

PATHWAYS PROGRAM[®] REPORT 2022-2023

FEBRUARY 2024

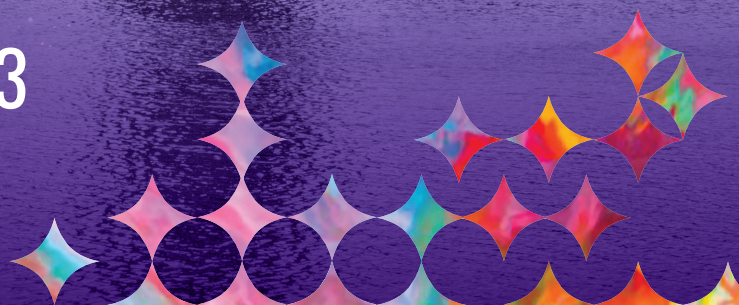


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pathways Program® is Furman’s **credit bearing advising program** that supports students through their first year and sophomore year. The program was adopted as a graduation requirement and scaled to all incoming first-year students beginning in Fall 2022.

In September 2023 this program was **ranked #20** among all colleges and universities in the “**Best First Year Experiences**” category in U.S. News and World Report, up 12 spots from 2022 and up from #56 in 2021.



In the first year of the fully scaled Pathways Program®, we experienced many early successes, including:

- A **3% increase** in first-year to sophomore retention, returning to levels consistent to historical norms pre-pandemic (91%), with a **6% increase** in first-year to sophomore retention in students who are first generation in their family to attend college and an **11% increase** in first-year to sophomore retention in students of color
- Improvements in **advising satisfaction** among first-year students measured by internal metrics and improvements in **perceptions of overall educational experience** by first-year students in the National Survey of Student Engagement from 87% in 2018 to 94% in Spring 2023
- A **9% increase** in first-years’ sense of belonging compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019 and a **10% increase** in feeling that they matter compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019
- An increase in first-years’ reporting they strongly agree that professors **care about them as individuals** when comparing Fall 2019 to Fall 2022, with levels similar to those reported by juniors and seniors who have had more time to develop those relationships
- Increases in usage of **campus resources** including the Counseling Center and the Malone Center for Career Engagement

This report also shares some challenges for the Pathways Program®, including initial short-term challenges that were related to scaling the program on a short timeframe as well as ongoing challenges related to staffing the program, training expectations, and student perceptions of the program.



Furman University is a private co-educational liberal arts university located in Greenville, S.C. The student body consists of approximately 2,500 students (2,300 undergraduates with a four-year on-campus residency requirement and 200 graduate students). Our student body demographics are 57% female, 27% students of color, and 11% first generation in their family to go to college. Furman offers over 75 academic programs within three undergraduate degrees (B.A., B.S., B.M.) and seven graduate programs (five M.A., one Ed.S., one M.S.). The student-faculty ratio is 9:1.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is facing many challenges. Gallup data show that Americans' confidence in higher education overall has fallen from 57% in 2015 to 36% in 2023 (Gallup, 2023). With rising costs and changing demographics resulting in fewer college-aged students, universities must make an argument for the **value of higher education** and demonstrate how higher education **prepares students for post-collegiate opportunities**. In addition, higher education faces challenges in the nature of the students that we serve. Over the past decade, students' **mental health concerns** have increased and these conditions have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2022 survey by the American College Health Association found approximately 77% of students reported experiencing moderate or serious psychological distress. In addition, the pandemic has widened pre-existing educational achievement gaps.

At Furman University, we began thinking about how to address these challenges nearly a decade ago. The work began with our participation in the **Student Resilience and Well-Being Project**, a four-year longitudinal study funded by the Duke Endowment that engaged four schools (Furman, Davidson, Duke and Johnson C. Smith) in conducting research to examine areas of challenge and resilience for students in the Class of 2018 throughout their four years of college. This research confirmed that we needed to take a **holistic approach** to supporting students and we needed to think about their experience through a developmental lens to ensure that the right supports are available at the appropriate time. The results also reinforced that every student is unique with their own multifaceted needs and therefore campus support needed to have an **element of personalization** to ensure that all students achieve their potential.

THE FURMAN ADVANTAGE

To address the challenges of higher ed outlined above, and informed by the Resiliency and Well-Being Study, in 2016, Furman University launched **The Furman Advantage (TFA)**, a vision for an integrated approach to supporting each student's experience. **Central to TFA is an “integrated four-year pathway,” which uses mentoring and advising to encourage students to think intentionally about their classroom learning, engaged learning experiences, and career exploration to prepare them for life after college.**

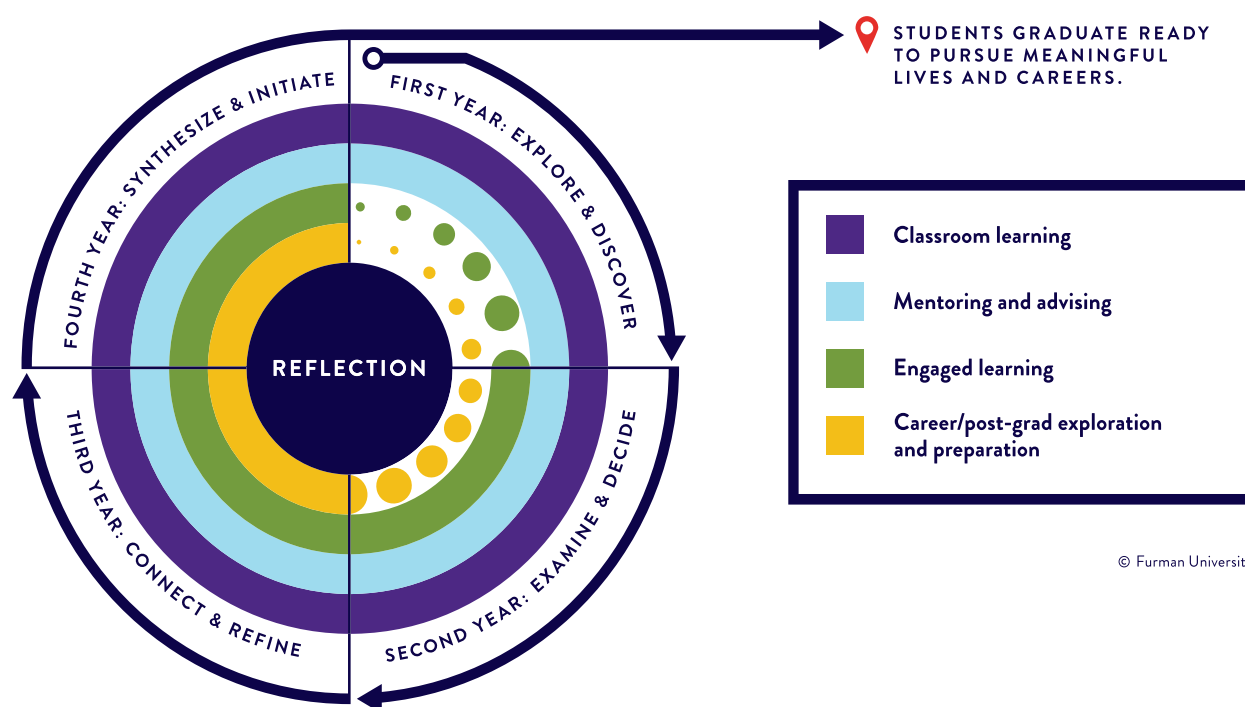
This scaffolded approach ensures that all students are aware of the resources and opportunities that are available to them and that they are exposed to opportunities with enough time to ensure that they may participate.

(For more details, see The Furman Advantage website: furman.edu/furman-advantage)

Working groups, consisting of faculty and staff from across several divisions of the university, were created to develop ideas for the implementation of the components of The Furman Advantage. These groups concluded that to achieve the promise of the integrated four-year pathway in which all students had access to an immersive and impactful individualized experience, students needed to

be aware of available resources and needed dedicated time and guidance to reflect on their experiences to help them articulate what they have learned, and to discern what opportunities they should pursue next. This would require a new approach to advising and mentoring, one that would embed advising into the curriculum more directly and that would be developmentally scaffolded to address the needs of first-year students, sophomore students, and juniors and seniors within a major department.

Prior to the launch of The Furman Advantage, Furman offered components of a first-year experience program; however, the institution did not have a unified approach. Students participated in a summer orientation focused on introducing academic expectations, a fall orientation focused on acclimating to the campus socially, a first-year writing course focused on developing college-level writing skills, and were assigned an academic advisor. This approach is common across higher education in which efforts to support student success are relatively uncoordinated and insufficiently integrated (Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2004). There was no formalized consistent curriculum or any assurance that students were uniformly receiving similar support in their first year.



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In addition, there was no formalized consistent curriculum for sophomore students. Once students declared a major, many departments had developed programming to support students who were pursuing a path to graduate school, but this programming was inconsistent across departments and also did not consistently support students who intended to go into the workforce after graduation.

Thus, the launch of The Furman Advantage provided us with the opportunity to reimagine and redesign our first-year and sophomore programming to set the foundation for the four-year pathway in a coordinated and intentional way, while also addressing issues of awareness and access of support resources for students new to the university. What emerged was the **Pathways Program®**, a common

advising program to support first-year and sophomore students, followed by our **Purposeful Pathways program** that occurs within each academic department and supports junior and senior students with programming that is discipline specific.

After several years of pilot testing, the two-year Pathways Program® was approved by the faculty as a graduation requirement for all incoming students in March 2023. Fall 2023 marked the first iteration of the program at scale. This report provides an overview of the two-year Pathways Program® and shares data that were collected on the first full-scale cohort of students participating in the Pathways Program® during their first year of college.

OVERVIEW OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM®

WHAT IS THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM®?

The Pathways Program® is an advising program supporting first- and second-year students. The program was designed with the goal of providing all students with a foundation that would promote their **wellbeing and success**, ensure **awareness of available resources**, and allow **all students to achieve** the promise of The Furman Advantage. The program consists of a set of four 1-credit, letter-graded courses. Students complete one course each term for their first four semesters, thereby totaling four credits by the end of a student's sophomore year. The class meets once per week for 50 minutes. Students are randomly assigned to cohorts. There is a mechanism for advisors to propose non-random cohorts to support specific populations of students which are considered for approval by the Academic Advising Committee. This committee, consisting of faculty and staff from Academic Affairs and Student Life divisions, is responsible for the oversight of the curriculum.

The program is designed to be developmentally appropriate, providing **topical content** to students at the time when the topics are most directly relevant to their college experience. Much like a traditional first-year

seminar course, the first-semester course is designed to help ease the transition to college and to help students identify resources across campus. Lessons on time management, study strategies, stress management and campus support resources are particularly valuable for lesser prepared students coming out of the pandemic.

The Pathways Program® goes beyond a traditional first-year seminar course by continuing through the end of the sophomore year, engaging students in reflection and discussion on topics that become more relevant in later semesters. The second semester of the program focuses on holistic wellness, encouraging students to reflect on what they have learned about themselves during their first semester and set new wellbeing goals for the second term. The curriculum also introduces students to CliftonStrengths and career competencies in this term.

In the sophomore year, students have started to select their majors and the focus of the third semester curriculum shifts to **career exploration**. The final semester of the program asks students to begin thinking about how they will have an impact on others, focusing on **leadership** and **telling one's story**.

Pathways Program® advisors and peer mentors are provided with lesson plans for each module, designed by campus experts, with defined learning objectives and suggestions for facilitation. Advisors and peer mentors are also provided with training to ensure they are knowledgeable about the resources that are available for students. Advisors and peer mentors are encouraged to adjust the presentation of the material in ways that will resonate with their class dynamics and their teaching style. At the end of each class, students complete short evaluation surveys that ask the extent to which the class met the learning objectives.

PATHWAYS PROGRAM® GOALS

The Pathways Program® goals align with the components of student success outlined by Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot in the 2004 handbook, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First-Year of College* and literature on supporting sophomore students (Schreiner, 2018). The Pathways Program® aims to provide students with tools and information necessary to meet the following objectives:

- 1) Develop **intellectual curiosity** and **academic competence**
- 2) Establish and maintain **meaningful interpersonal relationships**
- 3) Develop one's **identity, purpose, and integrity**
- 4) Establish and maintain **personal health and wellness**
- 5) Develop **cultural humility**
- 6) Explore potential **majors** and academic directions, including **study away, research, and internships**
- 7) Explore **career paths** and identify ways to build career competencies
- 8) Develop **career competencies**, including professionalism
- 9) Learn about the components of **leadership**
- 10) Engage in **reflection** on one's own development

In addition to these objectives, the two-year curriculum was designed to address the developmental goals of students outlined in The Furman Advantage.

YEAR 1 CURRICULUM

Similar to a traditional first-year seminar, the curriculum in fall of year 1 is designed to support students as they transition to college. The curriculum addresses goals 1-5 and reflection (goal 10) listed above and covers topics that are typical of first-year seminars such as **time management, study strategies, stress management**, using **library resources**, and learning of offices across campus to support students' success. The first semester of the Pathways Program® also incorporates discussions of **values** and **thriving** into the curriculum. As part of goal 5, developing cultural humility, we include modules related to developing the skills of **empathetic listening** and **communicating across difference**. In addition to classroom meetings, peer mentors meet with their students outside of class at least once in the first six weeks of the term to check in and ensure that first year students are acclimating to Furman. Weekly reflection assignments also provide insight into how students are doing and whether additional connection or intervention is required on the part of the advisor.

The spring semester curriculum continues to address goals 1-5 and also introduces goal 6 (exploration of major directions) and goal 7 (introduction of career competencies). We introduce the university's **holistic wellness framework** in the second semester by engaging students in reflection on their first-semester experiences and encouraging them to think about how different facets of wellbeing intersect (e.g., academics and social, financial and social, etc.). We also use this opportunity to remind students of campus resources and encourage their use through peer modeling. As part of goal 5, students participate in conversations around identity and being a member of an inclusive community. We intentionally introduce goal 7 in the first year to encourage students to begin thinking about careers; however, we recognize that many of our students are still in the phase where they are deciding what they want to do.

Therefore, we introduce students to the NACE career competencies and ask them to think about how they are developing these competencies through their curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular experiences. We also encourage students to begin thinking about how they may use **engaged learning experiences** to help develop these skills in the future through conversations with upper-class students who have experience participating in these activities. These conversations take place during our signature campus-wide event, **Furman Engaged**, in which students present what they learned through their research, internship and study away experiences. Throughout, students are asked to reflect on their experiences in and out of the classroom. By the end of the first year, students should be aware of resources, have explored the curriculum and potential majors, and have developed a supportive relationship with their advisor and peer mentor.



YEAR 2 CURRICULUM

As the Pathways Program® extends into the sophomore year, it allows additional time to address goals 6-8 related to major and career exploration more deeply. We have found that sophomore students typically return to campus with a clearer sense of what major they want to pursue, making the sophomore fall an ideal time to engage in conversations about career exploration and engaged learning experiences that will be most informative to their path. Therefore, in the fall,

sophomore students explore their **strengths and values**, and reflect on how these strengths and values can be applied in different career settings. Students are required to learn more about the engaged learning experiences that are available to them and what the processes and timeline are for applying to these experiences. This semester also develops practical skills by requiring students to complete an informational interview, create a resume, learn how to engage in networking, and mapping out a plan for their remaining time at Furman.

Finally, in the spring semester of the sophomore year, the curriculum shifts the focus to how the student may have an impact on others and focuses on goal 9, leadership. The first half of the semester asks students to reflect on **what they value**, how they want to **have an impact**, and forms of **leadership**. The second half of the semester focuses on helping students learn how to **articulate their story**. Thus, as they move into their majors by the end of the sophomore year, students should have a clear plan for what their next steps are along their four-year pathway, and they have been exposed to campus resources that they will need to engage with during their remaining time at Furman (e.g., the Malone Center for Career Engagement, the Center for Engaged Learning).

Overall, the two-year Pathways Program® is a comprehensive, integrated curriculum that provides students with support that is scaffolded in a developmentally appropriate way. It not only addresses issues of transition to college in the first year but extends to the sophomore year to support the changing needs of students by addressing purpose, career paths, engaged learning opportunities and leadership at the times when students are prepared to engage in these ideas. The modular nature of the curriculum allows for adjustments to be made each year to adapt and respond to the changing needs of students based on feedback from advisors and peer mentors. This two-year program sets up students to be prepared to engage with the continued programming that is designed for juniors and seniors that occurs within the major departments and provides a common set of expectations for academic departments to build from.

PATHWAYS PROGRAM® STAFFING

ADVISOR RECRUITMENT AND COMPENSATION

Historically, advising was considered part of the service requirements for faculty members and was completely voluntary for staff. When developing the Pathways Program®, we recognized that we needed to create a **compensation structure that reflected the importance** of the Pathways Program® while also acknowledging the additional time and effort that the program would require of advisors. In this new model, staff who volunteer to be advisors in the Pathways Program® are compensated with a stipend, with approval from their supervisors, equivalent to the rate for teaching a 4-credit overload. Faculty advisors are compensated with a stipend or may request their participation to count as part of their teaching load with approval of the Dean of Faculty and their department chair. Faculty who opt for compensation in the form of course credit are strongly encouraged to apply the course credit in the first semester of the program, when students have the greatest need for support.

In 2022, with an incoming class of 652 students, we recruited advisors to staff 44 sections. 73% were faculty and 27% were staff. 25% of the advisors had previous experience with facilitating the program during the pilot phase. 22% of faculty advisors opted to be compensated with course credit; the remaining advisors were compensated with a stipend.

In addition to advisors, peer mentors were recruited to support the program. Each peer mentor co-facilitates two classes and receive \$2400 per year in compensation. In total, we had 23 peer mentors of which 65% were juniors and 35% were seniors with 57% of students having prior experience with the Pathways Program® as students or peer mentors within the pilot phase.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

All academic advisors at Furman are required to complete advisor training that provides them with **knowledge of graduation requirements, academic regulations**, and instruction on the use of advising **tools and systems**. This general training also includes a session on **inclusive advising** and **support resources**. Each year, advisors are encouraged to a brief refresher training to learn about changes to the curriculum and academic policies and support resources available on campus.

In addition to the basic advisor training described above, Pathways Program® advisors and peer mentors are required to participate in multi-day training in advance of the fall and spring semesters that provides background information on the incoming student class, **considerations when advising first-year students**, and an overview and training on the Pathways Program® curriculum. Pathways Program® advisors and peer mentors also participated in a day-long training related to developing skills of **empathetic listening** and **communicating across difference**, facilitating **challenging conversations**, and setting and upholding **community norms**. These sessions were mandatory for advisors who were new to the Pathways Program®, whereas advisors who had previously participated had a mix of mandatory and optional sessions to attend. We encourage returning advisors to attend several sessions to share their advice and experience to help **develop a sense of supportive community among advisors**. We also include working time during training for advisors and peer mentors to begin planning how they will approach the facilitation of the content to try and maximize the benefit of having the scheduled time together. Optional sessions on using our course management software and teaching stations were also offered for those who were unfamiliar with these systems.

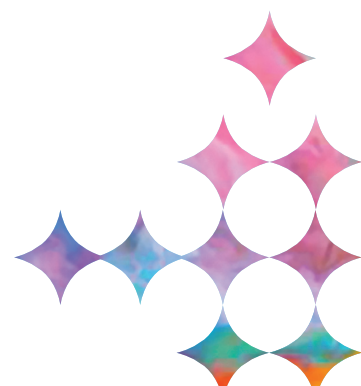
Peer mentors also received additional training related to understanding the peer mentor role, supporting the unique needs of first-year students, working with students who are struggling, Title IX, ethical considerations that emerge in the peer mentor role, facilitating discussion, building an inclusive community, and setting boundaries/self-care.

Throughout the year, optional lunch and learns were provided on supporting students in distress, coaching advisees, strengths-based advising, advisor self-care, and learning about the appeals process. Peer mentors also participate in weekly meetings to receive additional professional development and have the opportunity to debrief their experiences.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The Pathways Program® is assessed in a variety of ways to capture data to evaluate the **(1) fidelity of the program content** (i.e., consistency of content across sections, teaching effectiveness, feedback on content of modules), and **(2) student outcomes** related to the program goals outlined on page five of this report. Data on the **program content** are collected in ways that are similar to other course content evaluations. Data are collected from students using immediate short evaluation surveys completed at the end of each class and student opinions of teaching surveys. **This feedback shows that there is a high level of consistency across sections and ratings of instructor performance were in line or in some cases higher than overall university averages.** Feedback is also provided by advisors and peer mentors throughout the year during meetings and online surveys. These data are reviewed by the Academic Advising Committee, which is responsible for curriculum oversight, and are used to inform changes in the curriculum over time.

Student outcome data are collected via available institutional data, quantitative surveys that are administered throughout the year by the **Office of Institutional Research**, and qualitative coding of end-of-year student reflections. In addition, student outcome data are collected annually through a partnership with **Gallup** and biennially through the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)**. These latter entities, for some items, allow for the comparison to benchmark data from other institutions. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have compared results to baseline data collected in 2018 or 2019 where it exists; although, it should be noted that current students have experienced a range of challenges associated with the pandemic and therefore the historic student samples likely differ in many ways from the current student sample. In addition, during the pilot phase of the Pathways Program® we collected data from students in the program as well as control group of students who did not participate in the program. The results we found after the first year are largely consistent with the trends that emerged in the pilot phase.





ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES

SATISFACTION WITH FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

The Pathways Program® represents a significant change to Furman’s approach to advising and supporting first-year students and impacted every student who entered Furman last year. Therefore, we examined data from the National Survey of Student Engagement collected in the spring of 2023 from first-year students (n=205) to see if the program had an impact on overall satisfaction with their first-year experience. **The data showed that first-year students’ satisfaction with Furman’s educational experience is higher than ratings from the overall sample,** Southeast private colleges, and schools with similar Carnegie class designations. 94% of students responded good or excellent to the item, “How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution” compared to 82% of students at other southeast private schools. This is an increase from pre-pandemic levels. 87% of first-year students rated the experience good or excellent in 2018, the last pre-pandemic data point we have available.

Furman



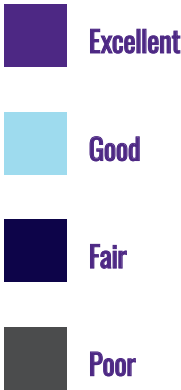
Southeast Private Schools



Carnegie Class



NSSE 2022 and 2023



SENSE OF BELONGING

Sense of belonging is found to be a strong predictor of student retention. We evaluated this construct using two separate items. Although this construct is influenced by many different facets of a student’s experience, the Pathways Program® was unique in the last year as a universal experience for all incoming first-year students.

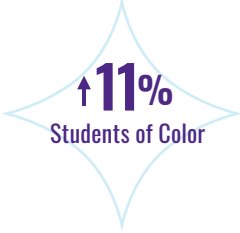
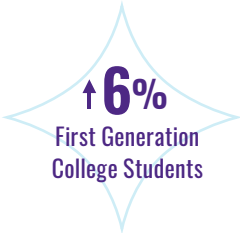
“I FEEL LIKE I BELONG AT FURMAN”			“I FEEL LIKE I MATTER AT FURMAN”			
Fall 2019	34%	36%	Fall 2019	33%	27%	Strongly Agree
Fall 2022	41%	38%	Fall 2022	37%	37%	Agree

FIRST-YEAR TO SOPHOMORE RETENTION

Although the Pathways Program® was not originally created to be a retention intervention, we anticipated that the additional support that the program provides to students could have a positive impact on retention. If students feel a stronger sense of belonging, higher satisfaction with their first-year experience, and a sense of support from their advisor and peer mentor, it would logically follow that retention may increase. In particular, we anticipated that certain demographics of students who our data show have lower retention rates, such as students who are first-generation in their family to go to college and students of color, may benefit to a greater extent from the program than others.

In the first year of the program, the data are consistent with these predictions. **The first-year to sophomore retention rate increased to 91% of the 2022 entering cohort, compared to 88% in the 2021 entering class.** The 91% rate is similar to historical norms pre-pandemic (average rate was 91.25% from 2015-2018).

Looking at retention by student demographics the largest increases were found for students who are the first generation of their family to attend college and for students of color. **The retention rate for first generation college students increased to 89% of the 2022 entering cohort, compared to 83% in the 2021 entering class.** This also reflects a return to historical norms pre-pandemic (average 88.75% from 2015-2018). **The retention rate for students of color increased to 96%, compared to 85% in the 2021 entering class.** Last year’s rate is higher than historical norms pre-pandemic (average 90.25% from 2015-2018).



STUDENTS' PERCEIVED VALUE OF THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM®

Students' final reflections at the end of the spring semester were coded for themes that emerged. The qualitative analysis found that **66.5% of students wrote about the Pathways Program® as having been valuable to their first-year experience.** 6.9% of students wrote about the program as having been a negative during their first year, and 6.4% of students wrote that the program was something they didn't enjoy but noted that the content was useful. The remaining 20% of students did not mention the Pathways Program® in their final reflection on their first year at Furman.

Sample quotes include:

"Pathways inspired me to get the help I needed ... I am incredibly grateful for the extra push that the Pathways Program gave me."

"Beyond the individual lessons and class meetings, the Pathways Program has helped to make me feel more welcomed and comfortable at Furman by providing me with support and giving me the opportunity to reflect on my college experience."

"Pathways has created a safe environment to share learning experiences and make mistakes and I cannot be more grateful for this."

"The more I think about it, the more it makes sense to me why we need to have a program like Pathways. I know that in the beginning I was very hesitant and somewhat against the program ... I thought that I was above needing help transitioning to college. However, now that I have hindsight, I can realize that I definitely needed as much help transitioning to college as I could have gotten."

"Pathways has taught me many lessons, such as understanding my strengths, helping choose classes for a major, and financial well being. I think all of these lessons have helped me understand areas of myself that I think I need to pay more attention to and really help understand at a deeper level."



ASSESSMENT OF PATHWAYS PROGRAM® GOALS

The Pathways Program® intentionally addresses the foundational components of student success outlined by Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot in the 2004 handbook, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First-Year of College*. To assess these components, we used a combination of internal assessments and data collected through our partnership with Gallup.

In comparison to data collected in Fall 2019 (pre-pandemic) we saw increases on metrics related to five of the seven goals that the first-year program focused on.

PATHWAYS STUDENTS REPORTED HIGHER LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT, BELONGING AND PREPAREDNESS, COMPARED WITH STUDENTS WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE PILOT. *(Gallup first-year student data)*

↑ **“My professors care about me as a person”** from 81.2% to 87.5% with the increase occurring in the ‘strongly agree response’ (51%) (Goal 2)

↑ **“I am confident I will graduate from Furman with the knowledge and skills I need to be successful in the job market”** from 78.5% to 84.3% (Goal 7)

↑ **“I am confident I will graduate from Furman with the knowledge and skills I need to be successful in the workplace”** from 82.3% to 88.6% (Goal 7)

↑ **“Furman clearly communicates about resources available to help students prepare for life after college”** from 59% to 80% (Goal 7)

Students also reported increased agreement with the internal item **“I know what my purpose in life is”** from 36.4% to 41.8% (Goal 3) and with the NSSE item **“institutional emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds”**, which was 17% higher relative to other Southeast private institutions (Goal 5).

In terms of data related to resource use, we saw:

↑ Increased usage by first-year students of our **Trone Center for Mental Fitness** (counseling center) from the year before (from 23.7% to 28.4% of first-year students) (Goal 4)

↑ Increased number of **appointments** at the **Malone Center for Career Engagement** from the year before (Goal 7)
– 51 appointments reflecting 7.8% of first-year students increased to 75 appointments reflecting 11.5% of first-year students

↑ Increased participation in **Malone Center for Career Engagement programming** from the year before (Goal 7)
– 123 first-year participants (18.8% of the class) to 257 first-year participants (39.4% of the class)

It is important to note that there have been many simultaneous activities across campus that may also contribute to these findings. Although the successes reported here may not be solely attributed to the Pathways Program®, many of these findings are consistent with data that were collected during the pilot phase of the program during which we compared outcomes for students in the Pathways Program® pilot and a control group of students.



CHALLENGES FOR THE PROGRAM

In the first year of scaling the Pathways Program®, the initial challenges were the result of having to formally scale up the program in a 5-month window between faculty approval of the program and the start of the next academic school year. Staffing the program with advisors and peer mentors, developing a training model for advisors and peer mentors with a range of advising and Pathways Program® experience, and ensuring that requirements set by policy would be met within the short timeframe were one-time challenges that have been resolved.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Three ongoing challenges for the Pathways Program® that emerged in the past year are: 1) staffing the program over time; 2) navigating differing training needs for advisors with varying levels of experience; and 3) student perceptions of the program.

• Staffing

Recruitment of faculty advisors has been more challenging than the recruitment of staff. The primary barriers for faculty participation include concerns about timing in light of upcoming sabbatical or study away programs, other service commitments, and a desire to participate for course credit but not having this option due to departmental staffing needs.

With respect to staff, recruitment has been less of a challenge. Staff report that they value participating as a form of professional development and as an opportunity to connect and support our students in ways that their primary roles do not allow them. They also appreciate that their participation is compensated. The largest challenge we have observed for staff is related to compensation structures and our inability to pay stipends to hourly workers due to federal rules.

Similar to staff, the recruitment of peer mentors has not been a challenge. Student interest in the peer mentor role is high, as evidenced by the fact we have significantly higher numbers of applications than we have available positions. These students see the role as valuable to develop their teaching and student support skills.

• Training Needs of Advisors

The goal of training is both to ensure that advisors are prepared to facilitate the content, but also to develop a sense of community among advisors and peer mentors. As we have scaled the program, we are faced with the challenge of developing training that meets the needs of both our experienced and novice advisors. We want to ensure that there are opportunities for our new advisors to learn from our experienced advisors, while also not asking experienced advisors to have to spend extensive amounts of time in training they have previously completed. To provide additional professional development opportunities and help develop a sense of community, we have added optional sessions at times throughout the year for those who wish to continue elevating their advising practices.

• Student Perceptions

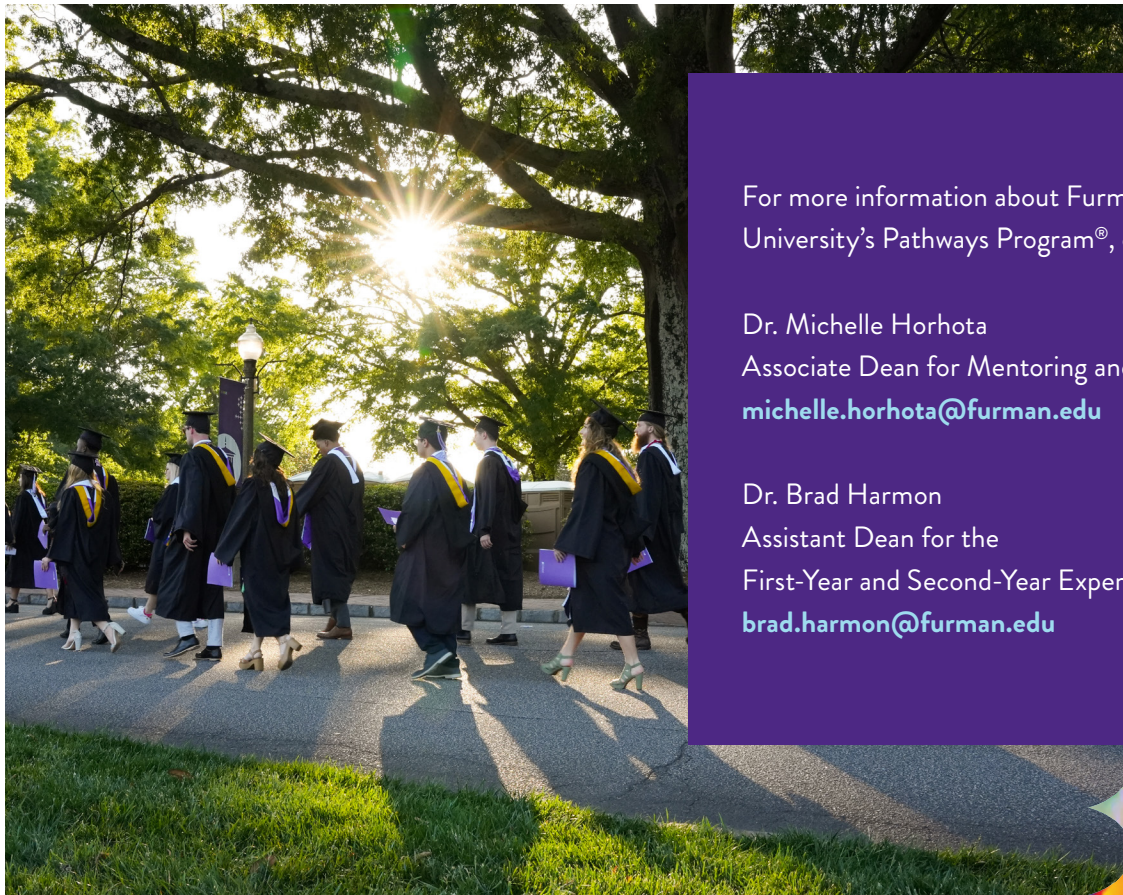
Although the qualitative analysis of final reflections found a majority of students wrote about the Pathways Program® as having been valuable to their first-year experience, a subset of students shared concerns. The primary concerns shared related to prior familiarity with the content of the program and feeling that using the class time for other activities would be more valuable. These perceptions emerged through snap evaluations, reflection papers, and information shared with their peer mentor. It is unclear how to interpret this information since we do not have any data to compare this to perceptions of other required programs (e.g., general education requirements or first-year writing seminars).

It may be the case that these rates of disapproval are similar to that of other required programs. It will also be important to follow these perceptions over time to see if students' perception of the value of the program changes over time as more cohorts of students have participated in the program. Therefore, we will continue to monitor perceptions of students in the sophomore year and conduct follow-up assessments of juniors and seniors in the coming years.

CONCLUSION

In 2016, the launch of **The Furman Advantage** provided us with the opportunity to reimagine and redesign our first-year and sophomore programming to set the foundation for the four-year pathway in a coordinated and intentional way, while also addressing issues of awareness and access of support resources for students new to the university. What emerged was the **Pathways Program®**, a common advising program to support first-year and sophomore students, followed by our **Purposeful Pathways program** that occurs within each academic department and supports junior and senior students with programming that is discipline specific.

The Pathways Program® is innovative, comprehensive, data-driven, and unique in higher education. It has quickly become recognized as a leading program in the country, with a ranking of #20 among all colleges and universities in the “**Best First Year Experiences**” category in U.S. News and World Report in 2023. After one year of implementation, the data suggest that the Pathways Program® is having a positive impact on our first-year students, with outcomes ranging from **increased belonging**, **increased use of campus resources**, and **increased retention**. We are currently collecting data on the effectiveness of the sophomore program and will continue to evaluate program outcomes over time.



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