

ILLUMINATIONSSM

Highlighting important research in postsecondary education access

THE ISSUE:

Low-income students face two main obstacles to college access: insufficient financial aid and inadequate academic preparation. Many low-income students who prepare for college cannot afford to attend. Other low-income students are not prepared for postsecondary education because they did not take a rigorous high school curriculum. The key task for state and federal policy-makers is to develop a college access agenda that provides sufficient financial aid *and* encourages students in middle and high school to prepare academically for postsecondary education, regardless of income.

THE PROGRAM:

In the mid-1990s, the Indiana Department of Education implemented curriculum reform to improve the academic preparation of students in the state. These reforms provided incentives to students and school districts to expand college-preparatory (Core 40) and honors curricula. The Twenty-first Century Scholars Program began in 1990 with foundation support and has since been expanded through state funding and with federal support from Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). The program pays full in-state tuition for low-income students who

meet certain academic and behavioral standards. The principal eligibility requirement for Twenty-first Century Scholars is that each student must qualify for the federal Free and Reduced Lunch program in the eighth grade — thus the program targets low-income students.

Eligible students must pledge to:

- Graduate from an Indiana high school with at least a 2.0 grade point average.
- Apply for admission to an Indiana college.
- Apply for financial aid.
- Use no illegal drugs or alcohol.
- Commit no crime.
- Enroll full-time within two years of high school graduation.

In turn, the state pledges to:

- Pay full tuition and fees at any public college in Indiana (or a portion of tuition at independent colleges in Indiana).
- Provide additional support services such as tutoring, mentoring, college visits and activities for parents through regional service centers.
- Disseminate additional information and guidance about the value of higher education and the importance of a college-preparatory curriculum.



**Indiana
program helps
low-income
kids meet the
access challenge**

In 1995, the first group of Twenty-first Century Scholars finished high school. Since then, nearly 15,000 students have received scholarships to attend college in Indiana. According to information from 13 of the 16 regional service centers in 2000-2001, almost 32,000 students received mailings, almost 34,000 students attended workshops, and more than 3,000 students made campus visits.

THE RESEARCH:

The Indiana Education Policy Center was awarded a Lumina FoundationSM research grant to evaluate the effectiveness of the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program in promoting college access. A research team led by Edward P. St. John of Indiana University-Bloomington used a 65,000-student database created in 1995 by the Indiana Career and Postsecondary Advancement Center. The researchers merged this data with student records on state financial aid and college enrollments provided by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's Student Information System, the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana, and the Indiana Department of Education. Researchers estimated that 14,800 of these 65,000 students were eligible to participate in the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program.

Researchers used statistical analyses to estimate the effects of the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program on college enrollment and persistence for this group of students. The research model compared students who enrolled in college with a reference group that did not enroll in college. The model controlled for several factors widely documented to affect enrollment patterns — individual student characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, GPA, personal aspirations, parents' college experience) and characteristics of the high schools they at-

tended (racial/ethnic makeup, geographic locale, and the proportion of students in Core 40 or honors programs).

THE FINDINGS:

The evidence shows that ninth-grade students who participated as Twenty-first Century Scholars were significantly more likely than non-Scholars to enroll in college. Of the 2,202 Scholars in the study sample, 1,752 (nearly 80 percent) enrolled in an Indiana college

or university within one year of high school graduation. The evidence also suggests that student aspirations, student middle-school grades, the presence of parents who attended college, and residence in a town or suburb all are positively related to student enrollment in public four-year colleges and Indiana independent colleges. African-American students and students from urban and rural locales were shown to be more likely to enroll in public two-year colleges.

"Financial aid and academic preparation are both crucial to increasing access."

— Edward P. St. John,
the report's principal author

WHAT'S NEXT:

This research-based evaluation of the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program shows that states can improve college access for low-income populations by pursuing a two-pronged public policy strategy — one that promotes a college-preparatory curriculum *and* guarantees adequate financial aid. If states provide sufficient financial aid to low-income students, federal programs or private sources could provide support services that expand access for students who prepare academically.

Free copies of the full report, *Meeting the Access Challenge: Indiana's Twenty-first Century Scholars Program*, are available. To obtain a copy or to request any of Lumina Foundation's printed materials, please send an e-mail request to pgriffin@luminafoundation.org or visit the "Publications" section of the Foundation's Web site, www.luminafoundation.org.

Lumina Foundation for Education, a private, independent foundation based in Indianapolis, strives to help people achieve their potential by expanding access to an education beyond high school. Through research, grants for innovative programs and communication initiatives, Lumina Foundation addresses issues surrounding financial access, educational retention and degree or certificate attainment, and opportunities for underserved

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