



The Virginia–North Carolina
Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation



**“What’s Your STEMspiration?” Social Science Research Study
Frequently Asked Questions**

Q: Why is my institution participating in this study? A: Your institution is a member of the VA–NC Alliance, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The social science research study is a requirement of this five-year award. Your institution has agreed to partner in the VA–NC Alliance, including the required social science research study. As a partner institution, it is your obligation to participate in this research study. The NSF requires discussion of the social science research study in the VA–NC Alliance’s annual reports. Comprehensive annual reports are required for continuation of Alliance funding. Please collaborate with colleagues in your institutional research offices to fulfill this obligation.

Q: How can I access the documentation regarding my institution’s participation in this study? A: Email Kristin Morgan (klm3q@virginia.edu) to request the NSF documentation containing the original award conditions, the proposal’s project description, and your institution’s letter of collaboration.

Q: Has this study been approved or exempted by an IRB? A: This study has been reviewed and exempted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). The researchers do not perceive more than minimal risks from involvement in this study. Student participation is completely voluntary. Student participants are free to choose not to participate and may withdraw at any time without consequence. If you have any questions about participant rights, please feel free to contact them at 804-828-0868. **This study’s ID number is: HM20013327.**

Q: Does VCU’s IRB exemption cover my institution? A: Yes, your site is listed as an institution that is a part of this study, and one whose institutional research office is expected to provide the necessary student information so that the designated research team may contact them, collect data, and analyze data for this study. Your site is listed as non-engaged in the study’s research gathering and analysis; therefore, a separate IRB does not need to be filed at your institution.

Q: What about FERPA? A: There are exceptions to FERPA to provide limited student information without prior consent for the purpose of a research study. Institutions may disclose without prior consent when conducting a study. Helpful information may be found on the following U.S. Department of Education website:

<https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/privacy-and-data-sharing>

Note: The students’ names and emails will be destroyed after the study is complete. We are not requesting student records.

Q: What about the Virginia Code § 23.1-405? A: VCU's legal counsel has confirmed that if the partner institution agrees that VCU is conducting the study for the purpose of improving instruction, then the written agreement would comply with the studies exception of FERPA, which does not implicate the Virginia law. The law applies only to the directory information exception.

In short, if your institution is a partner of the VA-NC Alliance, we have a subaward agreement, which serves as the written agreement piece. The work that we are doing in this study is with the intent of understanding the effectiveness of the programs provided to students at partner schools. The goal then is in alignment with 'improvement of instruction' for all of our partner institutions - which allows all to remain compliant while also meeting the requirements of the grant.

Q: How will students participate in this study? A: Students will be invited to participate in a voluntary survey. Then, the research team will randomly select a few student respondents to voluntarily participate in focus groups. All responses will be kept completely confidential and viewed only by the researchers.

Q: What is the purpose of this research study? A: The purpose of this research study is to examine factors impacting a student's academic success, retention, and graduation in STEM disciplines, and post-graduation career plans. The results of this research may be presented at national conferences or summarized for publications. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that individual responses are confidential, and only aggregate data will be presented.

Q: Who should I contact if I have questions about this study? A: If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Holly Jackson at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) – jacksonhd@vcu.edu.

Q: Where may I find more information about this study? A: <https://lsamp.virginia.edu/what%E2%80%99s-your-stemspiration>