More than Dollars for Scholars: The Impact of the Dell Scholars Program on College Success

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Joint work with Stacy Kehoe, Ben Castleman & Gumilang Sahadewo
College attainment by socioeconomic status

Educational attainment by SES, class of 2002

Gaps in access.

Nearly all high SES students and three-quarters of low SES students access postsecondary education.

College attainment by socioeconomic status, class of 2002

Gaps in success. Of those who begin, about three-quarters of high SES students and half of low SES students earn a postsecondary credential.

## Supports for college degree attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINANCIAL SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV Promise</td>
<td>Average of $10K over 4 years for students meeting 3.0 GPA &amp; 21 ACT</td>
<td>+ 7–9 pp, + 4 pp (BA in 4 yrs, BA in 5 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL Student Assistance Grant</td>
<td>$1300 annual grant for low-income students to attend FL university</td>
<td>+ 4.6 pp        (BA in 6 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Scholars</td>
<td>$3500 annual grant for low-income students to attend WI public university</td>
<td>+ 5 pp          (BA in 4 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Track</td>
<td>Freshman year coaching on how to prioritize work and identify and overcome barriers to academic success</td>
<td>+ 4 pp          (BA, time unspecified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Covenant</td>
<td>Full cost of attendance at UNC-Chapel Hill + additional counseling and support services for low-income admits</td>
<td>+ 8 pp          (BA in 4 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>Intensive structural, advising, and financial support for selected low-income community college students</td>
<td>+15 pp          (AA in 2.5 yrs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• $20,000 scholarship
• Laptop computer
• Textbook support
• “…ongoing support and assistance to address the emotional, lifestyle & financial challenges that may prevent scholars from completing college. These pressures range from dealing with stress, to getting out of debt, to managing child care, and dealing with life circumstances as they arise.”
“We are more than a check. You are not alone.”

--Ninfa Murillo, Dell Scholars
Retention Officer
Data-driven case management model

Dell Scholars Program Team

Escalations

Dell Program Portal

Enrolled

Y1

Y2

Y3

Y4 ...

Support and Interventions

Dell Scholars

Registration

Onboarding

Fall term check-in

Renewal

Renewal

Renewal

Renewal

Support and Interventions

Graduation
>30k start application process

8000+ submit initial application

900 semi-finalists selected – most of these submit finalist application

300 are selected as Dell Scholars

Scholar Selection Process

Nov

Jan

Mar

Apr
3000+ scholars since 2004
First in family to go to college: 95%
Average family income: $27k

Who are the Dell Scholars?

> 600 Colleges & Universities
62% @ Public
38% @ Private

Hispanic: 79%
African American: 21%
Asian American:
White:
Other:
Research question

What is the impact of selection into the Dell Scholars Program on college access, persistence and bachelor’s degree completion within four or six years?
# Summary of impacts:
Enrollment, persistence & degree attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Less-selective institutions</th>
<th>More-selective institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate enrollment</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year persistence</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year persistence</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA attainment, in 4 years</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA attainment, in 6 years (2009-2010 only)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does the Dell Scholars Program impact students’ academic performance and financial outcomes?
Federal loan borrowing, year 1

Overall
- Comparison: 52%
- Dell Scholars: 25%

Less Selective
- Comparison: 47%
- Dell Scholars: 26%

More Selective
- Comparison: 56%
- Dell Scholars: 26%

*p<.10  **p<.05  ***p<.01
Parent PLUS loan borrowing, year 1

Overall

Less Selective

More Selective

* p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01
Private loan borrowing, year 1

![Bar chart comparing private loan borrowing between Overall, Less Selective, and More Selective institutions.

- **Overall**: Comparison 8%, Dell Scholars 3%
- **Less Selective**: Comparison 6%, Dell Scholars 3%
- **More Selective**: Comparison 10%, Dell Scholars 4%

* p<.10  ** p<.05  *** p<.01
Working 30+ hours / week, year 1

Overall

- Comparison: 7%***
- Dell Scholars: 2%

Less Selective

- Comparison: 10%
- Dell Scholars: 6%

More Selective

- Comparison: 6%***
- Dell Scholars: 0%

*p<.10  **p<.05  ***p<.01
Credit attainment

Comparison
Dell Scholars

Cumulative Credits Earned

Y1 Progress
Y2 Progress
Y3 Progress
Y4 Progress

32 credits needed
64 credits needed
96 credits needed
128 credits needed

103.0 ***
94.0

24.0 *
44.0 ***

23.0

* p<.10  ** p<.05  *** p<.01
Comparison

Dell Scholars

Cumulative GPA

Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4
---|---|---|---
2.86 | 2.94 | 2.97 | 2.97

***p<.01 **p<.05 *p<.10
Cumulative GPA, less selective institutions

Comparison | Dell Scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.97***</td>
<td>3.00***</td>
<td>2.97***</td>
<td>2.97***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.10  ** p<.05  *** p<.01
GPA < 2.0 in years 1 - 4

Overall
- Comparison: 38% ***
- Dell Scholars: 30%

Less Selective
- Comparison: 50% ***
- Dell Scholars: 35%

More Selective
- Comparison: 30%
- Dell Scholars: 26%

*p<.10  **p<.05  ***p<.01
Key program features

• **Long-term, personal commitment:**
  – Program supports students to & through college with very stable staff
  – Data-informed system through which staff identify and respond to risk for not persisting
  – Flexible, student-focused policies & practices (e.g., flexibility in fund disbursement)

• **Multifaceted:** suite of supports to address the financial, academic, social and life challenges students can face in college

• **Carrot & stick:** Scholarship aid combined with reporting requirements
Implications

• Improving college success among low-income, first-generation college goers is an important national policy challenge.

• Many efforts to improve access and/or success focus on only one dimension of difficulty students face.

• The Dell Scholars Program, which combines generous financial aid with strategic outreach and support using technology and a large student-to-staff ratio, presents a promising, scalable model to better identify and respond to the risk factors students exhibit, particularly in context of less-selective institutions.
Thanks to

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For more on this project

Full paper: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2726320