BEYOND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A Webinar on Innovative Scholarships for Impact

Tuesday, July 29

PRESENTED BY

Helios Education Foundation | 20 YEARS

TODAY'S SPEAKERS

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About the Research

Beyond Financial Support is an update to and expansion of a 2017 Helios brief on innovative scholarships.

- Focuses on how institutional and private scholarship providers are **moving beyond** traditional models.
- Identifies key considerations for program design to ensure **efficiency, sustainability, and positive impacts** for the students, communities, and institutions.
- **Aims to inform** scholarship providers, foundations, and policymakers as they develop or revise programs to meet the needs of students and communities served.

Scholarships Help Improve Postsecondary Outcomes

- Despite variations in programs, scholarships produce positive effects across areas that boost postsecondary attainment, including:
  - ✓ Enrollment
  - ✓ Credit accumulation
  - ✓ Persistence
  - ✓ Completion

- Scholarships are also among the most flexible student funding sources and help fill gaps when other sources have been used.

How Intentional Design Enhances Scholarship Programs

Models that Work

Model Type	Core Design	Primary Goal	Key Features
Wraparound Support Programs	Financial support + non-academic student services	Increase persistence and completion	Academic advising, coaching, tutoring, career planning, emergency aid
Performance-Based Scholarships	Funding linked to academic benchmarks (e.g., credits, GPA)	Encourage continued enrollment & progress	Disbursed incrementally; may include required advising or workshops
Place-Based/ Promise Programs	Funding for students in defined geographic area	Expand access and foster community impact	Tuition/fee coverage; may be first- or last-dollar; often paired with outreach
Completion/Last-Mile Grants	Aid for students close to graduation	Prevent stop-outs near degree completion	Covers unmet tuition/ fees; may require academic planning or counseling

Wraparound Supports

- Connect recipients to support services that improve chances of enrolling, persisting, and graduating.
- Wraparound supports help address intersecting financial, academic, and social barriers to success.
- Supports include:
  - ✓ Academic advising
  - ✓ Tutoring and coaching
  - ✓ Career guidance
  - ✓ Basic needs support

Performance-Based

- Offer a financial award contingent on meeting designated academic milestones or benchmarks
  - ✓ Frequently require students to participate in support services

- Vary significantly in terms of eligibility, disbursement, academic benchmarks, award amounts, and wraparound supports, but generally have three common characteristics:
  - ✓ Distributed incrementally
  - ✓ Flexibility in how funds can be used
  - ✓ Does not replace existing financial aid packages

Place-based, Promise, and “Free College” Programs

- **Covers tuition and fees** at designated institutions for students who reside in a specific geographic area and meet other eligibility criteria.
- **Expand access** to postsecondary education, **foster** a college-going culture, and **strengthen** local economies.
- **Efficacy** depends significantly on design:
  - **First-dollar** programs: more expensive to administer and sustain, but most effective in making college more affordable.
  - **Last-dollar** programs: may be less effective, but much less expensive and more easily sustained.

Financial Emergency

- Emergency scholarships and grants (or microgrants) help students manage financial crises and unforeseen expenses
- Provide immediate, one-time aid to cover expenses
- Award amounts are usually small, but can be life-changing
- Go beyond scholarships, including campus vouchers for books, food, or transportation; food pantry access; or emergency loans

Retention and Completion

- Ensure financial need is not a barrier to success.
- Intended to cover known or predictable financial needs (such as small tuition and fee balances).
- Can cover small sums for those nearing completion or graduation to avoid pauses or delays.
- Incorporate wraparound services to help students stay on track.

Key Program Design Considerations

- **Students Served**
  - ✓ Who is the program intended to serve? What barriers will the program aim to address?
  - ✓ Does administrative data show the program meets the needs of its target student population?
- **Wraparound Supports**
  - ✓ What kinds of *pre-enrollment* wraparound supports can the program provide?
  - ✓ What kinds of *post-enrollment*, *ongoing* wraparound supports can the program provide to help?
- **Program Structure**
  - ✓ What restrictions does the program have on how students use the funds? What purpose do these restrictions serve? Is there a merit or performance component?
  - ✓ Does the award replace other sources of aid?

Key Program Design Considerations

- **Program Administration**
  - ✓ How can the application process be simplified to reduce complexity?
  - ✓ What steps can be taken to ensure clear understanding of award timing, amounts, and renewal?
  - ✓ Are the requirements creating a barrier for students?
  - ✓ How do changing state and federal policies impact the program, if at all?

- **Efficacy and Sustainability**
  - ✓ How will impact be measured? What metrics are most important?
  - ✓ How can the data be used to improve or retool certain components? What additional data is required?

Dr. Steven R. Gonzales

Chancellor, Maricopa Community Colleges

Maricopa Promise Program

Dr. Steven R. Gonzales
Chancellor, Maricopa Community Colleges

Maricopa Promise Program

- Created to support students with the greatest financial need
- Provides $600 per semester, for up to four consecutive semesters
- Utilizes a cohort model to provide wrap-around support services
- Creates standard eligibility and is open to eligible students across our 10 colleges
- Unifies multiple city promise programs under one, systemwide model
- Reduces administrative burden and simplifies access for students, funders, and colleges

Become a Maricopa Scholar

- Students must demonstrate a financial need, determined through FAFSA completion
- Students must be enrolled in a minimum of six credits per semester
- Students must be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program at any of our 10 colleges
- Students have completed a high school degree or equivalency, and qualify for state tuition
- Open to newly enrolled students, both traditional and non-traditional

Our Process

- Originated with the Mesa College Promise pilot program launched in 2021
- Success led to program expansion with additional local municipalities, including the cities of Peoria, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe, and the Town of Queen Creek.
- Launched a Dreamer Promise Program in 2023 for students with mixed immigration status
- Helios Education Foundation provided the initial seed funding of $1.2 million
- Funder Collaborative, made up of business and industry, government, community partners, and donors allows us to scale the program across our 10 colleges

Lessons Learned

- Funders prefer a unified approach, as it's easier to scale, administer, and measure outcomes
- A cohort model enhances student success, improving access to support services and peer connections
- Creating a standard eligibility and criteria ensures consistency across the program, allowing us to serve more students
- A combined "last-dollar" and stipend model is earlier to administer across our 10 colleges

The Maricopa Promise Program will support 500 students during the Fall 2025 semester

To date, $2.4 million has been raised to fund the Maricopa Promise Program.

Students enrolled in a promise program have a semester-to-semester retention rate of 70%—15 percentage points higher than students not receiving this type of support.

70% of promise program students are female, 83% identify as BIPOC, and 31% are single parents.

25% average annual growth in student program participation.

Approximately 70% of promise program participants are first-generation college students.

Thank You

Dr. Bridgette Cram

VP, Academic Affairs: Student Success Operations and Integrated Planning,

Florida International University

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

THE FIU LAST MILE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Bridgette Cram, Ph.D.
Vice President, Academic Affairs
Student Success Operations and Integrated Planning

Purpose

The purpose of the Last Mile Scholarship Program was to:

1. Scale the efforts that have worked for FIU thus far re: completion grants
2. Engage with a program evaluator to review our completion grant initiatives and develop an evaluation plan to track the effectiveness of the program
3. Support students through completion grants, financial wellness coaching, and other holistic wraparound supports

Completion Grants at FIU

1. Program has been in place since 2015
2. Key Partners
    - Office of Scholarships
    - Financial Wellness Coaching
    - Student Success Operations and Success
    - Enrollment Management Services (registrar, financial aid, student financials, etc…)
3. Focused on students in the last year of their studies, in academic good standing, but at risk of stopping out
4. To receive the grants, students can:
    - Apply via scholarships.fiu.edu
    - Receive outreach from our Student Success team during enrollment cancellation
    - Be referred to the program via our Emergency Aid process

Implementation for Helios Last Mile

1. Through Office of Scholarships and Financial Wellness Coaching, developed outreach plan and instructions for awarding completion grants awards to the new student population
2. Ensured alignment across key student success units (registrar, student success, career, financial aid/student financials, etc.)
3. Updated internal systems to collect additional data to conduct program evaluation

Importance of Evaluation

1. FIU has always tracked data related to completion grant initiatives, which is critical for explaining to funders why your program should continue to be invested in
2. Qualitative AND Quantitative data is key
3. This investment allowed us to expand our existing data collection to include additional last mile population and develop a robust evaluation plan
4. As a result, we were able to use this evaluation data to apply for, and be awarded, a FIPSE Post Secondary Student Success Program Grant

Results

1. 795 students received support
2. 789 (99 percent) have graduated and another 2 are on track to graduate in 2025
3. Avg. financial assistance of $1,021 per student
4. Recipients participated in over 830 financial wellness coaching sessions, 542 tutoring sessions, 196 career development events, and 116 college life coaching sessions
5. Quantitative Evaluation Summary:
    - We compared matched recipient groups on average graduation rates for 94,046 FIU students.
    - All differences in graduation rates between groups were statistically significant.
    - While comparisons showed a difference between groups, the grant program can be considered successful in absolute terms. Only 1.2%, or 32 students who received grants left college over the six years in the dataset, compared to 6.0% who left in the non-recipient group.

What We've Learned and "Food for Thought"

1. Reminder of the 'why' – we are here for our students; how can we design infrastructure and processes with them in mind?
2. Iteration is critical – how can we use what we've learned to improve processes across the university?
3. Focus on an idea that can help make something you already succeed at even better
    - You already have the infrastructure; the perfect opportunity to show success for a "proof of concept" idea

What We've Learned and "Food for Thought"

4. Create a team that spans the university
    - How can including other members of the university strengthen your program?
    - How might this create a connection to improve the student experience and further reduce barriers?
5. Focus on sustainability
    - What happens if grant funding cannot be secured to continue the project?
    - How can you make sure the positive impact of your project continues?
6. Invest in research training/outcomes assessment training for your staff
    - If you are already evaluating outcomes for your programs, designing the evaluation will be much easier.

Eduardo Mesa

Helios Last Mile Scholarship Recipient
Graduate, Florida International University

Jay Vazquez-Hidalgo

Phoenix Promise Program Scholarship Recipient
Student, South Mountain Community College