteristics and CBPs. The first section will examine assessment practices utilized by CBPs (research question 1), followed by an examination of the practices CBPs utilized to engage students and develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills (research questions 2, 2a, 2b), and peer institution HIP implementation (research question 3). In addition, it should be noted that 42% (n = 63) of responding institutions reported that their CBP was either suspended or discontinued. While quantitative data from these institutions is not reported, this information did impact the qualitative phase of the study and is addressed in a later section of this chapter.

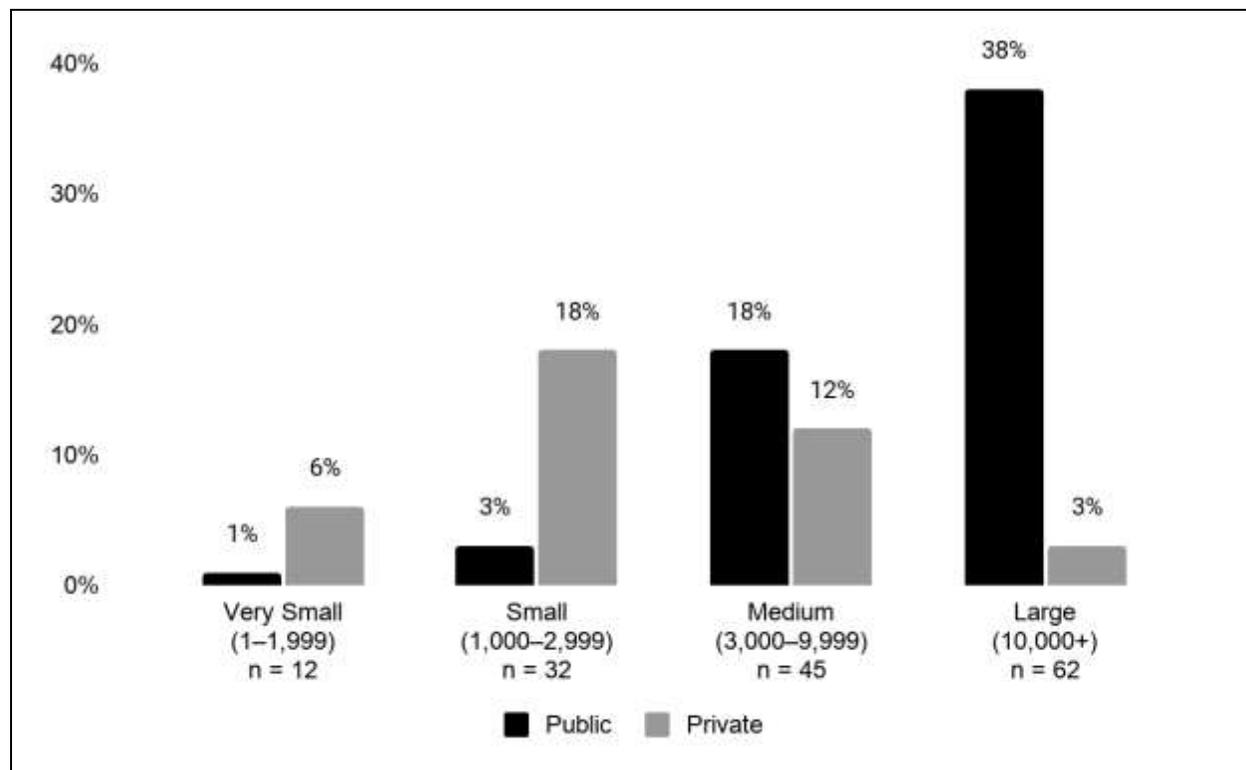
Demographic Information

Survey questions collected institutional demographic information, including: (a) public or private designation, (b) size based on degree-seeking student enrollment (utilizing definitions by NCES), (c) setting (rural, suburban, urban), and (d) whether first-year students are required to live on campus. As shown in Figure 3, respondents represented a diverse sample of institutions based on the size and type of institution. The majority of respondents represented a public institution (60%, n = 91), with the remaining 40% (n = 60) representing private institutions. The largest cohort of respondents represented large, public institutions (38%, n= 57); followed by medium, public (18%, n= 27); and finally, small, private (18%, n = 27). This sample is

consistent with the National Center for Education Statistics (2020) *Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions* report that indicates the majority of four-year private institutions in the U.S. enroll fewer students than public institutions.

Figure 3

Institution Size and Type



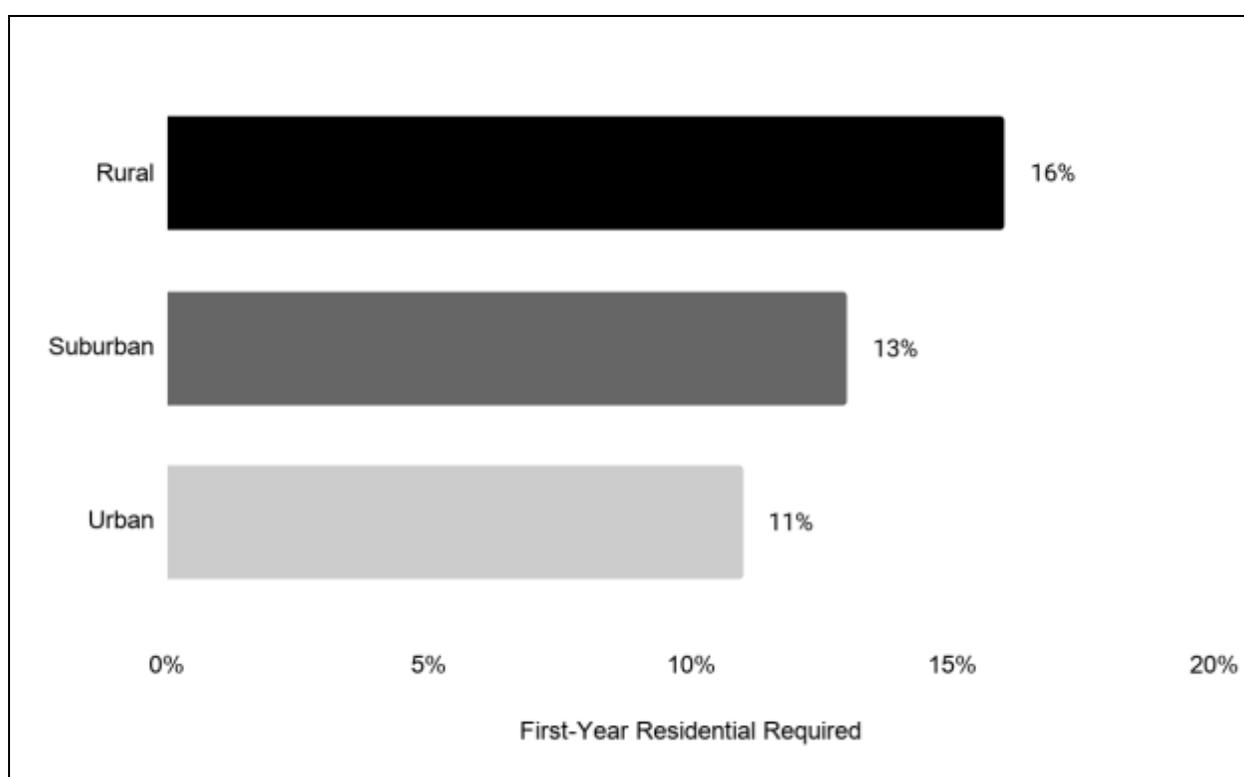
Note. Institution size determined by degree-seeking student enrollment categorized by institution type. A total of 151 submissions were received: Very Small (n = 12), Small (n = 32), Medium (n = 45) and Large (n = 62).

Institutions implement student engagement programs, including CBPs, with the goal of increasing student engagement early in the student’s academic career (Chrysikos et al., 2017). Many CBPs engage students through residential life activities, such as discussion groups organized by residence hall assignment or living-learning communities (Ferguson, 2006). As such, survey participants were asked whether first-year students were required to live on campus

at their institution. The majority (58%, $n = 90$) of respondent institutions reported that they do not require first-year students to live on campus, with a breakout by setting shown in Figure 4 below (see survey question 4, Appendix C). The largest respondent group with a first-year residential requirement was rural institutions (16%), followed by suburban (13%), and urban (11%).

Figure 4

Institution Setting and Residential First-Year Requirement



Note. Institutions requiring first-year students to live on campus by campus setting. A total of 151 submissions were received with 61 institutions requiring first-year students to live on campus: Rural ($n = 24$), Suburban ($n = 20$), and Urban ($n = 17$).

In summary, the survey sample includes a diverse group of respondents representing public and private institutions of differing sizes. Additionally, the institution setting varied, as did the first-

year residential requirement. This demographic information provides context to the reported assessment practices.

Common Book Program Assessment Practices

The first research question in this study aims to identify the best practices in assessing CBP program outcomes utilized at four-year institutions in the U.S. The aim is to investigate the connection between how CBP program outcomes are defined and what assessment methods should be used to effectively evaluate CBPs. Four open-ended survey questions were designed to collect this data, including (a) intended goals, (b) intended learning outcomes, (c) how effectiveness of CBP learning and/or program outcomes are measured, and (d) who conducts the effectiveness assessment (see questions 8-11, Appendix C). Open-ended questions were coded utilizing QuestionPro text analysis features, via in vivo coding procedures as outlined in Chapter Three. Three primary themes emerged, including intended goals, learning outcomes, and effectiveness measures, which will be discussed in following sections.

Intended Goals.

Survey question 8 (Appendix C) asked participants to describe intended goals of their CBP. The research team designed this question to learn more about the desired results of CBPs at respondent institutions. The results are consistent with findings in the literature review (Boff et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2006; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018; Nicholas, 2012), with respondents (n = 92) noting that the intended goals of their institution's CBP is to create a common intellectual experience, provide an introduction to the academy, and explore complex issues. Other, less frequently referenced goals included bridging experiences inside and outside of the classroom, creating opportunities for increased engagement with the community outside of the campus, as well as fostering a sense of belonging and campus engagement.

Common Intellectual Experience.

Common intellectual experience as an intended CBP goal was cited most frequently with 72 instances. Responses that included the terms “common intellectual,” “common academic,” “shared academic,” and/or “shared intellectual” were coded to this theme. Participants provided differing amounts of detail and context in the responses, ranging from straightforward statements to more expanded responses including who is engaged in the common intellectual experience and how the CBP engages those groups. Examples of straightforward goal statements are “To provide a common intellectual experience for incoming students” and “Provide a shared intellectual experience.”

Some respondents shared details as to the campus community members who are engaged in the common intellectual experience. For example, what student groups are involved, “...to create a common intellectual experience for *incoming undergraduate students* [emphasis added]...” and “to provide a common academic experience for *first-year students* [emphasis added] as they enter the college.” Other respondents identified members of the campus community, other than students, who share in the common intellectual experience: “The Common Read is the first shared academic experience where members of the university community, including *faculty, staff, students, alumni, the Board of Visitors* [emphasis added] and you will read and discuss this text” and “Provide a common intellectual experience for *first year students, faculty, staff and the surrounding community* [emphasis added].”

Finally, in addition to the groups engaged in the common intellectual experience, respondents also shared when this engagement occurred. One respondent noted, “To have all incoming students read and then discuss the common book theme *during Welcome Week* [emphasis added]” Another example included, “To offer a common experience to incoming

first-year students both *during the summer and during the fall semester* [emphasis added].” In addition to engaging students and other campus stakeholders in a common intellectual experience during orientation and/or throughout the semester, respondents also shared that the intended goal of their CBP was to provide an introduction to the academy.

Provide an Introduction to the Academy.

The intended CBP goal of providing an introduction to the academy was referenced 48 times in the 92 responses. Responses that included the terms “introduce,” “introduction,” “to the academy,” “academic discourse,” “critical thinking,” “writing,” “intellectual culture,” and/or “critical reflection” were coded to this theme. The detail and context in responses varied, with some respondents providing simple statements and others providing more detail. Examples of less detailed responses are the CBP goals to “Draw students into the intellectual culture of the University” and “Introduce students to collegiate reading and writing.” Other respondents provided more detail as to what student groups are targeted, such as the goal “To introduce our *first year students* [emphasis added] to the academy and help them begin to learn the importance of critical thinking and engagement.”

Respondents also shared strategies used to achieve the intended CBP goals, such as conversations and debates. For example, “Orient students to the academic community by encouraging intellectual dialogue and critical thinking.” Another participant noted, “we try to orient students to our intellectual community by introducing them to the conversations and debates that will be occurring on campus through a common reading.” Providing opportunities for students to engage in dialogue could also contribute to the CBP goal of providing students with the opportunity to explore complex issues.

Explore Complex Issues.

The intended CBP goal of providing students with the opportunity to explore complex issues was mentioned 29 times (see question 8, Appendix C). Responses that included the terms “complex,” “diversity,” “issue,” and/or “problem” were coded to this theme. The intended CBP goal to help students approach complex issues and problems from multiple perspectives was highlighted across responses. For example, one respondent noted that their institution uses “...a common text to show how a complex problem can be examined in different ways using differing perspectives and disciplines.” Another stated the intended goal is to “Illustrate how a complex issue can be explored from a variety of perspectives.”

Other participants explained that the intended goal of their CBP took this one step further, providing students with an opportunity to develop critical reflection skills in addition to examining problems from multiple perspectives. One participant noted that “The[CBP] is a shared, community read, designed to promote discussion and understanding of important issues facing the broader community.” Another respondent stated “The readings and related discussions aim not only to encourage critical reflection about important issues but also to invite consideration of how our individual actions affect these issues.”

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice were also referenced in multiple responses coded to this theme. One respondent noted that the goal of their CBP is “To help students to think about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion early in their college experience.” Another shared the goal “To engage students with social issues.” Others took this concept beyond awareness to include engaging students “To explore the role we play in creating a just society.” By examining complex issues, CBPs also create opportunities to bridge curricular and co-curricular experience.

Bridging Experiences.

The CBP goal of bridging experiences inside and outside of the classroom was referenced 12 times. Responses coded as bridging experiences included the terms “co-curricular,” “curricular,” and/or “extracurricular.” For example, one respondent noted the intended CBP goal to “Develop stronger connections between curricular and co-curricular activities and involvement.” Another respondent explained their CBP goals include the intention “to connect faculty and student affairs personnel by enhancing the classroom experience with co-curricular activities.” Additional details about types of students or experiences was not provided.

Other Themes.

Other themes that emerged in CBP intended goals include creating opportunities for increased engagement with the community outside of the campus (11 references), as well as fostering a sense of belonging and campus engagement (10 references). Responses including the terms “community,” “connection,” and/or “engagement” were coded to the increased community engagement theme. An example of a community engagement-intended CBP goal is to “Promote interaction between [institution] and the community.” Another respondent shared the groups their CBP intends to engage is to “Promote connections among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the wider community.”

Finally, the theme of fostering a sense of belonging and campus engagement was coded for responses including the terms “belonging,” “campus,” “engagement,” and/or “sense.” One respondent noted the CBP goal to “Develop an increased sense of belonging in the [institution] community.” Other respondents shared their CBP goals to “Foster community among our first-year students” and “Encourage community building.”

In summary, the reported CBP intended goals align with those reported in the literature (Boff et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2006; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018; Nicholas, 2012). More frequently reported goals include to create a common intellectual experience, provide an introduction to the academy, and explore complex issues. Bridging experiences inside and outside of the classroom, creating opportunities for increased engagement with the community outside of the campus, as well as fostering a sense of belonging and campus engagement are not as popular among respondent institutions in this study. The next section will review the intended CBP learning outcomes reported by participants.

Learning Outcomes.

Survey question 9 (Appendix C) asked participants to describe intended learning outcomes of their CBP. The term “intended learning outcomes” was not defined in the survey instructions because the research team wanted to decrease bias among survey participants. A total of 91 responses were received for this question.

Learning outcomes were coded based on the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs framework, adapted from the Gunuc and Kuzu (2015) Campus-Class-Technology model (see Chapter 3). This framework centers on the understanding that students who participate in CBPs experience three types of engagement that lead to successful student outcomes: emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Emotional/psychological student engagement encompasses student emotional reactions to those with whom they interact as well as the subject matter to which they are exposed (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Behavioral engagement includes student participation in academic experiences outside of the classroom as well as in-class activities and class attendance (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Cognitive student

engagement refers to student investment in and value given to learning ideas, goal setting, planning, and motivation (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015).

Results are presented in the next section by the coding frequency, cognitive (58), emotional/psychological (39), and behavioral (35). It is important to note that 17 respondents indicated that no stated outcomes currently exist for their CBP, which is consistent with Zilvinskis (2019), who identifies a need for further assessment of both CBPs and HIPs.

Cognitive.

Cognitive engagement was the most popular theme across the intended learning outcomes responses; it was cited in 58 of the 91 responses. Results were coded as cognitive engagement if the response included the terms “academic,” “critical thinking,” “learning,” “reading,” “written,” and/or “writing.” Critical thinking emerged as a common learning outcome within this theme. Several respondents noted their CBP engages students “in a dialogue and critical thinking” and fosters “...critical thinking by offering multiple opportunities to examine and reflect upon the reading throughout the year.” One institution takes this a step further, encouraging students to “apply critical thinking to the ideas and themes presented in the text.”

Some institutions use their CBP to foster cognitive learning outcomes to improve specific academic skills. For example, one institution shared providing opportunities within the CBP for students to “develop and practice the essential academic skills of critical thinking, constructive civil discussion, and written communication.” Another institution explained their oral and written communication learning outcomes:

Students will engage in active discussions throughout the semester that focus on topics within the common read to improve their oral communication skills. Students will also

reflect on the common read through a written response assignment to improve their written communication skills.

Another commonly referenced academic skill included reading comprehension, with a respondent noting the intended learning outcome to “improve reading comprehension” and another “to see that reading is something that defines the academic life.”

In summary, cognitive engagement was the most frequently referenced learning outcome for CBPs. Institutions are utilizing CBPs to improve students’ critical thinking, oral and written communication skills, and reading comprehension levels. Emotional/psychological student engagement was also frequently cited and will be reviewed in the next section.

Emotional/psychological.

The theme of emotional/psychological student engagement was referenced 39 times (n = 91) (see question 9, Appendix C). Terms such as “emotion,” “experience,” “reflect,” “resiliency,” “self-awareness,” and/or “understanding” were coded for this theme. Examples of emotional/psychological learning outcomes include “finding oneself, resiliency and perseverance, or strength” and “allow for self-discovery and self-awareness.” Another example is the CBP that provides students with an “...early academic experience that seeks to provide them confidence in the immediate future.”

Respondents shared the intended learning outcomes to develop students’ ability to relate to others by better understanding themselves. One participant noted the learning outcome “To read and learn something about their lives by learning about someone else's life experiences.” Another described that the learning outcome was “To help student[s] develop ways of looking at their lives.” Yet another respondent shared, within this theme, the CBP was used to “develop understanding and empathy.”

CBPs foster emotional/psychological student engagement by providing opportunities for self-reflection and examination to better understand others. Developing these connections to others can positively influence outcomes such as student retention from the first- to second year (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2012; Tinto, 1993). In addition to emotional/psychological student engagement, CBPs can also provide opportunities to develop behavioral student engagement.

Behavioral.

Behavioral student engagement learning outcomes surfaced 35 times within the 91 responses to this survey question (see question 9, Appendix C). This code was applied if the terms “academic,” “classroom,” “co-curricular,” “curricular,” and/or “extracurricular” were included in the response. The concept of engaging students inside and outside of the classroom emerged, with participants noting the intention of their CBP to “Develop stronger connections between curricular and co-curricular activities and involvement” and another to “...engage students in a dialogue and critical thinking about the book's themes inside and outside of the classroom.”

Other respondents noted the intended learning outcomes of preparing students for the rigor of academic life. For example, a participant noted their institution’s CBP learning outcome is to “...prepare students for the classroom environment, normalizing faculty interaction and setting expectations for academic rigor.” Another stated the intended learning outcome to “Prepare students for the college-level environment.” Finally, other behavioral engagement outcomes include fostering student’s reading habits: “To engage students in co-curricular reading.” Another respondent noted “We hope it encourages students to read for the enjoyment of reading.”

In summary, institutions may be utilizing their CBPs to engage students on the cognitive, emotional/psychological, and behavioral levels, but it is not intentional based on the survey results. Utilizing multiple strategies to engage students has the potential to provide a well-rounded student experience and positively influence the likelihood that the student will retain from year one to year two (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Karp et al., 2008). To determine if CBPs are meeting their desired outcomes for the students and institutions they serve, the next section will review how institutions are measuring CBP effectiveness.

Effectiveness.

Six themes emerged in analyzing the ways participant institutions determine the effectiveness of CBP learning and/or program outcomes (see question 10, Appendix C). These themes include (a) course evaluations, (b) course project/assignment grades, (c) faculty surveys, (d) participation levels/numbers, (e) student surveys, and (f) no formal assessment utilized. Each outcome measure will be reviewed in subsequent sections.

Student Surveys.

The most popular reported effectiveness measure was student surveys, cited 28 times in 89 responses. Data was coded to the student survey theme if the terms “feedback,” “student,” and/or “survey” were included in the response. Respondents noted that surveys are sent after the program has concluded “We send a survey to participants afterward.” An example of the data included in these surveys are “demographic info, reason for attending, amount of book read, and reaction to the event itself.” Additional detail or examples were not provided by respondents.

Participation.

Measuring CBP participation was another popular effectiveness measure reported 26 times (n = 89). Researchers coded a response to this theme if the terms “level,” “number,”

and/or “participation” were included. One response accurately summarizes the responses in this theme: “Primarily through level of participation how many classes assign, how many people - including students, staff, faculty and community take part in [CBP] events.”

No Formal Assessment.

The response “no formal assessment reports” was also a popular response, with 22 references in the 89 answers to this question. Terms used in coding this theme include “do not,” “don’t,” “n/a,” “no,” “none,” “unknown,” and/or “unsure.” One institution noted they do not assess CBP student learning outcomes, and are “only tracking text use and programming involvement.”

Course Grades.

Course project/assignment grades as a measure of CBP effectiveness was referenced 16 times (n = 89). Responses were coded to this theme if the terms “assignment,” “course,” “essay,” “grade,” “paper,” “project,” and/or “quiz” were present. Multiple respondents noted using assignment grades in the first-year seminar courses, such as “assignments about the book in the required-for-all-freshmen Freshman Experience Seminar course” and “Assessed through student work.”

Faculty Surveys.

Faculty surveys were referenced 15 times (n = 89) as a measure of CBP effectiveness. If the terms “faculty,” “feedback,” and/or “survey” were present in the response, it was coded to this theme. Examples did not include great detail, with some responses including phrases like “instructor feedback,” “informal feedback from instructors,” and “Survey faculty for first-year writing courses.”

Course Evaluations.

Course evaluations were also shared as CBP assessment methods, with eight references noted in the 89 responses to this question (see question 10, Appendix C). The terms “course” and “evaluation,” “feedback,” or “survey” were used to code to this theme. Respondents did not provide detail beyond “course evaluations for first-year seminar” or “End-of-semester course evaluations in all sections of University Seminar.”

In summary, CBPs utilize multiple assessment methods to determine program effectiveness. Student surveys and tracking participation were the most commonly cited methods. Additional assessment strategies were tied to courses, including course evaluations as well as course and project/assignment grades. Some programs also assess utilizing faculty surveys. Twenty-five percent (n =22) of respondents also noted not having a formal assessment mechanism. The next section outlines who is responsible for conducting CBP assessment.

Assessment Responsibility.

Respondents were asked to share who is responsible for conducting the assessment of the CBP at their institution (see question 11, Appendix C). A total of 90 responses were received, and 14 respondents indicated “not applicable” due to no formal assessment of the CBP at their institution. At the majority of respondent institutions, FYE program (23 responses) and CBP leaders (20 responses) are responsible for assessing effectiveness. Faculty (13 responses), institutional effectiveness offices (9 responses), and student affairs units (9 responses) are also responsible at some institutions. The majority of respondents (48%, n = 43) report that FYE and CBP leaders are responsible for assessing the programs. Conducting CBP assessment and improvement has the potential for CBP to positively influence student engagement, which will be reviewed in the next section.

Student Engagement

CBPs seek to enhance student engagement, a contributing factor to support first-year to second-year student retention (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Baraclay et al., 2018; Millea et al., 2018). As such, the second research question aimed to examine the practices that CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community. Sub-questions probe deeper into how CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills as well as foster student connections to other university community members. This section reviews how different CBP program models engage students, develop students' critical thinking skills, and foster connections across the campus community.

Program Model.

CBP models differ across institutions and can include any or all of the following: (a) pre-semester activities and orientation, (b) FYE programming, (c) CBP text integration into first-year courses (Ferguson, 2006; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012; Nicholas, 2012). Researchers sought to better understand if the institution size influenced the type of CBP model utilized. In addition, the VCU CBP is interested in learning more about peer institutions as VCU is classified as a large, urban institution.

Table 4 summarizes the reported CBP models by institution size, with 160 responses received because participants could select all that apply (see question 12, Appendix C). The majority of institutions incorporate CBP activities in FYE programming (33%, n = 53), followed by credit-granting classes (32%, n = 51). Limiting CBP activities to welcome week or orientation activities was not cited as frequently, representing 21% (n = 33) of the sample.

Table 4*Common Book Program Model and Institution Size*

	Welcome week or orientation activities only n = 33	Credit-granting courses n = 51	First-year experience programming n = 53	Other n = 23
Very Small (1,000 or fewer)	1%	1%	2%	0%
Small (1,000–2,999)	7%	6%	9%	2%
Medium (3,000–9,999)	8%	10%	9%	4%
Large (10,000 or more)	4%	14%	13%	8%
Total	21%	32%	33%	14%

Note. Large and medium institutions incorporate common book programming in credit-granting courses more frequently than small and very small institutions. Small and very small institutions were more likely to report incorporating their common book programming into the first-year experience.

Other activities were cited by 14% (n = 23) of respondents, with the majority describing activities that spanned the academic year, bringing together the campus and larger community in a variety of events.

Researchers hypothesized that there is a difference in CBP program models implemented by institutions of different sizes. A chi-square test was used to determine if a relationship exists between these categorical variables. The chi-square test provided a method to test the null hypothesis that there is no association between the variables (Yale University, n.d.). As shown in Table 5, the p value of 0.326 is not below the accepted cutoff value of 0.05; therefore, the researchers fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in CBP models based on

institution size. Thus, the research team concludes that program model and institution size have no significant correlation.

Table 5

Chi-square test: Institution size and common book program model

Chi-square	10.31
p value	0.326
Degrees of freedom	9
Critical value for (p = .01 [1%])	21.666

Critical Thinking.

Survey question 15 (Appendix C) was designed to gauge critical thinking skill development by asking respondents to describe how students are applying the knowledge gained through participation in the CBP. A total of 86 responses were received, with the largest number of respondents (n = 27) reporting students are primarily applying the knowledge gained through the CBP participation in other curricular areas. For example, one participant noted that “..students, to varying degrees, connect the content of this course [FYS] to their courses.” Another participant shared, “Some faculty incorporate the common book into their major or gen ed courses, or even their senior seminar.”

Many respondents (19 references, n = 86) indicated that they do not know how students are applying the knowledge gained participation in the CBP. Examples include, “We really have no idea” or “I don’t know.” Another noted, “How students apply or use this knowledge beyond the first-year writing course, I don't know.” This highlights the need for CBP outcomes and

effectiveness assessment to better understand how students utilize what they have learned in the program.

Eighteen respondents (n = 86) noted that students are applying knowledge gained in CBP in FYS courses. Class discussions were mentioned by participants as an example of students applying this knowledge. For example, “They [students] discuss the events and common reader book weekly in First Year Seminar discussions.” Another noted the knowledge is “Applied in small group discussions and in first year seminar classes through the first semester.”

Six respondents (n = 86) noted that students apply knowledge gained in the CBP to service-learning opportunities. One participant noted that at their institution, “The book is always tied to a day of learning called Symposium Day, where sessions focus on the book, including sometimes service-learning activities.” Respondents provided little detail beyond “service learning project.” However, one participant shared that their service learning projects engaged “...off- and on-campus organizations, charities, and groups.” Another noted that their projects are centered around the content of the text, sharing that students “also participate in service activities based on the social issues addressed in the book.”

Students' application of CBP learning within learning community activities were referenced six times by respondents. Responses included some form of discussions as the primary modality, for example, “discussions and dialogues with other students within their classes or learning communities.” Unfortunately, respondents did not provide additional details.

FYE programming was referenced three times as an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned in the CBP. Again, respondents provided little detail, for example noting, “Application to Common Experience events” and “...in several First Year Experience sections.”

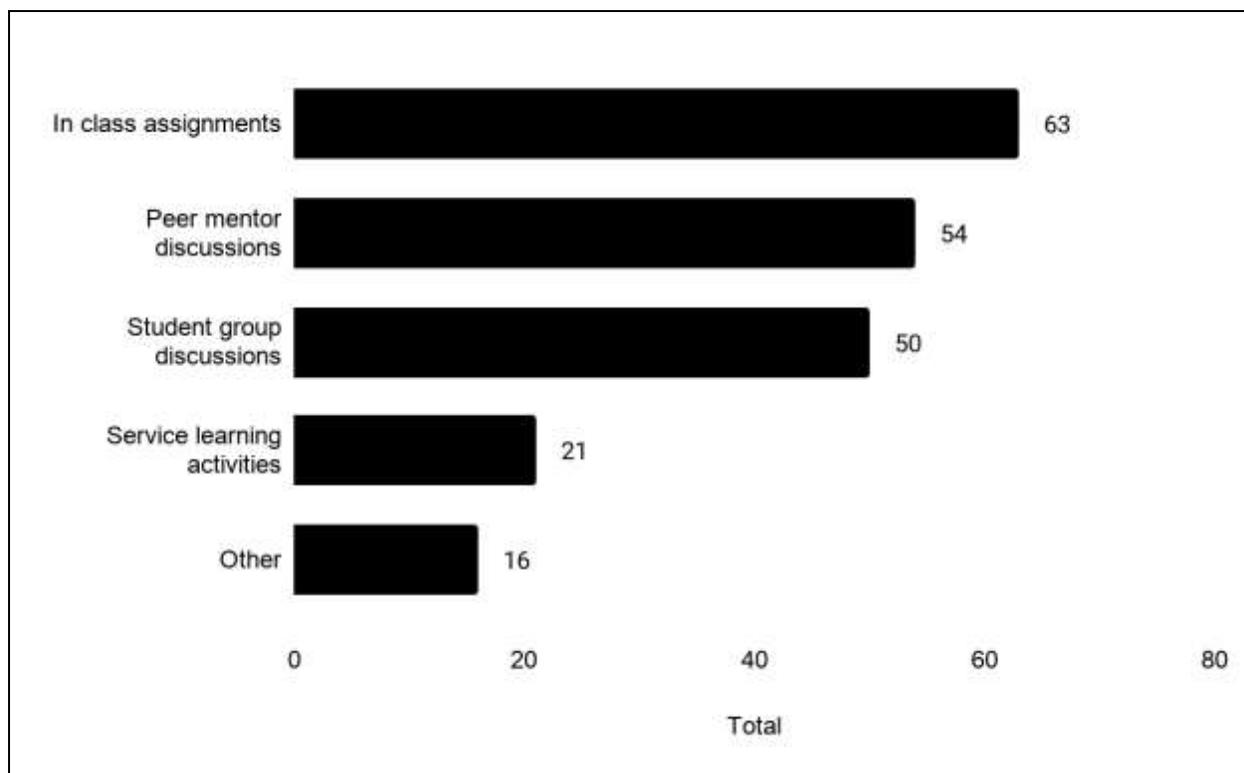
In summary, CBP programs foster critical thinking skill development through incorporating CBP into the curriculum, through FYS and other courses. Many respondents did not know how students at their institution are applying the knowledge gained through participation in the CBP, reinforcing the need for CBP program assessment efforts. The next section will change focus, reviewing how CBPs report fostering students' sense of connectedness.

Fostering Connections.

A feeling of connectedness to peers, faculty, and the institution positively contributes to student retention from the first to second year (Burch et al., 2015; Caruth, 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Common book programs are uniquely positioned to foster connections between students and their peers, faculty/staff, and the community outside of campus. As such, survey respondents were asked to identify student engagement activities utilized by their institution's CBP program (see questions 16, 17, 19, and 20; Appendix C).

Peer Engagement.

As shown in Figure 5, in-class assignments were the most frequently reported ($n = 63$) strategy utilized to engage students with their peers (see question 16, Appendix C). Fifty-four respondents noted peer mentor-led discussions led by residence assistants or peer student advisors as a peer-engagement strategy utilized at their institution. Student group discussions, such as those led within student organizations and service-learning activities, were also popular, with 50 respondents reporting use of this method. Service-learning activities (21 references) and other activities (16 references) were less popular means that CBPs utilized to engage students with their peers.

Figure 5*Peer Engagement Activities*

Note. In class assignments are the most frequently reported student peer engagement activity utilized by common book programs, followed by peer mentor discussions and student group discussions.

Activities noted in the “other” category included CBP co-curricular activities, such as participating in “...events related to the [CBP] program” or “Events related directly to the text.” “Faculty or administrative-led discussions” and “through student affairs programming” were also cited in the “other” category, but additional detail was not provided.

Researchers hypothesized that differences in CBP peer (student-to-student) engagement methods would be found based on institution size. As shown in Table 6, the methods utilized to engage students with peers varied based on the size of the institution. Respondents were able to select all that apply, with most institutions utilizing multiple engagement strategies.

Table 6*Institution size and CBP peer engagement activities*

	In class assignments	Service-learning activities	Peer mentor discussions	Student group discussions	Other	Total
Very Small (1,000 or fewer)	1	1	3	1	1	7
Small (1,000-2,999)	14	5	12	9	3	43
Medium (3,000-9,999)	16	7	17	13	6	59
Large (10,000 or more)	32	8	22	27	6	95
Total	63	21	54	50	16	204

Note. Multiple engagement strategies are utilized by institutions to engage students with the CBP.

The most commonly cited peer engagement activity was in-class assignments (n = 63), followed by peer mentor discussions (n = 54). Student group discussions (n = 50) were also a common engagement strategy, followed by service-learning activities (n = 21).

A chi-square test was utilized to determine whether to accept the hypothesis that differences exist in the types of peer engagement activities utilized by CBPs based on institution size. As shown in Table 7, the p value of 0.941 is greater than the cutoff of 0.05.

Table 7*Chi-square test: Institution size and common book program peer engagement methods*

Chi-square	5.45
p value	0.941
Degrees of freedom	12
Critical value for (p = .01 [1%])	26.217

Researchers fail to reject the null hypothesis: There is no difference in CBP peer engagement methods based on institution size. As such, this statistical test supports the fact that institutions, regardless of size, may benefit from any number of student engagement initiatives.

In summary, CBPs utilize different strategies to engage students, develop critical thinking skills, and foster connections on campus. Based on this sample, there are no differences based on institution size. The next section will review how CBP and FYE programs implement HIPs.

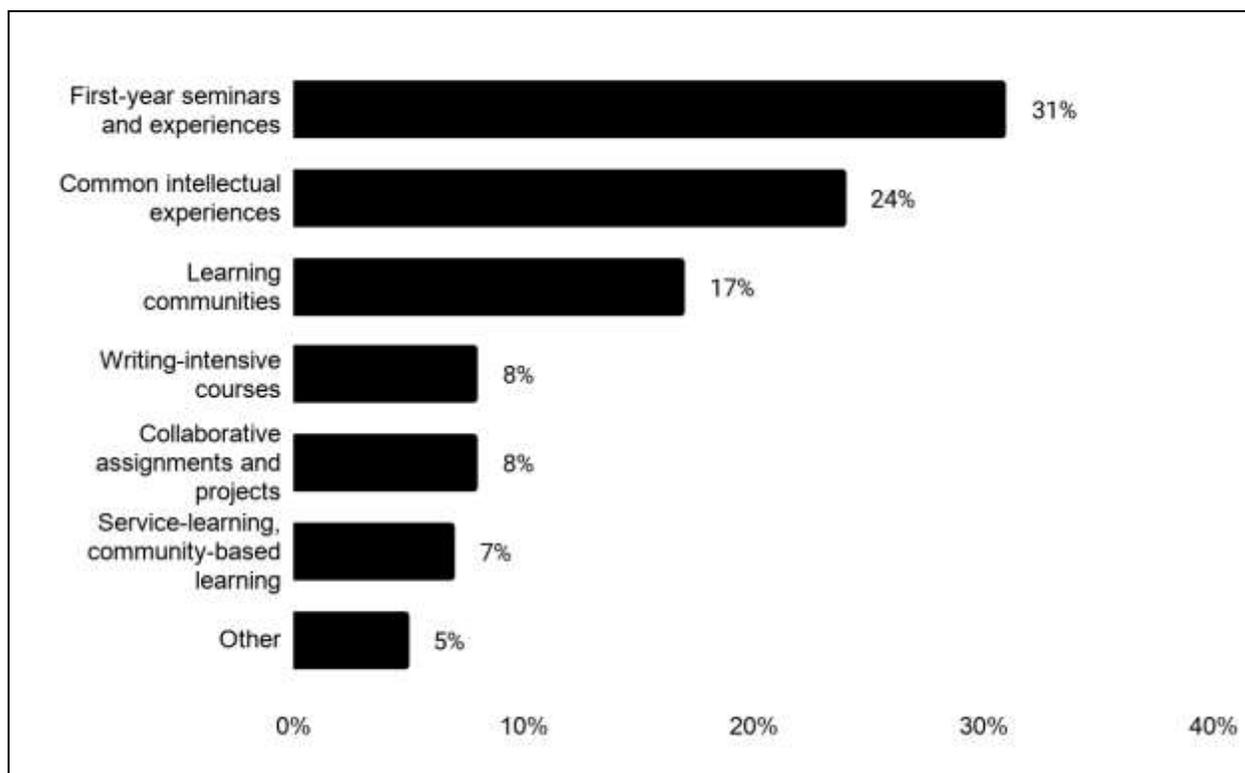
High-Impact Practice Implementation

The final research question in this study sought to understand the ways that VCU's peer institutions implement HIPs as related to CBP and FYE programs. HIPs that focus on creating shared experiences lead to increased student engagement and retention (Kuh et al., 2017; Millea et al., 2018; Woolfork-Barnes, 2017). The Common Book Survey asked participants to report which HIPs are incorporated into their institution's CBP (see question 14, Appendix C). Participants were presented with the six HIPs most relevant to CBPs with definitions for each. The six HIPs most relevant to CBPs are: (a) first-year seminars and experiences, (b) common intellectual experiences, (c) learning communities, (d) writing-intensive courses, (e) collaborative assignments and projects, (f) service-learning, community-based learning (Kuh,

2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018). Figure 6 summarizes the 219 responses received (respondents could select all that apply).

Figure 6

High-impact practices utilized by CBPs



Note: A total of 219 responses were received, participants could select all that apply.

First-year seminars and experiences are the most popular HIPs incorporated into CBPs, with 31% of responses ($n = 68$) reported in this category. Common intellectual experiences were cited in 24% of responses ($n = 53$), followed by learning communities (17%; $n = 37$). Writing-intensive courses (8%, $n = 18$), collaborative assignments (8%; $n = 18$), and service-learning (7%; $n = 15$) were less popular HIPs implemented as part of CBPs.

Respondents who reported in the “other” category (5%; $n = 11$) cited on-campus events associated with the CBP as a HIP utilized by their institution. Two respondents noted that the

HIPs implemented are dependent upon faculty: “Not all faculty use the book in class. Not all use it in the same way” and “Depending on the book, and on who adopts it for class use, the kinds of curricular experiences vary.”

Because VCU is a large institution, it was important for the research team to examine the types of HIPs implemented by different size institutions. Table 8 summarizes the HIPs utilized by different sized institutions based on degree-seeking student enrollment.

Table 8

High-Impact Practice Implementation by Institution Size

	Very Small (1,000 or fewer)	Small (1,000– 2,999)	Medium (3,000– 9,999)	Large (10,000 or more)
	n = 12	n = 32	n = 45	n = 62
First-year seminars and experiences	1%	8%	10%	12%
Common intellectual experiences	1%	7%	8%	8%
Learning communities	0%	3%	4%	9%
Writing-intensive courses	0%	2%	2%	4%
Collaborative assignments and projects	1%	2%	1%	4%
Service-learning, community-based learning	0%	1%	2%	4%
Other	0%	0%	1%	3%
Total	5%	23%	28%	44%

Note. Institutions of all sizes utilize different HIPs in their CBP and FYE programs.

Large institutions report using first-year seminars and experiences most frequently (12%), followed by learning communities (9%) and common intellectual experiences (8%). Medium and small institutions are similar in also reporting use of first-year seminars and

experiences, followed by common intellectual experiences and learning communities. Writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments, and service-learning were not popular regardless of institution size.

Researchers hypothesized that differences in HIP implementation would be found based on institution size. A chi-square test utilized to analyze this data, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Chi-square test: Institution size and high-impact practice implementation

Chi-square	10.93
p value	0.897
Degrees of freedom	18
Critical value for (p = .01 [1%])	34.805

The p value of 0.897 is greater than the cut off value of 0.05. Therefore, researchers reject the hypothesis and fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference in HIP implementation based on institution size. This quantitative data suggests that HIPs may be impactful regardless of an institution's size, creating an opportunity for a broader focus on HIPs across institutions in the subsequent qualitative phase of this study.

Qualitative Findings and Analysis

This section will outline how the survey data analysis and results informed interview protocol development. Per the mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design, quantitative data collection and analysis informs qualitative data collection (Ivankova et al., 2006). In this study, quantitative survey results informed the refinement of the interview protocol and questions (see appendix D).

The survey provided participants the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview (see question 25, Appendix C). Sixty-four institutions were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Based on survey results, the research team selected 20 institutions that were contacted for an interview, of which a total of 15 interviews were conducted, with 12 having active programs and three inactive programs.

Based on the survey data analysis, researchers developed interview questions related to structure and initiatives incorporated into CBPs (see questions 1, 4, 6 and 7, Appendix D). Questions were also developed to further explore CBP outcomes and the assessment processes utilized to measure CBP program effectiveness (see questions 2 and 3, Appendix D). Based on limited survey data related to student engagement activities, interview questions were created to identify what type of engagement practices are used in connection with CBPs (see question 5, Appendix D). Further, a subset of questions were developed for inactive programs to learn more about their decision to either suspend or discontinue their CBP (see questions 8, 9, and 10, Appendix D). The following sections will share qualitative findings from the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Fifteen institutions were selected for an interview across institution types (private or public), size, and CBP active or inactive status in order to find a broad sample. Zoom video conference software was utilized and at least two research team members were present for each interview. Following each interview, researchers utilized Zoom features to transcribe the session and coded the data individually, followed by a cross-check of codes and aggregation using Nvivo coding software (See Chapter 3). Data collected through thematic analysis was analyzed through the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs in order to gauge, on a micro level, the ways

in which select CBPs foster emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive student engagement. Coding resulted in the emergence of three main themes: student engagement, HIPs, and assessment and outcomes. In this section, each theme will be examined in the context of the study's research questions.

Student Engagement

The theoretical framework and model for this study centers on the understanding that students who participate in CBPs experience three types of engagement through academic and co-curricular programs that lead to successful student outcomes: emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (see Figure 1). In total, participants were asked three questions about how their CBP engages students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively (see question 5, Appendix D). While the interviews revealed some evidence that programs engage students within these categories, there were several stronger and more salient themes related to the theoretical framework that emerged. The three most notable themes that emerged through the coding process were co-curricular engagement, academic engagement, and engagement that occurred through peer-to-peer and student-to-institution connections. In total, “student engagement” was referenced 165 times throughout all 15 interviews.

Co-Curricular Engagement.

Co-curricular engagement, which is defined in this study as engagement related to CBPs that occurs outside of the classroom, was coded by researchers 61 times. In total, 11 participants shared that their program incorporates co-curricular activities into their CBP offerings that engage student learning inside of the classroom with opportunities outside of the classroom. For instance, Participant 1 from a large, public institution stated that their CBP runs “about 20 events in a semester” that are related to their chosen text. Similarly, Participant 7, also from a large,

public institution, shared that a goal of their program is to offer curricular and co-curricular experiences that “promote education initiatives and learning outcomes and bridge learning experiences in and outside of the classroom.”

Similar examples of bridging in-class and out-of-class learning experiences through CBP programming were provided by other interview participants, including Participant 3 who shared that they often choose a text that can be used in the setting of “residence hall groups, fraternities, sororities, etc.” Additional co-curricular engagement opportunities that were shared included Participant 5, whose CBP offers “optional book clubs” for students to informally discuss the common book text outside of the classroom setting.

Many additional examples of co-curricular engagement opportunities were offered by participants. These examples included discussion groups, discussion panels, and/or presentations by the author of the chosen text. For example, Participant 14 from a medium sized, public institution offered that even though their CBP is currently inactive, a key co-curricular feature of their CBP was having their orientation leaders help lead “...conversations around the theme...” of their CBP text for that year during new student orientation sessions. Furthermore, Participant 11 described an effective co-curricular activity in which their CBP runs a “Friday lunchtime lecture and discussion series” about the book they are reading. Similar examples of out-of-class CBP engagement opportunities were also provided by Participant 12, who shared that their institution specifically designed co-curricular activities into their CBP that are “...coming out of student affairs and coming out of the student success center...” for the purpose of helping students “...to unpack some of the other themes...” that arise in their selected common book text.

Bringing the author of the common book text to campus to engage students was another common practice that was revealed through the interviews and subsequent coding. For example, seven participants (1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12) highlighted that one of the most popular events related to their CBP was a keynote address by the author of their chosen text. As Participant 2 shared, they “typically have the author come to visit” followed by discussion inside and outside of the classroom. Participant 10 also offered that their CBP provides opportunities for their students to “engage the author” of their CBP text. While co-curricular student engagement emerged as a dominant theme in the interviews, civic engagement emerged as a common sub-theme of co-curricular engagement.

Civic Engagement.

Civic engagement emerged as a sub theme within several interviews. Participant 12 stated that “[their common book] program was incorporated into the center for civic engagement at their institution.” Specifically, their common book text selection is tied to students participating in civic engagement activities throughout their time at the university and that their CBP partners with community organizations. Participant 8 shared that their freshman service program is connected to the CBP and that the college has a “commitment to service...” Participant 11 also offered that their program ensures that each selected book will engage students in a way that will spark “...some conversations about identity...identity development, and community” in order to challenge students to think about their “social and... personal responsibility in a globalized world.” Tying back to the co-curricular aspect of their program, Participant 8 also offered that “...additional programming coming out of student affairs and coming out of the student success center helps to unpack...” some of the themes associated with their CBP text. While many interview participants highlighted co-curricular student engagement

opportunities, including civic engagement, academic engagement also emerged as a dominant theme through the coding of interviews.

Academic Engagement.

Academic engagement was defined by researchers as engagement occurring within the classroom setting. In total, academic engagement was referenced 117 times during the interviews. Like co-curricular student engagement, existing research and literature supports the frequent utilization of academic engagement in CBPs as a means to achieve successful student outcomes (Boff et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2014; Nicholas, 2012; Kennedy & Boyd, 2018). Interview participants shared how their CBPs are deeply tied to the academic experience at their institutions. Examples of academic engagement referenced by participants included embedding CBP within FYE courses as electives, tying common book themes to academic work and projects in the classroom, and connecting common book themes to course work in a variety of other academic departments. For example, Participant 11 offered that their “first year foundations courses are required to use it in some capacity in their classes,” indicating a strong academic integration.

Some participants described how that their programmatic goals are premised on making connections between the themes of the CBP book selection and the academic experience of the institution. For example, Participant 7 offered that one of the goals of their program is to “promote educational initiatives and learning outcomes and bridge learning experiences in and outside of the classroom.” More fundamentally, Participant 9 stated that their program is tied to the academics of the institution by ensuring that “showing up to class is a part of the grade” earned by the student participating in the program. Similarly, Participant 6 shared that their chosen method for academic engagement includes ensuring that the chosen common book text

“becomes a course text in the fall semester for about 25 to 35 different classes that are all first-year students.” Participant 8 also noted that their program promotes academic engagement by making a concerted effort to make sure that “the book connects to the new learning outcomes” of their freshman seminar course. Most interview participants were able to offer evidence of a strong relationship between their CBP and the academic goals of the institution and the academic expectations for their students.

Student and Institutional Relationships.

In addition to academic engagement, student and institutional relationships was a sub theme that emerged within the theme of student engagement. Student and institutional relationships were mentioned a total of 7 times by interview participants. Specifically, student and institutional relationships were mentioned by participants as one of the benefits of CBPs. For example, Participant 2 stated that their program allowed students to develop “more close relationships with their faculty” Similarly, Participant 12 offered that participation in their CBP “helps connect students to faculty...students can get to know faculty and staff they wouldn’t have known otherwise.” Further, Participant 12 also stated that their CBP “begin the sparks of a relationship” between students and the faculty and the staff of their institution.

Community Engagement.

Community engagement was also found to be a sub-theme of student engagement that was mentioned several times by interview participants. For example, Participant 7 shared that “the program engages the campus community and beyond.” Similarly, Participant 11 shared “the first-year common reading program is a way to build community with our first-year students,” which also helps to engage students within the context of the campus. Overall, participants shared the importance of ensuring that their CBP provided students with the opportunity to

connect with other students, faculty, and staff. Even programs that are no longer active stated that tying the CBP to building relationships between the faculty, staff, and students. For example, Participant 13, whose program is no longer active, shared that their program incorporated “faculty or staff and a peer mentor...” as a way to build connections.

Peer relationships.

Peer relationships were another focus of many CBPs. Several of the institutions discussed placing students into discussion groups during the program and even throughout the first semester. According to Participant 3, “[these groups] start community [and] intellectually challenging conversations.” These groups also create a sense of belonging and are a good way of helping students build community. Participant 7 also offered that their program is intentionally designed to “promote connections amongst students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the wider community.” This is supported by Young (2020) who found first-year experience programs provide a connective thread to other programs like orienting students to campus resources, building a sense of belonging, and providing a curricular anchor for additional high-impact practices. While many participants offered numerous examples of the ways in which their program engages students, it was also clear that many programs were utilizing HIPs to achieve successful student outcomes through their CBPs.

High-Impact Practices

Interview participants were not asked specific questions about how they implement HIPs as they relate to the CBP or FYE. However, they were asked multiple questions related to student success, outcomes, and engagement strategies within the proposed the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs framework that resulted in themes emerging that relate to HIPs (see questions 2, 3 and 5, Appendix D). The Student Engagement Through CBPs framework

theorizes that engagement occurs through curricular and co-curricular experiences, and how emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, with the use of HIPs, lead to positive student success outcomes. Findings support implementing HIPs as an engagement strategy (AAC&U, 2007) and a solution to advance the academic growth and persistence of undergraduate students (Kuh et al., 2017), leading to better student outcomes.

Kuh and colleagues (2008, 2017) identified eleven high-impact practices in his research, including undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, e-portfolios, internships, capstone courses and projects, first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignment and projects, and service-learning, community-based learning. White (2018) reported that six of the eleven HIPs are most relevant to CBPs: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, and service-learning/community-based learning.

Results from this study suggest that diversity and global learning, first-year seminars and first year experience, common intellectual experience, and service-learning and community-based learning are the four of the eleven HIPs that were most relevant, with three of the four of those falling within the category of most relevant to CBPs as defined by White (2018). The following sections will review the four HIPs identified by participants interviewed in this study: diversity and global learning, first-year seminars and experience, service learning, community-based learning, and the common intellectual experience.

Diversity and Global Learning.

Diversity and global learning was identified 33 times within the interview data as a specific HIP employed by CBPs within FYS and FYE. Eleven of the fifteen interview

participants indicated using HIPs, seven of those eleven in the sample leveraged diversity and global learning as a HIP. This HIP was delivered differently across institutions. Participant 7 shared that all campus police and dispatchers joined in the CBP program, adding that “police officers that are well informed [in] understanding people’s different viewpoints that also makes for a better experience for the students on our campus when they have interactions.” Participant 11 explained, “We’re trying to get the students to recognize the behaviors, recognize how their experiences in their background shape those behaviors and then work towards some kind of change.” This same participant shared that their goal was to get students “to think about things from divergent perspectives, some of the more marginalized voices. I think they need to be heard. You have to provide space for the other side.” Similarly, Participant 6 stressed that the CBP book selected by their institution “needs to have themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and it needs to be something that will generate ideas and kind of poke the curiosity of the students.”

Themes of diversity and global learning were frequent, with Participant 4 sharing that “the mission of the book project is to improve on-campus climate and community relations to foster diversity and promote equity inclusiveness.” In addition, Participant 1 shared, “One of the efforts [around our CBP is] that we try to engage students in a wider experience of diverse perspectives.” There was a direct acknowledgement of commitment to diversity and global learning from an infrastructure standpoint from Participant 12, who shared that their CBP has been moved from academic affairs, “and now we’re part of a new division on community and equity, so we report up through a position that’s on the cabinet for community and equity.” Participant 8 also spoke to this concept, stating, “technically, we have two first year

seminars, one that's learning and community and then the other one credit course that's on contemporary diversity".

Participants also reported that they used the CBP not only in the first year but across the full undergraduate curriculum in an attempt to engage the entire student body. Participant 12 stated that they were "particularly looking for books that have a social justice theme to them that would inspire conversation that can touch across academic fields and discipline studies." In addition, the same participant indicated that "we're looking for students to understand the ways that privilege difference and power work in their own lives." Barclay et al. (2018) and Owolabi (2018) highlight the importance of institutional efforts to incorporate intellectual and social growth into academic learning opportunities, fostering resilience and persistence (Barclay et al., 2018; Owolabi, 2018).

The challenge in providing these opportunities for diversity and global learning was acknowledged by Participant 11:

When you think about the kinds of people and the kinds of ideals that are held by the people that we're trying to develop this unity with, that can be quite a challenge and there needs to be some space to acknowledge that.

By taking on this challenge, universities foster a more well-rounded experience that can positively influence student retention from year one to year two (Chrysikos et al., 2017; Karp et al., 2008).

First-Year Seminars and First-Year Experience.

FYS and FYE were coded 26 and 23 times, respectively. Jobe et al. (2016) and Muller (2017) indicate the positive impact of collaborative institutional efforts on student engagement and the student experience. Specifically, HIPs that focus on providing shared experiences that

foster first-year student integration lead to increased engagement and retention (Kuh et al., 2017; Millea et al., 2018; Woolfork-Barnes, 2017). Overall, participants' FYS and FYE varied greatly.

Ten participants indicated that they had either a FYS or FYE program. The structure and format of how FYS or FYE were implemented on campus varied greatly by institution, indicating that a CBP program model is intentionally campus specific. This is supported by the work of Jobe and colleagues (2016) that indicates that success in FYS and FYE stems from providing experiences that are student centered and institution specific. Participant 7 acknowledged that the institution has “a first-year seminar on campus, and they typically will engage, how they engage changes every year, how much they use the book changes every year.” This response illuminates’ inconsistencies in their FYS course. The same participant indicated the importance of the course and how it should “tap into and promote intellectual resources of campus” and how “learning inside and outside the classroom is a big thing for us.”

A peer-focused model is employed by Participant 13 in order to address limitations of previously housing the CBP within the FYS courses. According to Participant 13,

They sort of ended up splitting that freshman seminar course across the curriculum and a bunch of different places that there just wasn't an easy place to put the common book. We tried for years without the freshman seminar and it just didn't really, just didn't really take off so we have a freshman coaching program now.

The revised focus for Participant 13 is around “intellectually challenging conversations,” providing students an

avenue to talk about things that like you can see your forming and then you move away for the first time and you have these new experiences but you don't have any way to talk

about it and our students seem to really latch on to that and in a really positive way. And that alone, I think is a really great way for us to do it.

Sometimes the goals of FYS and FYE are as simple as Participant 5 expresses: “I wanted a common experience; I was anticipating some difficulties with our incoming freshman in terms of acclimating, transitioning to campus.” Regardless of structure, all of the FYS and FYE were focused on building student engagement through the shared intellectual experience of a CBP.

Common Intellectual Experience.

Common intellectual experience surfaced as a theme in participant responses 19 times in interviews and varied greatly among the institutions. Millea and colleagues (2018) indicate a need to constantly evaluate institution-specific strategies to increase student retention. Participant 15 speaks to ending their CBP and shifting their focus to “support and challenge our units to have a signature learning experience that all students within that discipline have.” Similarly, Participant 7 shared that “we have four pillars of it [the common intellectual experience] with things like you know intellectual curiosity, empathy, and those kinds of things so it connects directly to that experience goal for our campus.”

Two participants shared examples of particular student subgroups participating in a shared common intellectual experience. Participant 7 described their nursing student population: “So often they will have all these nursing students [who] have to get the book, have a discussion about how it’s going to inform their practice and how they’re going to go forward, you know, being nurses.” In accordance with research, this model for nursing students supports a common intellectual experience, as well as a learning community within which the students share common learning interests and where learning is focused on participating in co-curricular

activities together and collaborating on academic pursuits (Gore & Metz, 2017; Muller et al., 2017).

In considering common intellectual experiences, Participant 5 addressed how they were able to leverage widespread involvement:

We had pretty decent engagement during the fall semester. I think there were close to thirty students that opted to enroll in the book club and who knew, who read the book, alongside the freshman. I think having the involvement of more than just their peers from the incoming class helped.

To further support this concept, Participant 4 discussed ways to “bring an opportunity for dialogue, community-building, and collective learning to our campus and community.” The mission of Participant 4’s CBP specifically references engaging the full campus. They state, “The mission of the book project is to improve on campus climate and community relations to foster diversity and promote equity inclusiveness.” Findings support Kuh et al. (2017): Institutions that use common intellectual experiences have been proven to enhance student learning and success.

Service Learning/Community Learning.

Service learning/community learning, referring to learning that occurs outside the classroom within the community that encourages a student to examine and pursue resolutions to real life issues (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017) was referenced 11 times in interview data. White (2018) identified this HIP as one out of the six most commonly associated with CBPs. Participant 7 said, “We partner often depending on the book for most books; there’s typically a service aspect, and so they’ll use the book as an anchor.” The same participant also shared that part of the intention with CBP text selection was,

to then inspire students to go out and do service because often we will pick books that are contentious like we don't stray away from books that have some debate in them and make other programs feel a little uneasy.

In exemplifying the best practice of connecting more than one HIP, Participant 5 said, "We often do service projects connected to [the CBP]." Participant 8 was most clear in communicating how they addressed social concerns through service learning by stating, "So we want them right away to understand what the commitment to service at ... [university name] looks like as a way to get them connected with that service piece." By providing learning through service opportunities and integrated hands-on learning, students are able to participate in the HIP of a shared intellectual experience focused beyond the borders of the campus community, helping to prepare them for challenges both in and outside of the classroom, support engagement, and help connect knowledge with action by addressing complex problems (AAC&U, 2007).

HIP Implementation.

In the qualitative phase of the research, eleven out of 15 participants reported using at least one HIP, and each of the eleven high-impact practices were reported as being used at least once. The average number of HIPs employed by participants from public institutions was three, with a range from one to six. The average number of HIPs employed by participants from private institutions was two, with no variation in range. Existing research reports that students who participate in multiple HIPs experience a positive cumulative effect of their perception of learning and achieve academic and personal benefits (Finley & McNair, 2013; Johnson & Stage, 2018). Information gleaned from the qualitative methods provided depth in understanding of

where and how HIPs are leveraged within the context of a CBP, leading to student experience, program design, and program assessment and outcomes.

Assessment and Outcomes.

Interview participants were asked two questions related to CBP assessment and outcome practices (see questions 2 and 3, Appendix D), with the themes of assessment and outcomes emerging throughout the responses. Qualitative findings support quantitative findings, indicating that institutions do not have defined assessment practices directly related to CBP outcomes. Programs described assessment practices to be challenging as a result of the CBP selected text changing each year. Participant 5 explained that their assessment practice is “not formal at this point as it related to student success,” and Participant 11 shared that “we’ve not quite formalized it in terms of assessment.”

While institutions interviewed shared the lack of assessment practices related to the CBP, eight out of 15 participants identified assessment as something they will need to improve. Participant 7 shared, “Assessment is a weakness of our program.” These findings support Shavers and Mitchell (2019) who found assessment practices have not been used formally in relation to HIPs.

Three participants shared that their assessment method included a review of course evaluations to determine how the common book text was used within the course. Participant 8, whose institution uses the common book in a course shared, “Assessment of the book right now is very much tied to the assessment of the course.” Overall, the assessment practices at the 15 institutions interviewed were identified as lacking and in need of improvement to better assess CBP outcomes, aligning with the literature review that found institutions need to ensure they are assessing the degree to which outcomes and goals are achieved (Zilvinskis, 2019).

Of the participants interviewed, 13 of the 15 institutions had established outcomes for HIPs and FYE, but only four had specific outcomes related to their actual CBP. In answering the interview question related to outcomes (see question 3, Appendix D), participants named specific goals related to their CBPs, which included learning outcomes, student engagement, the promotion of students building relationships, generating discussions and cultural awareness. Participant 3 stated,

It's important our book meet our student learning outcomes but also be a good fit; we're not picking a book to make us look good. We are a land grant university and we [have] open enrollment and we recognize we have a wide range of students.

Participant 11 shared, "So part of our mission statement is about building global citizens and having challenging conversations and talking across multiple perspectives." Participant 12 stated,

[The Civic Engagement] center's learning outcomes, so we're looking for students to understand the ways that privilege difference and power work in their own lives... making sure we're bringing in [a] community voice that they're hearing other people's stories that they're connecting the theme of the book.

In addition, Participant 2 shared, "One of the outcomes that we try to get is to help people build connections and to have some common experience." Participants 2, 3, 11 and 12 have specific outcomes related directly to CBP programs; however, the majority of participants (n = 11) shared their CBP outcomes were not clearly defined but did have connection to larger university goals.

Nine institutions shared their CBP outcomes were not defined but instead used university goals in specific areas including FYE, honors college, civic engagement, college retention, course outcomes and mission statements. Participant 10 shared, "... it's the shared experience

[that] is the overall common goal because, I mean, we can't tie it to retention.” In addition, Participant 5 stated, “We’re thinking about civic engagement and how do we get our students to think differently about topics like that. And so, in that sense, I would say it’s loosely connected [to outcomes] but certainly not formalized in any way.” Participant 2 shared,

I think another goal is ...and I think with the type of university that we are. I think it's to push the boundaries and challenge people to think about things from different perspectives or to deepen their understanding if it's maybe their own perspective...goals and initiatives right now, I don't think that has ever really clearly been defined.

None of the institutions shared how they specifically connect their assessment practice to outcomes. Zilvinskis (2019) stated the importance of mapping outcomes as an effective tool used to understand the links between practices and desired learning outcomes. Given the importance of assessment and outcomes when evaluating program impact, this area remains less clear and emerges as an opportunity for future investigation.

Innovative Common Experience

In addition to the four main themes that emerged from the coding process, three participants shared information regarding the closure or suspension of the CBP at their institution and innovative practices emerged as a result. Participant 13 shared,

So we have a freshman coaching program now [sic] and we've pushed out talking points weekly through our freshman coaching program all freshmen are in this group of 15. They have a either faculty or staff coach and a peer mentor that's tied to that group and their affinity groups. So, some of them are themed around things like gaming, some are themed around academic majors and some are themed on [topics like] time management.

Participant 15 shared, “When the common book was going away, that's when the five essential practices emerged... and when the [CBP] dissolved, now what we're trying to do is each FYI unit, or course, has a signature learning experience.” Participant 14 stated with the suspension of their CBP as a result of COVID-19, it is allowing them to evaluate and be more intentional about program outcomes: “I think that's allowing faculty to actually think through and be a little bit more intentional with the [book]... versus what we have to do...so it's allowing a little bit of creativity to take root.”

Interview data provided by suspended or discontinued CBPs was rich in content. While these institutions may not represent a traditional CBP model in practice, information gleaned does address the study's research questions and provides insight into program innovation and improvement efforts to increase impact and outcomes, which will be shared in the next chapter.

Summary

This mixed-method sequential explanatory study utilized an initial quantitative survey followed by a second qualitative interview phase. In total, 151 institutions with active and inactive CBP, ranging in size, setting, and program model participated in the study. While the survey provided broad data, the individual interviews provided greater detail in investigating the study's three guiding research questions focused on CBP assessment practices, student engagement, and HIP implementation.

Assessment Practices

The first research question focused on assessment practices used by CBPs. Four open-ended survey questions investigated intended program goals, intended learning outcomes, how effectiveness of CPB learning outcomes and/or program outcomes are measured, and who conducts the effectiveness assessment (see questions 8-11, Appendix C). Consistent with the

literature, reported CBP goals focused on a common intellectual experience, providing an introduction to the academy, and exploring complex issues; however, there was no consistent use of similar assessment practices found across institutions. The subsequent interviews asked two questions related to program assessment (see questions 2 and 3, Appendix D). Consistent with the survey data, participants shared that there are no clearly defined assessment measures used across institutions and that assessment needed to be improved. Examples of assessment strategies included course evaluations and outcome measures connected with HIPs and university-specific goals (e.g. civic engagement).

Student Engagement

The second research question examined the practices leveraged by CBPs to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively, as well as develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills; and connections. Survey results support that cognitive engagement is most prevalent in CBPs, followed by emotional/psychological, and behavioral engagement. Critical thinking was frequently used to apply knowledge gained through the CBP to other areas (e.g. FYS) or programming opportunities (e.g. service-learning). Further, CBPs were found to engage students with peers, faculty, and community members in varying levels across institutions both inside and outside of the classroom.

Qualitative data supported the prevalence of both co-curricular and academic engagement as a way to strengthen engagement and foster connections through a CBP or common intellectual experience. Of particular interest, civic engagement emerged as a strategy to increase student engagement and impact through a common experience. Both the survey and interview data support that student engagement is prevalent within sampled CBPs; however, the type of

engagement is program specific and how institutions define critical thinking and ethical reasoning shapes program design and desired outcomes.

High-Impact Practices

The final research question explored institutional use of HIPs related to the CBP and/or FYE. Data from the quantitative survey supports that FYS and FYE are the most frequent HIP leveraged by CBPs, followed by a common intellectual experience. Less popular HIPs included learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments, and service-learning. The interviews provided greater depth in understanding of where and how HIPs are leveraged within the context of the CBP.

Interview data supports that diversity and global learning, first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experience, and service/community learning are the most impactful HIPs leveraged by CBPs. As such, the study allows for a more specific focus on four HIPs related to the CBP as a way to enhance program outcomes and engagement. The next chapter will consider how these findings can be used to enhance the current literature, specifically the gap in CBP outcomes and assessment as well as provide VCU CBP with recommendations for program development and strategic planning.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to inform the strategic planning and future program evaluation efforts of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Common Book Program (CBP). This study examined best practices utilized by peer institutions, including program assessment and outcomes, as well as high-impact practice (HIP) implementation. VCU CBP is focused on student engagement and skills development to support successful college careers (VCU University College, 2020). In an effort to improve the VCU CBP, additional information was needed to assess the current CBP landscape and identify best practices that could be implemented locally. This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory study methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006; Subedi, 2016), in which both quantitative (a national survey) and qualitative (interviews) research methods were used to respond to the research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the assessment practices of CBPs?
2. What practices do CBPs utilize to engage students emotionally/psychologically, behaviorally, and cognitively within the campus community?
 1. How do the CBPs help students develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills?
 2. How do the CBPs foster student connections with each other, faculty, staff and the community?
3. In what ways do peer institutions implement HIPs as they relate to the CBP or first-year experience (FYE)?

This mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was informed by two frameworks: Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs (adapted from Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015) and HIPs (Kuh, 2008). The quantitative data collection phase consisted of an online survey of CBP stakeholders at four-year institutions in the U.S. (Appendix C). The survey data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi square tests, and in vivo coding of open-ended questions. This data informed the qualitative phase of the study, volunteer interviews (Appendix D). Interview data was analyzed by several members of the research team using predetermined codes.

The data collected from survey and interview respondents informed researchers of current assessment strategies, student engagement practices, and HIPs utilized by CBPs. The data informed recommendations to aid VCU CBP in future programmatic assessment and planning efforts. This chapter summarizes the findings from the study, addresses limitations, provides recommendations, outlines implications for practice, and suggests considerations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Study findings center on three primary themes. First, there is a lack of an assessment culture among CBPs in this study. Further, although CBPs do engage students, the data was limited in accounting for emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement as presented in Chapter 3. Lastly, HIPs utilized by respondents in this study were different than those initially identified in the literature (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018).

Common Book Program Assessment and Outcomes

The findings from the mixed-methods sequential explanatory study methods illuminated the lack of specific program outcomes and assessment practices used by CBPs nationwide.

Survey respondents stated that “no formal assessment” was conducted for CBPs, which aligned with the qualitative findings that found assessment practices were not formally defined. These findings were also consistent with Shavers and Mitchell (2019), which found assessment has not been used formally in relation to HIPs.

In addition to assessment practices, a gap was identified in CBP-defined program outcomes. The survey results indicate that the majority of CBPs report intended goals to create a common intellectual experience, provide students with an introduction to the academy, and explore complex issues, such as social justice, but these were not well defined. Interview results substantiate that finding with only four of the 15 institutions interviewed reporting defined CBP outcomes. Zilvinskis (2019) states that institutions do not have defined outcomes for HIPs, which aligns with the researchers’ findings. Based on this result, a recommendation below addresses strategies for CBPs to define program outcomes.

Student Engagement

This study utilized the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBP framework, adapted from the Gununc and Kuzu (2015) Campus, Class, Technology model (see Chapter 3) as well as HIPs by Kuh (2008). The Theory of Student Engagement Through CBP framework intended to demonstrate how student outcomes are influenced by student engagement opportunities and HIPs within academic and co-curricular experiences offered by CBPs. Specifically, the framework focused on three categories of student engagement: emotional/psychological, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. However, the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study revealed that most participants were not able to provide salient examples of how their programs offered students these three forms of engagement.

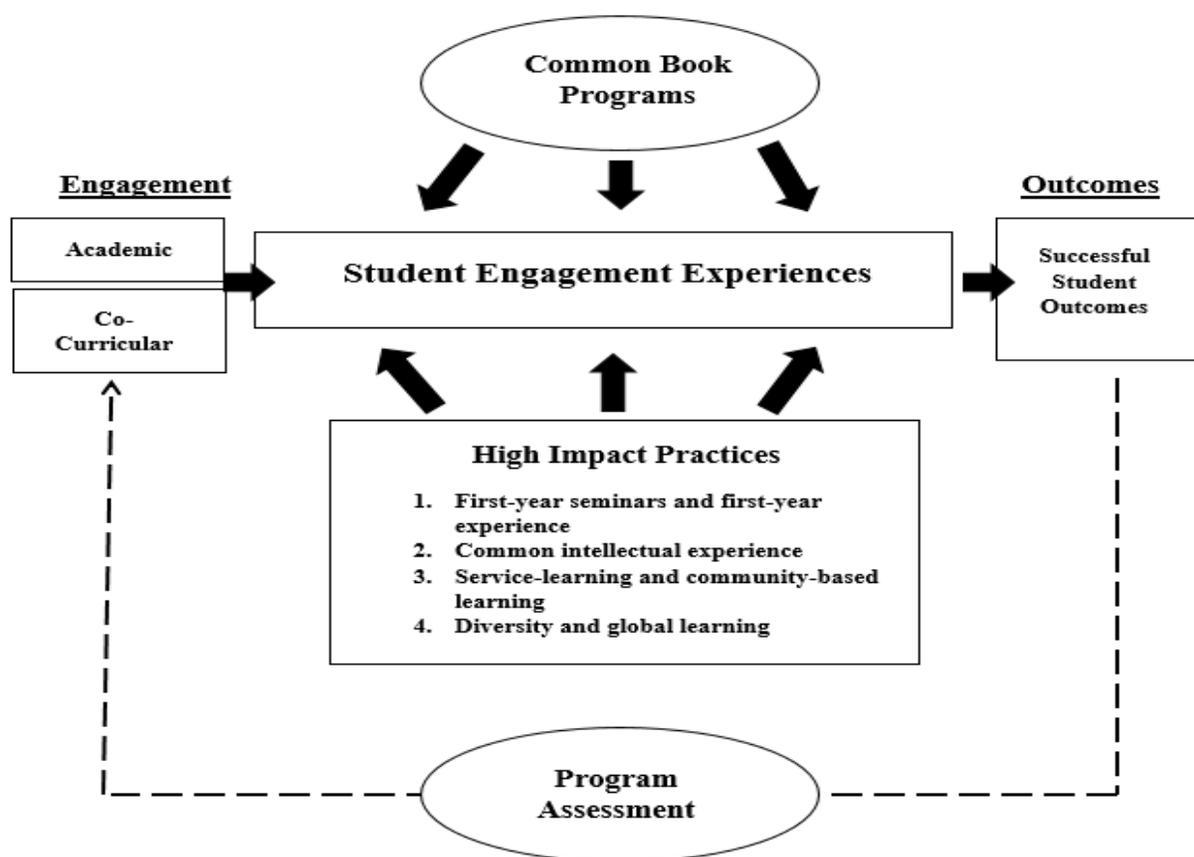
There are two rationales that demonstrate how the Theory of Student Engagement Through CBP framework was insufficient to identify the types of student engagement present in CBP programs. First, most study participants did not have a clear understanding of how the engagement categories (emotional/psychological, behavioral, cognitive) were applicable to student engagement programs offered by their CBP, as evidenced by a lack of specific examples aligned with the engagement portion of the framework. With the exception of a few examples, we found that there was a lack of data to support how study participants utilize emotional, behavioral, and cognitive student engagement tactics in CBP programs. Second, the data analysis revealed that very few, if any, study participants intentionally designed their CBP engagement opportunities within the categories of emotional/psychological, behavioral, or cognitive engagement. We found that the primary reason for this was that most study participants did not clearly define or assess programmatic outcomes, which included learning outcomes and student success outcomes beyond retention and persistence. Rather, more emphasis and intentionality was placed on designing opportunities that engaged students through academic or co-curricular programming.

Similarly, the original framework and model proposed by this study emphasized the importance of applying six HIPs offered by Kuh (2008) to inform student engagement opportunities offered by CBPs: First-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, and service-learning/community-based learning. However, our findings indicated that there were four HIPs most frequently used by study participants in the design of their CBP engagement opportunities: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, service learning/community-based learning, and diversity/global learning. We found that these

four HIPs were the most salient examples utilized across the board by study participants. The student engagement findings necessitated several alterations to the original theoretical framework, resulting in the Student Engagement Outcomes and Assessment Framework (SEOAF) as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Student Engagement Outcomes and Assessment Framework (SEOAF)



Adapted from S. Gunuc and A. Kuzu (2015)

After all qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed, we utilized the findings to inform the SEOAF model. This model functions similarly to the framework proposed earlier in this study (see Chapter 3). However, it is important to understand how the findings changed the model to create the SEOAF for effective engagement by CBP programs.

The first step in utilizing this model is for CBPs to establish clearly defined successful student outcomes. It is important for CBP program administrators to consider that successful student outcomes can be defined by using a range of factors including learning outcomes, student development objectives, varying levels of student participation, alignment of the institutional mission and vision, retention and persistence data. Once outcomes are defined, CBPs should then intentionally design engagement experiences for students that are informed by the four HIPs identified through our data analysis. Engagement experiences should include a balance of both academic and co-curricular opportunities. Third, CBPs must design evaluations and assessments informed by the determinants of student success to ensure that pre-defined outcomes are achieved.

Student success outcomes must be identified at the campus level, informed by the institution mission, importance of academic prowess, purpose of the CBP program, student demographics and characteristics. Caruth (2018) discusses how retention rates are appropriate for assessing college success, and formative assessments are most effective to evaluate student learning. The type of program assessments used, as suggested by this framework, are critical to ensure that student success outcomes support CBP academic and co-curricular engagement initiatives. In fact, Caruth (2018) argues that “Colleges have the duty to the society to make postsecondary education a successful experience for students to do well in school, to graduate, and to become what they want to become in life” (pp. 27-28). The SEOAF model provides structure for CBP programs to address the lack of assessment practices and stated program outcomes, with emphasis on an effective strategy to support student success. Further, how engagement experiences informed by HIPs help to achieve those outcomes is also significant.

High-Impact Practices

This study provided both qualitative and quantitative data related to peer institutions' use of HIPs related to the CBP and FYE. The most frequently implemented HIPs in the survey data were FYS and FYE, followed by common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects and service-learning/community-based learning (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2017; White, 2018). Additional information gathered in the interviews added to the breadth of understanding of how peer institutions implement HIPs beyond our survey results. Similarities in both data sets include the FYS and FYE, the common intellectual experience, and service-learning/community-based learning. However, the prevalence of using diversity and global learning as a HIP in the interview's deviates from the current literature. Diversity and global learning was a salient focus in CBP programming among interview participants, as evidenced by 64% of the peer institutions in the sample reporting use of this HIP. This is not surprising given the present climate focused on addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the U.S. during the time of this study.

Within the SEOAF model, the four HIPs should inform the type of student engagement opportunities provided by CBPs. FYS and FYE, the common intellectual experience, service-learning/community-based learning, and diversity and global learning have been found to have a positive impact on student learning outcomes (Kuh, 2008). Finley and McNair (2013) stated that students who participate in multiple HIPs experience a synergistic effect on engagement and success, resulting in increased student engagement, student success, and student retention. The SEOAF model can be leveraged to help programs meet their student success outcomes and provide strategic retention efforts that are institution-specific and student-centered.

Limitations

This study was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, accuracy of publicly available information, survey design, and unintentional bias. The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in March 2020 and continued through data collection had a profound impact on U.S. higher education institutions and CBPs. During this time, CBP administrators were addressing multiple public health mandates and moving programming to virtual formats, adding to existing workloads. As such, survey response rates were impacted, affecting the overall sample of 151 complete submissions. The response rate was also impacted by the accuracy of data collected in website analysis.

The research team relied on publicly available information on institutions' websites to identify the CBP and FYE primary contact information for the quantitative survey invitations. In cases where information was outdated, meaning the primary contact had changed or the email address was incorrect, the survey was not successfully delivered to the correct contact, thereby indirectly removing the institution from the respondent pool. In addition, FYE interest group listservs were also utilized to promote the survey, which may have impacted the quality of data collected. The listserv subscribers responding to the survey may not have had as much experience and/or knowledge of their institution's CBP, which could have influenced their responses to the survey questions.

The survey question design that did not include definitions for key terms also created limitations in this study. For example, definitions were not included for the terms "intended goals" and "learning outcomes," which could have impacted the quality of the data received (see questions 8-9, Appendix C). Another limitation is the selection of six HIPs included as response

choices for survey question 13 (Appendix C), as the team identified additional HIPs used by CBPs through the interview process.

Finally, unintentional selection bias in the qualitative phase also created a study limitation. A total of 64 survey respondents volunteered for the 15 interview slots. The research team attempted to mitigate bias through the selection process, ensuring institutions of different sizes and with inactive CBPs were included to provide a diverse sample population.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the research team offers four recommendations to the VCU CBP as they seek to grow and improve their existing program. While the recommendations are written for VCU, given the broad reach of the study, we believe the recommendations are relevant for other CBPs. Recommendations include assessment practices, student engagement, HIPs, and innovative practices. Each is subsequently detailed and includes specific action items or suggestions for implementation.

Recommendation 1: Assessment Practices

HIPs result in positive outcomes related to student retention and persistence; however, institutions need to ensure they are assessing the degree to which outcomes and goals are achieved (Zilvinskis, 2019). VCU CBP is not alone in challenges related to assessment and outcome practices. Based on the findings, the majority of institutions with CBPs or other FYE activities including common intellectual experiences and learning communities, struggle to define outcomes and create assessment practices that allow for successful program evaluation.

We recommend VCU CBP review resources from the University of Wisconsin and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), which provide information related to specific outcomes and program goals (Appendix F - Outcome Resource). These two

programs have defined program outcomes that could be useful in better understanding how VCU CBP might structure and define their program outcomes. We have also provided a Student Engagement Outcomes and Assessment Program Development Tool (SEOAF Tool) (see Appendix G) to orient CBP programs to utilize the SEOAF model to develop program outcomes.

Further, we also recommend creating operational definitions for any program goals or outcomes. If terms like *critical thinking* and *ethical reasoning* are to be included in program goals or outcomes, those terms would need to be defined to enhance assessment practices. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) provides templates specific to student learning outcomes, including both critical thinking and ethical reasoning (Rhodes, 2010). We recommend using the AAC&U Value Rubric tool to define each term and desired outcome.

While none of the programs we interviewed had specific assessment tools for CBP, Virginia Tech does provide an assessment tool for their Common Student Experience and FYE programs. This tool provides a template that could be used in the creation of CBP-specific outcomes and direct and indirect assessment (Steger & Wubah, 2010). Virginia Tech's tool provides a method of mapping desired outcomes to better assess how and if the program's goals are being met. In addition, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2021) has an Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community, as well as the Assessment, Persistence, and Data Analytics Conference that may provide valuable insight into assessment tools and resources. The knowledge community allows professionals to share best practices within higher education, specifically related to assessment.

Our final recommendation related to program assessment is to be intentional about how the program outcomes are connected to student engagement, HIPs, and innovative practice. The program outcomes can then serve as a guide when determining what recommended practices should be developed. The SEOAF Tool (see Appendix G) can assist in the development of program outcomes and provide a structured format for continued program assessment. This tool is meant to provide a framework for how the VCU CBP can deliver specific student engagement experiences that support successful student outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Student Engagement

We recommend that VCU utilize the SEOAF model for program design, implementation, and assessment. This model informed by study findings provides VCU CBP with a comprehensive framework for designing meaningful and effective student engagement programs. Based on our student engagement model, we offer several additional and specific recommendations for VCU CBP to adopt.

Planning Worksheet

We recommend that VCU utilize the SEOAF Tool to design, implement, and assess their CBP program (see Appendix G). This worksheet serves as a helpful planning tool that VCU CBP can use to map out the program within the context of the SEOAF framework. This worksheet was developed using a step-by-step approach based on the various elements of the SEOAF model.

The first step in utilizing this worksheet is for VCU to identify the academic and co-curricular aspects of their CBP. Providing students with engagement opportunities related to the CBP helps to bridge connections between in-class and out-of-class learning, which can positively

affect outcomes achievement. Identifying how VCU CBP engages students will aid VCU in the process of formulating specific student engagement strategies and experiences.

The next step is for VCU CBP to identify specific academic and co-curricular engagement experiences that are offered. The SEOAF tool provides VCU CBP with a checklist of engagement experiences that were identified through our research. VCU CBP may also have engagement practices of their own that have proven to be effective; however, we recommend that VCU incorporate engagement experiences found on this list.

Once engagement experiences are identified, VCU CBP should then apply HIPs as a means to carry out engagement experiences. As the findings indicated, there were four main HIPs that were most frequently employed by study participants. We recommend that VCU CBP utilize these four HIPs to inform their engagement experiences.

The third step is for VCU CBP to identify the desired outcomes for each engagement experience that will be offered. Study findings indicated that most CBPs do not have clearly defined outcomes, which can be detrimental to program effectiveness. We recommend that VCU CBP define their intended program and student outcomes. Broad outcomes could include factors such as increasing retention or persistence. Specific outcomes could include helping students develop ethical reasoning and critical thinking skills, exposure to diverse topics, time management skills, and writing proficiencies.

Finally, once steps one through four have been completed, we recommend that VCU CBP develop methods of assessing the effectiveness of their program. Most study participants indicated that their respective programs do not include formal assessment processes. However, we have provided several questions that should be answered to help guide VCU CBP in the creation of assessment practices. Additionally, VCU CBP should organize their assessment

process by not only using the SEOAF model framework but also the recommended assessment plan template provided on our worksheet (Appendix G). This framework and template will help organize how the outcomes for each engagement opportunity will be tracked and assessed.

Recommendation 3: High-Impact Practices

HIPs have been found to support student engagement, persistence, and retention in undergraduate students, particularly from first to second year. There is a cumulative benefit when more than one HIP is used in conjunction with another. Much of our research indicated that institutions were using at least two or more HIPs together to support student success within the CBP and within the FYE.

Although the literature does not recommend any specific combination of how the various HIPs should be used, the research does support leveraging HIPs that are institution specific and are in alignment with overall program goals and outcomes (Johnson & Stage, 2018). The SEOAF supports the use of assessment practices to evaluate how HIPs inform and influence student engagement. Since our findings suggest four HIPs can maximize student engagement and success, we recommend the following per the SEOAF model: first year seminars and first-year experience, common intellectual experience, service-learning/community-based learning, and diversity and global learning (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al, 2017; White, 2018). VCU CBP is on par with its peer institutions in many of its practices, but intentional use of these four HIPs through both academic and co-curricular efforts can provide a stronger framework for engaging and retaining students, as well as in achieving its program outcomes and meeting strategic goals.

Another emerging HIP that we found in our research was the particular use of diversity and global learning within CBPs and FYE programs. This is a new finding as it relates to current literature. Given the social and political climate that current exists in the United States, it is not

surprising that this would be an emerging trend. Diversity and global learning was the most frequently referenced HIP among interview participants, and the peer institution interview participants adopted this practice in conjunction with other HIPs. VCU CBP is already using diversity and global learning as a strategy in book topic selection, but we recommend even more intentional use of this HIP in academic and co-curricular activities as a part of the SEOAF model. With the VCU (2021b) Quest 2025 strategic plan, one of the four pillars focuses on leveraging diversity, equity, and inclusion to provide a safe space for students to learn and engage. This pillar fits well within the context of VCU's CBP, FYS and FYE and could serve as a student outcome and be included into future assessment efforts. It also provides a foundational platform for the other three HIPs that we are recommending with the SEOAF model. Diversity and global learning could serve as the theme for FYS and FYE, the common intellectual experience, and service-learning, community-based learning projects around which curricular and co-curricular engagement efforts can be built. Intentionality in providing strong academic and co-curricular opportunities to engage students can lead to the achievement of student success outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Innovative Practices

We recommend that VCU CBP consider two innovative practices as they advance their program. Innovative practices include shifting from a single text to a broader common intellectual experience as well as the developing partnerships within the VCU campus community. These innovative practices support both the academic and co-curricular aspects of the CBP that could positively influence student engagement. Further, these recommendations incorporate HIPs identified in this study, including the common intellectual experience, service learning/community-based learning, and diversity and global awareness.

Common Intellectual Experience

It is recommended that VCU CBP consider a common intellectual experience rather than maintain the current focus on a common text. This study supports the shift to a common intellectual experience that includes both academic and co-curricular elements and leverages key HIPs in order to strengthen student success outcomes. CBP status quo that remains focused on one text fosters lackluster assessment and outcomes, restricts engagement opportunities, and limits HIPs. An innovative common experience provides broader opportunities for participation and greater student engagement impact.

Further, a number of institutions indicated that their CBP is incorporating podcasts, movies, or projects as a shared intellectual experience in lieu of a text. This change addresses the limitations of a one size fits all approach when a single text is used. Our quantitative analysis supports that an institution's size does not correlate with program model or intended outcomes, thereby supporting that institutional demographics should not drive or limit the CBP's approach to the common intellectual experience.

Campus Partnerships

Campus partnerships will lead to increased program awareness and strengthen the VCU CBP desired student learning outcomes including critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills. Further, campus partnerships can lead to increased use of recommended HIPs. Given that VCU serves 30,103 students, programs that operate independently may have a difficult time building awareness and impact (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020).

VCU CBP is encouraged to form campus partnerships in the program's model. Based on the review of VCU initiatives, it is recommended that the CBP develop closer alignment with the VCU (2021b) Quest 2025 strategic plan and partner with the VCU (2021a) iCubed

initiative. Both partnerships provide new opportunities to increase program awareness and to strengthen student learning outcomes.

Quest 2025.

It is recommended that VCU CBP review the VCU (2021b) Quest 2025 strategic plan to identify areas that align with the CBP's desired learning outcomes. Based on the plan's mission that supports "Real-world learning that furthers civic engagement, inquiry, discovery and innovation" (para. 4), Quest 2025 may provide language and program goals relevant to student success outcomes. For example, when selecting the CBP text or experience, consideration could be given to themes that align with the mission of Quest 2025 (e.g. civic engagement).

iCubed.

VCU's iCubed initiative is designed to enhance critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills, which are also intended learning outcomes of the VCU CBP (VCU, 2021a). By partnering with iCubed, VCU CBP can create a mutually beneficial opportunity to enhance critical thinking and diverse, global learning experiences. iCubed's central themes include broadening diversity awareness, creating inclusivity, building connections between the VCU community and the larger community, and innovative solutions to problems that cross boundaries (VCU, 2021a). Through this partnership, iCubed and the CBP could develop opportunities for academic and co-curricular student engagement for a shared common experience.

Implications for Practice

This study was designed to inform VCU CBP administration in developing outcomes assessment for first-year student initiatives specific to the CBP, as well as to learn how student engagement and HIPs influence student outcomes. Ignoring assessment and demonstrable outcomes will lead to decreased CBP funding and/or program suspension.

The first implication for practice is to address the lack of assessment and outcomes practices of first-year student initiatives and CBPs. Administrators need to develop assessment and outcomes practices, with a focus on defining intended program outcomes, followed by mapping practices to the outcomes. By determining and assessing CBP outcomes, opportunities for improvement can be identified, which could lead to improved student engagement and retention.

Another implication is sustainability for CBPs through institutional funding. Program assessment and outcomes measurement will provide CBP administrators with rich data and information to justify increases in and sustainable funding. By establishing assessment and outcomes measurement that support the institution's goals and mission, defined and proven program outcomes would be a significant value add for the institution. Assessment measures may evolve from simply calculating student participation rates and/or facilitator feedback to measuring the defined learning outcomes of the program.

Additionally, our findings indicate that incorporating additional HIPs into CBPs is a growing trend. Intentionally incorporating diversity and global learning as a strategy can support student engagement. Institutions that commit to incorporating additional HIPs will need to intentionally work with constituents to identify areas of success and opportunity. This work may begin by using the proposed SEOAF Tool (see Appendix G) to evaluate current program design and then identify gaps in HIP use. This work should not be done solely by the CBP but will require collaboration across academic and co-curricular offices in order to maximize student engagement impact.

Considerations for Future Research

The limited sample size and focus on VCU peer institutions in this study creates an opportunity for future research. Due to the small sample size and focus on large, public institutions, CBP assessment practices may not be accurately represented. Additional research is recommended to determine if CBP assessment practices exist at institutions not sampled in this study. In addition, future research should include the student perspective on program assessment and outcome development as the student voice was not included in the present study.

The Theory of Student Engagement Through CBPs framework, adapted from the Gununc and Kuzu (2015) Campus, Class, Technology model was not supported by our findings. We proposed further modifications, creating the SEOAF model. Further research is needed to validate the SEOAF model and assessment tool (Appendix G).

Finally, future research examining innovative and emerging practices, such as the common intellectual experience, is recommended. Although institutions within this sample are utilizing these practices, the reported assessment and outcomes are anecdotal and are not supported by assessment data. Research is needed to measure student outcomes in CBPs utilizing innovative practices and multiple HIPs. We suggest researchers utilize retention data in future research to confirm the impact of incorporating HIPs into CBPs.

Conclusion

This study examined CBP assessment practices, student engagement practices, and HIP implementation to advise VCU CBP in program improvement efforts. The mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach collected data from 151 four-year institutions located within the U.S. Data was analyzed using multiple methods, including descriptive statistics and chi-square tests, as well as in vivo coding techniques for the open ended survey questions. The salient

findings indicate that there is a lack of assessment in CBPs, with the lack of defined outcomes contributing to this. In addition, this study determined that CBPs provide opportunities for academic and co-curricular student engagement, but further research is needed to understand the outcomes of these practices. The study illuminated that CBPs are utilizing multiple HIPs to positively impact student engagement and retention. Finally, innovative practices were also identified in this study, with CBPs shifting to a common intellectual experience to expand their impact and student engagement opportunities.

In closing, CBPs are widely used to engage students with the intention to create a shared experience, engage students academically and co-curricularly, and positively influence student retention. It is unknown to what degree CBPs are successful as intended learning outcomes and goals are not defined nor assessed. Further research is needed to examine CBP outcomes and use of innovative practices.

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Appendix A

VCU Common Book 2019 Student Survey

1. How beneficial was this discussion in helping you to connect with other VCU students?
 - a. Not beneficial
 - b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Very beneficial
2. How beneficial was this discussion in helping you to connect with VCU faculty, staff, or administrators?
 - a. Not beneficial
 - b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Very beneficial
3. After attending this session, how likely are you to (please respond for each question):
 - a. Read more books (outside of class)
 - b. Seek out more information on the issue of eviction
 - c. Discuss what I've learned with friends and/or family members
 - d. Better understand the perspectives of people with different life experiences
 - i. Not likely
 - ii. Somewhat likely
 - iii. Likely
 - iv. Very likely
4. How beneficial do you think your participation in a university-wide Common Book program will be for your successful transition to the VCU community?
 - a. Not beneficial

- b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Very beneficial
5. Approximately how much of the book did you read before attending this session?
- a. 0%
 - b. 25%
 - c. 50%
 - d. 75%
 - e. 100%
6. Are you taking Focused Inquiry (UNIV 112 OR UNIV 112) this semester?
- a. Yes - UNIV 111
 - b. Yes - UNIV 112
 - c. No, I'm not taking either FI class
7. What do you think the purpose of the Common Book Program is?
- a. Comment box
8. Which description best matches your current role at VCU:
- a. First-year student living ON campus
 - b. First-year student living OFF campus
 - c. New transfer student
 - d. Resident Assistant

Appendix B

VCU Common Book 2019 Facilitator Survey

1. How many times have you volunteered as a Common Book Facilitator at VCU?
 - a. 1 (this was my first time)
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
 - f. 6
 - g. 7
 - h. More than 7 times

2. Did you facilitate more than one session this year?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. How helpful were the following pre-facilitation preparation options to you?
 - a. Facilitator book discussions
 - b. Facilitator orientation/training session
 - c. Facilitator guide
 - i. Not very helpful
 - ii. Somewhat helpful
 - iii. Helpful
 - iv. Very helpful
 - v. N/A

4. How would you rate the NUMBER of email communications you received prior to the 8/19 event?
 - a. Too few
 - b. Minimally adequate
 - c. Appropriate
 - d. Too many
 - e. Other: (comment box)

5. How would you rate the QUALITY of email communications you received prior to the 8/19 event?
 - a. Not informative - often felt out of the loop
 - b. Somewhat informative but left me with questions
 - c. Informative enough to make me feel comfortable to facilitate
 - d. Too much information/too wordy
 - e. Other: (comment box)

6. How would you rate the timeliness of receiving your scheduled session time (3 weeks before event)?
 - a. Would have preferred to know the time much earlier than 3 weeks before event
 - b. Would have preferred to know the time somewhat earlier than 3 weeks before event
 - c. 3 weeks before was enough notice

7. In a few words or sentences, how would you describe your overall experience facilitating a Common Book discussion this year?
 - a. Comment box

8. How would you rate each of the following aspects of your students' engagement in the session(s) you led?
- a. Students' level of interest in the book
 - b. Students' level of interest in the book's topic
 - c. Students' level of participation in the discussion
 - d. Students' level of interactions with each other
 - e. Students' level of interactions with you
 - f. Resident Assistant's level of engagement in the session
 - i. Low
 - ii. Moderate
 - iii. High
 - iv. Don't know
9. After participating in this year's Common Book small group discussions, how likely are you to (please respond for each question):
- a. Participate in other events related to this year's Common Book (Evicted)
 - b. Incorporate this year's Common Book (Evicted) into classes you teach
 - c. Incorporate the topic of eviction into classes you teach
 - d. Seek out opportunities to become involved in addressing this issue in the Richmond community
 - e. Sign up to facilitate again next year
 - f. Tell friends, colleagues, and/or graduate studies about the facilitator opportunity next year
 - i. Very likely

- ii. Likely
- iii. Somewhat likely
- iv. Not likely
- v. N/A

10. Which description best matches your current role at VCU:

- a. Full-time faculty on the Monroe Park Campus
- b. Full-time faculty on the VCU Health System Campus
- c. Part-time or adjunct faculty on both/either campus
- d. Full-time staff on the Monroe Park Campus
- e. Full-time staff on the VCU Health Systems Campus
- f. Full-time staff on both/either campus
- g. Part-time staff on both/either campus
- h. Graduate student
- i. Community member not employed by VCU
- j. Other: (comment box)

11. In which department/school/college do you work? Or, if you are a community member, which organization?

- a. Comment box

12. Is there anything else you would like us to know about any aspect of your experience as a Common Book discussion facilitator?

- a. Comment box

13. Name (optional)

- a. Comment box

Appendix C

Common Book Survey and Invitation

First Email Invitation

Subject: Research Survey Invitation - Common Book Program and First-Year Experience

Date: November 10, 2020 (date to be determined based on IRB approval)

Hello,

We are doctoral candidates in the Virginia Commonwealth University Educational Leadership Program and we ask for your participation in our doctoral capstone research study titled "Review of Student Engagement, Assessment, and High-Impact Practice Implementation by Common Book Programs in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education." The purpose of this study is to examine assessment practices and high-impact practice implementation in Common Book Programs and First-Year Experience programs at colleges and universities nationwide. We also seek to gain a better understanding of how these programs impact student engagement.

Participation in this online survey will take approximately 10 minutes. If you are interested in completing this online survey please click the link below. We ask that you complete this survey by November 30, 2020. Your response will remain anonymous and the results will be reported for the group of respondents in aggregate.

<SURVEY_LINK>

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Andrea Perseghin at aperseghin@mymail.vcu.edu (or Dr. Tomika Ferguson, Faculty Chair, tlferguson2@vcu.edu).

Thank you very much for your time and support,

Wes Hillyard

Carrie Newcomb

Richard Pantele

Andrea Perseghin

Leslie Winston

First Reminder Email

Subject: Can you help us with our research?

Date: November 16, 2020

Hello,

Thanks to all who have completed this survey - we appreciate your time and feedback!

We are doctoral candidates in the Virginia Commonwealth University Educational Leadership Program and we ask for your participation in our doctoral capstone research study titled "Review of Student Engagement, Assessment, and High-Impact Practice Implementation by Common Book Programs in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education." The purpose of this study is to examine assessment practices and high-impact practice implementation in Common Book

Programs and First-Year Experience programs at colleges and universities nationwide. We also seek to gain a better understanding of how these programs impact student engagement.

Participation in this online survey will take approximately 10 minutes. If you are interested in completing this online survey please click the link below. We ask that you complete this survey by November 30, 2020. Your response will remain anonymous and the results will be reported for the group of respondents in aggregate.

<SURVEY_LINK>

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Andrea Perseghin at aperseghin@mymail.vcu.edu (or Dr. Tomika Ferguson, Faculty Chair, tlferguson2@vcu.edu).

Thank you very much for your time and support,

Wes Hillyard

Carrie Newcomb

Richard Pantele

Andrea Perseghin

Leslie Winston

Second Reminder Email

Subject: Research Survey Invitation - Last Chance

Date: November XX, 2020 (date to be determined based on IRB approval)

Dear [Name]:

We are writing to follow up on a message we sent earlier this month asking for your participation in our research survey on Common Book Programs and First-Year Experiences at colleges and universities nationwide.

Participation in this online survey will take approximately 10 minutes. If you are interested in completing this online survey please click the link below. We ask that you complete this survey by December XX, 2020. Your response will remain anonymous and the results will be reported for the group of respondents as a whole. If you have any questions, please let me know.

SURVEY LINK

Thank you for your participation.

Andrea Perseghin, Doctoral Student, Virginia Commonwealth University aperseghin@vcu.edu.

Common Book Program Survey

Introduction

We are doctoral candidates in the Virginia Commonwealth University Educational Leadership Program and we ask for your participation in our doctoral capstone research study titled "Review of Student Engagement, Assessment, and High-Impact Practice Implementation by Common Book Programs in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education." The purpose of this study is to examine assessment practices and high-impact practice implementation in Common Book Programs and First-Year Experience programs at colleges and universities nationwide. We also seek to gain a better understanding of how these programs impact student engagement.

This survey contains a maximum of 24 questions and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Andrea Perseghin at aperseghin@mymail.vcu.edu (Dr. Tomika Ferguson, Faculty Chair, tlferguson2@vcu.edu).

Thank you very much for your time and support,

Wes Hillyard

Carrie Newcomb

Richard Pantele

Andrea Perseghin

Leslie Winston

Please start with the survey now by clicking on the Continue button below.

Institution Profile

1. Is your institution...
 - a. Public
 - b. Private
2. What is the size of your institution based on enrollment of degree-seeking students?
 - a. Very Small (1,000 or fewer)

- b. Small (1,000–2,999)
 - c. Medium (3,000–9,999)
 - d. Large (10,000 or more)
3. What setting below best describes your institution?
- a. Rural
 - b. Suburban
 - c. Urban
4. Are first-year students required to live on your campus?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

Common Book Program

5. Is your institution's common book program active?
- a. Yes (skip logic to question #8)
 - b. No (skip logic to question #6)
6. Has your program temporarily suspended the common book program as a result of COVID-19?
- a. Yes (skip logic to question #8)
 - b. No (skip logic to question #7)
7. What factors influenced your decision to suspend the common book program?
- a. Please describe (comment box) (skip logic to question #25)
8. Briefly describe the intended goals of your common book program (comment box)
9. Briefly describe the learning outcomes of your common book program (comment box)

10. In what ways does your institution determine the effectiveness of your common book learning and/or program outcomes? (comment box)
11. Who conducts the assessment of your common book program? (comment box)
12. Which model best describes your institution's common book program? (select all that apply)
- a. Common Book Program activities are focused within welcome week or orientation activities
 - b. Common Book Program activities and text are integrated within credit-granting courses
 - c. Common Book Program activities are integrated within semester first-year experience programming
 - d. Other, please describe: (comment box)
13. Does your common book program have a curricular component?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. Which of the following student learning experiences are incorporated or a part of your common book program? (select all that apply)
- a. *First-year seminars and experiences*: First-semester activities meant to support the critical thinking, writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills to enhance a student's ability to persist.
 - b. *Common intellectual experiences*: The idea of a "core" curriculum with opportunities for learning in a group environment, usually connected to a general education program.

- c. *Learning communities*: Exploring topics outside the classroom that support the integration of learning across courses.
 - d. *Writing-intensive courses*: Courses that emphasize writing across the curriculum. This practice is repeating throughout the curriculum and supports concepts like qualitative reasoning and information literacy.
 - e. *Collaborative assignments and projects*: Students who work collaboratively can develop problem solving skills which enhances self-understanding and the appreciation of differing viewpoints.
 - f. *Service-learning, community-based learning*: Learning that occurs outside the classroom with community based experiences that lead a student to analyze and seek solutions to real life issues.
 - g. Other (please explain)
15. How are students using and/or applying the knowledge gained through the common book program on campus? (comment box)
16. How are students encouraged to form relationships with peers through the common book program? (select all that apply)
- a. In class assignments
 - b. Service learning activities
 - c. Peer mentor/led discussions (RA, Peer-mentor, Student advisor)
 - d. Student group discussions (student organizations, honors, etc.)
 - e. Other (please explain)
17. How are students encouraged to form relationships with faculty and/or administrators through the common book program? (select all that apply)

- a. In class assignments
 - b. Service learning activities
 - c. Faculty discussions
 - d. Academic advisor discussions
 - e. Undergraduate research
 - f. Other (please explain)
18. Are students required to participate in any extracurricular activities within the common book program?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
19. Does your common book program engage external stakeholders/community members?
- a. Yes (skip logic to question #20)
 - b. No (skip logic to question #21)
20. How does your common book program engage external stakeholders/community members? (select all that apply)
- a. Facilitate discussion groups
 - b. Service learning/volunteer projects
 - c. Serve as guest speakers
 - d. Invited to common book program campus events
 - e. Stakeholders/community members invited to read and participate in common book program activities with students
 - f. Stakeholders/community members invited to participate in common book program selection process

- g. Please describe (comment box)
21. Is your common book program offered to all first year students?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
22. What student populations does your institution's common book program engage? (select all that apply)
- a. First-generation students
 - b. Honors students
 - c. At-risk students
 - d. Transfer students
 - e. All first-year students
 - f. Other, please describe: (comment box)
23. How is your common book program funded? (select all that apply)
- a. Donor support
 - b. Institution support
 - c. Grant support
 - d. Student fees
 - e. Other (comment box)
24. Do you provide the common book text/materials to students at no cost?
- a. Yes, institution purchases text for students
 - b. No, students responsible for purchasing text
25. Who facilitates the common book program activities? (select all that apply)
- a. Common book program faculty

- b. Course faculty
 - c. Faculty volunteers from across the institution
 - d. Administrative staff
 - e. Students
 - f. Community members
 - g. Other, please specify: (comment box)
26. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up 30-minute Zoom or telephone interview?
- a. Yes (skip logic to question #26)
 - b. No
27. Please provide contact information:
- a. Name (comment box)
 - b. Institution (comment box)
 - c. Email address (comment box)
 - d. Phone number (comment box)

Appendix D

Interview Invitation and Protocol

Interview Invitation

Subject: Research Interview Invitation - Common Book Program and First-Year Experience

Date: December 16, 2020

Hello,

Thank you for your response to our recent survey regarding your interest in a follow-up interview. Our doctoral capstone team from Virginia Commonwealth University would like to schedule the interview. We anticipate the interview will take approximately 30 minutes and be conducted via Zoom. These sessions will be recorded for data collection purposes. Questions will be related to our research study on Common Book Programs and First-Year Experiences at colleges and universities nationwide. Please click the link below to schedule the day and time that works best with your schedule.

Interview Link

Thank you for your participation.

Raymond (Wes) Hillyard

Carrie Newcomb

Richard M. Pantele

Andrea M. Perseghin

Leslie Winston

Director/Supervisor: Tomika Ferguson, PhD

Follow up Zoom information

Hi there,

Carrie Newcomb is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Carrie Newcomb's Personal Meeting Room

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:

<https://vcu.zoom.us/j/5403770272?pwd=Tlo2MVpWYjBIWFJvcEtSQ2Q2RmNIdz09>

Password: 5tSHyq

Interview Protocol: Peer Institutions (Script)

Interview LEAD: First, we want to thank you for your time today, we anticipate this interview will last around 30 minutes. I'm _____ and I will be leading today's interview.

Interview OBSERVER: I'm _____ and I will be taking notes and recording today's session. And I'm _____ and will be observing

Interview LEAD: We also wanted to remind you that we will be recording today's interview but if at any time you would like us to stop recording please let us know.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

As you know through our survey our research team is examining Common Book Programs across the country. We will be asking you a series of questions to gather information for our study. The first question is:

1. Please describe your Common Book Program at your institution.

(Follow up questions if needed: What division/department is your program connected to?

How is your program structured?)

2. How does your institution define "Student Success" as it relates to the Common Book Program and/or First-Year Experience?

3. What are your program outcomes and/or goals related to your Common Book Program?
(Follow questions/rephrase: Or, what are outcomes that you are seeing from the CBP that makes continuing your common book program worthwhile?)
 - a. How do the outcomes/goals of your program align with larger university goals?
 - b. How do these goals align with your first year experience initiatives?
4. Please share resources that have been available to your Common Book Program
(financial, campus partners, research, community, etc.)?
5. We would like to learn more about how your CBP supports emotional/psychological, behavioral and cognitive engagement. We'll share some example of each. So to start:
 - a. How does your Common Book program support Emotional/Psychological Engagement for example how does the program support the development of student attitudes, interests and relationships within the college experience?
 - b. How does your Common Book program support Behavioral Engagement for example how does the program support students' participation in academic experiences inside and outside the classroom (field study, internship, service learning, participation in class, attendance).
 - c. How does your Common Book program support Cognitive Engagement for example how does the program support a students' investment and value of their college experience? For example, goal setting, learning, motivation, self-regulation and planning for the future.
6. How do you believe Common Book programs may evolve in the next 3-5 years? At your institution?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your Common Book Program and First Year Experience?

Subset of questions for institutions that no longer have a Common Book Program:

1. What influenced your decision to suspend and/or cancel your Common Book Program?
2. In what ways have you adjusted first-year programs as a result of discontinuing the common book program?

Appendix E

Qualitative Handbook

Academic

Co-curricular

Student Engagement

High Impact Practices

First-year experience

Pre-semester engagement

Common Book Text selection

Common Book program structure

Assessment

Outcomes

Student Success

Resources

Common Book Program Evolution

Innovative practice

Student Retention

Financial

Reputation

Student-institution relationships

Barriers

Appendix F

Outcome Resources

Virginia Tech:

FYE@VT leverages its cornerstones through five essential practices for transitioning students to learn skills necessary to be successful in the discipline.

Including: effective teaching and learning; Virginia Tech Principles of Community; mentorship and engagement; digital and information literacies; and undergraduate academic integrity.

Link to the program website: <https://fye.vt.edu/about-fye/essential-practices.html>

University of Wisconsin-Madison:

The University of Wisconsin–Madison invites you to participate in its common book program, Go Big Read. Initiated by past Chancellor Carolyn “Biddy” Martin, the program will engage members of the campus community and beyond in a shared, academically focused reading experience. Students, faculty, staff, and community members are invited to participate by reading the book, and taking part in classroom discussions and campus events.

This shared reading experience is designed to:

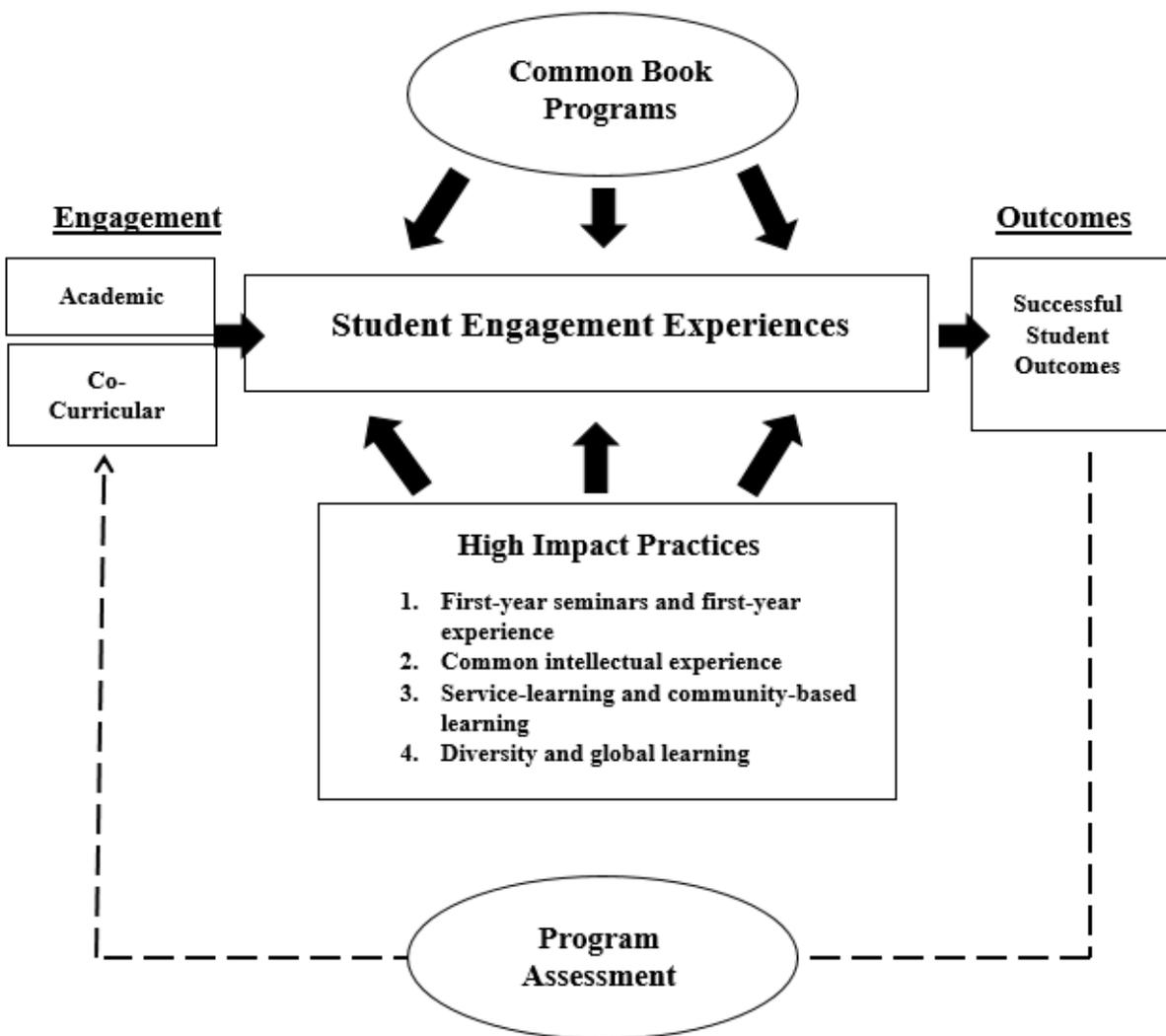
- Engage the campus community and beyond in an academically focused reading experience
- Generate vigorous discussions and exchanges of diverse ideas
- Promote connections among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the wider community
- Tap into and promote the intellectual resources of the campus
- Promote educational initiatives and learning outcomes
- Bridge learning experiences inside and outside the classroom

Link to the program website: <https://gobigread.wisc.edu/about-the-program/>

Appendix G

Student Engagement Outcomes and Assessment Framework (SEOAF) Program Development Tool

This tool can be used to orient common book program (CBP) goals and outcomes with the SEOAF framework.



Adapted from S. Gunuc and A. Kuzu (2015)

Step One: Identify what academic and co-curricular aspects of the CBP provide opportunities for engagement.

a. Academic

b. Co-Curricular

Step Two: Identify the student engagement experiences that are offered through the CBP and other relevant programming at the institution.

Student Engagement Experiences:

CBP experiences:

- Academic advisor discussions
- Author visit
- Faculty discussions
- In class assignments
- Peer mentor/led discussions (RA, Peer-mentor, Student advisor)
- Service learning activities
- Student group discussions (student organizations, honors, etc.)
- Other (please explain)

Relevant experiences:

- Capstone courses
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Common intellectual experiences
- Diversity/global learning
- E-portfolios
- First-year seminars and experiences
- Internships
- Learning communities
- Service-learning, community-based learning
- Undergraduate research
- Writing-intensive courses
- (other)

Step Three: Identify the desired successful student outcomes related to each of the student engagement experiences. Be specific and define terms that might need clarification for assessment purposes.

1. Student Engagement Experience One:
Outcome:
2. Student Engagement Experience Two:
Outcome:

Step Four: Identify how the successful student outcomes will be assessed. Be specific in your assessment practices using the questions below.

How often will assessment occur (annually, biennially, each semester, etc.)?

How will each outcome be measured and evaluated?

What are determinants/indicators of student success?

How often will program changes be made based on assessment results (annually, etc.)?

SEOAF Assessment Plan Worksheet SAMPLE Assessment Plan

Form of Engagement (Academic/Co-curricular)	Student Engagement Experience	Outcome (Program, Learning)	Assessment
Academic	Course lecture discussion of the Common Book	Ability to summarize the main purpose of the book	End of course assessment survey
		Reflect upon the book and how it impacts them as a learner	Pre-course assessment survey and end of course assessment survey
Co-curricular	Residence hall discussion group of the Common Book	Reflect upon how others view the book both similarly and differently	Discussion group assessment
		Make connections with others	Discussion group assessment