

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving contracted a research team at Trinity College to conduct a review of extant scholarly literature on scholarship aid and college student supports, summarized below. The scope of work also includes an analysis of the Foundation's scholarship recipient data to assess awardees' progress toward and completion of degrees and credentials. The literature review, which includes scholarly books and journals, as well as reports from non-profit foundations and research firms, aimed to answer three key questions:

How can scholarships be designed to increase college access, persistence, and completion?

Both need-based and merit-based student aid have contingencies that reflect a traditional notion of a college student (i.e., full-time, non-delayed entry, academically high achieving in high school and college). Research on college student access, persistence and completion suggests that these traditional students are the least likely to encounter obstacles in the course of their college careers. By contrast, non-traditional students including racial and ethnic minorities, first generation students, those who delay college entry, English Language Learners (ELL), undocumented students, and those who begin postsecondary education in community colleges tend to face significant obstacles. Three recommendations emerge from this broad theme in the literature.

- The Hartford Foundation should collect more comprehensive data on the students currently served and utilize the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to track enrollment, persistence, and completion.
- The Hartford Foundation should specifically target scholarship aid at populations for which access, persistence, and completion are significant issues (i.e. students of color, first generation students, delayed entry students, undocumented students, English Language Learners, and community college students).
- Additionally, the Foundation should focus less on one-time monetary awards and more on wrap-around supports and last-mile funding (such as completion scholarships and emergency funds) for students who may be at risk of dropping out.

What supports can be tied to scholarships to increase college access, persistence, and completion?

Monetary scholarships on their own are insufficient in helping students to: successfully access college (e.g., completing college and financial aid applications), successfully transition and acclimate to college (e.g., navigating college bureaucracy and culture shock), or remain resilient until completion.

- Additional supports including financial aid application assistance, enhanced advising and college coaching both before and during enrollment, immersion in learning communities, and sustained contact with awardees (characterized by “nudges” and reminders about procedural requirements (such as college and financial aid application deadlines, placement testing implications, and course registration) may be particularly effective in increasing college access, persistence, and completion.

How can scholarships best support these goals among underrepresented college students?

Underrepresented students tend to face some similar challenges, but this group is not a monolith. Thus, we group lessons and recommendations for six underrepresented student groups of interest identified by the Foundation, which we discuss individually:

Black and Latinx Students

Black and Latinx students are more likely to be low-income and first generation than their white counterparts and have significantly lower graduation rates (black male students have the lowest completion rate of any sex or

racial/ethnic group in higher education). Black and Latinx groups tend to lack the cultural capital¹ to adjust to college, when compared with traditional (typically white) students. Financial resources limit college access for these communities, and those that do enroll often begin in community colleges where they are less likely to persist and complete.

- Renewable grants targeted to Black and Latinx students may reduce the financial burden that steers these students away from four-year universities and towards community colleges. Proactive support services (e.g. equipping families with college knowledge via advising and free courses about the college process) and college peer mentoring (e.g., programs connecting black and Latinx students to same race/ethnicity upper classmen) are also suggested in the literature to aid students in adjusting to higher education. Investment in public marketing regarding scholarships targeted to these communities could be increased in order to ensure that students know what resources are available to them.

First-Generation Students

First-generation students tend to be less academically prepared, have more modest college aspirations (stemming from teacher and family expectations), have fewer resources to pay for college, and possess less “college knowledge” regarding the application and planning processes. First-generation students also face culture shock upon enrollment that can lead to lower academic and social integration, which can affect persistence and completion.

- Interventions could include pre-enrollment services, beginning in middle school or high school, that increase “college knowledge” (e.g. counseling, tutoring, college workshops). Post-enrollment supports such as enhanced advising and mentoring and/or learning communities of peers from similar backgrounds may reduce culture shock. One particularly promising intervention among those proposed for first-generation students is an increase in number and award amounts of grants exclusively designed for this community (by contrast, loans appear to have negative effects on persistence for first-generation students). Increased grant funding has been shown to help bridge the gap between increased college tuition and stagnant federal and state aid for first-generation students.

Delayed Entry/Non-traditional college students

Students who delay college enrollment after high school are more likely to have family and educational experiences that put them at greater risk of not completing college (e.g. more likely to be parents, low-income, work outside jobs, and be less academically prepared). Students who delay entry are more likely to pursue vocational training and less likely to pursue advanced degrees; length of delay is inversely associated with the likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree.

- Because delayed enrollment has overall negative effects on graduation rates, supports that target delayed entry students may include scholarships specifically for working students that allow for part-time and non-continuous enrollment and/or that cover childcare costs.

Undocumented Students

One of the biggest barriers to college completion that undocumented students face is lack of financial aid; they are ineligible for any federal financial aid and most state aid. Some institutions also require proof of legal residence

¹ Cultural capital refers here to language, values, and behaviors that reflect students’ socioeconomic and cultural background. In the context of higher education, cultural capital can manifest in students’ sensibilities and knowledge of college structures, policies, and behavioral expectations.

for institutional scholarships or grants. Additionally, undocumented students face anxiety and fear of seeking assistance due to institutional obligation to report their status.

- Interventions could focus on providing scholarships specifically designated for undocumented students, as they are unable to receive significant aid from federal or state sources. Investment in campus support programs (with advertised non-mandated reporters) to provide guidance and coping strategies for undocumented students could also prove worthwhile.

English Language Learners

English Language Learners (ELLs) are more likely than English-proficient students to be low socioeconomic status and first-generation college students. They have significantly lower college enrollment and graduation rates than their peers. They face obstacles in the early stages of college planning and enrollment. Standardized assessments in English often misclassify ELL students, channeling them into lower level and remedial coursework.

- Access to technology rich course content that differentiates and paces instruction. The Foundation could, to support ELL students incorporate the purchase of licenses to certain self-paced course content (e.g., ALEKS, MindTap) that would facilitate ELL students' course success. Institutional best practices discussed in the literature include multiple adaptive ongoing linguistic measures to more accurately match ELL students to appropriate courses, and remedial coursework that combines language learning with academic and career-field related content to limit negative impacts of remediation.

Community College Students

Community colleges tend to have lower and slower graduation rates than 4-year universities, and are more likely to enroll students in the categories listed above. One of the largest barriers to community college student completion is their placement in remedial courses; most community college students are channeled into remedial coursework due to lack of academic preparation via high school coursework and/or performance on placement exams, yet these courses do not contribute toward their degree. Community college students placed in developmental courses make slower progress toward degrees and frequently drop out before completion.

- Interventions that could address excess developmental coursework include pre-enrollment developmental courses and/or placement test preparation, as well as advising about multiple measures placement systems. Beyond developmental coursework, research has demonstrated effectiveness of wrap-around programs for community college students. These programs streamline instruction, create blocked schedules, provide book stipends, and include access to dedicated student advisors.