

transfers. Recognizing the need for a better-educated work force, the college has made an effort to enroll students from all economic backgrounds, many of them first-generation college students, in transfer programs. Partnerships with four-year colleges have provided more opportunities for students. Programs such as Running Start allow academic-minded high-school students to earn high school and college credit at the same time, and there are roughly 20 students annually who graduate with their high school diploma and with their associate's degree simultaneously.

The majority of students at the college are enrolled in professional, technical, and vocational programs. Nursing remains the program with the largest enrollment by far, followed by computing; welding; early childhood education; medical assisting; and business administration. (http://____.edu/info/webresources/Institutional-Research/FactBook2009-10.pdf) Students in these programs are typically older, tend to be more place-bound, and feel that they need a very direct path to employment. The college has been proactive in determining the needs of the local employers in Smalltown and in developing programs to meet those needs. There is a Business and Industry Center to facilitate communication between employers and the college. The college is also expanding its emphasis on work-based learning programs designed specifically to train workers for existing positions with businesses and industries in the community.

The college has a reputation for providing excellence in higher education and relevant, responsive training to the community of Smalltown. Despite dramatic changes in the economy and in the student population, the college never loses sight of its mission to ensure students' success. Each member of the administration understands that students are at the center of all of the college's activities and the administration works individually and collectively to serve their

needs. The college leadership includes the president; the cabinet, comprised of three vice presidents; and the advancement team, comprised of the director of college relations, the director of institutional research, and the executive director of the foundation.

The researcher is the current executive director of foundation and college development and reports directly to the college president. Her role in ensuring student success includes facilitating access to the college by removing financial barriers that preclude students from pursuing higher education. The researcher raises private funds for student scholarships at the college and oversees all aspects of the scholarship program, from the initial establishment of new scholarships by private donors to the disbursement of funds to individual students.

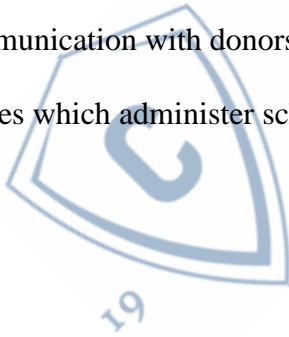
The foundation has been in existence for 35 years and the researcher is the fifth person to serve as executive director. Having just concluded her eleventh year at the college and her third year as the foundation director, the researcher is familiar with all areas of the campus and uses this knowledge in aligning the work of the foundation with the mission of the college. The researcher has long-standing positive relationships with college employees from classified and exempt staff, to faculty and administration. These relationships help the researcher to identify specific areas of need within the campus community and to develop fundraising appeals to address those needs. The researcher's years of prior work in student services and advising inform her discussions with external donors, as she is able to articulate a case for support based on a long history of providing first-hand direct service to students. With 15 years of active volunteerism and board service throughout the community of Smalltown, the researcher has also brought to the foundation existing relationships with a majority of the foundation's donor base.

The provision of financial support to students through the scholarship program is one of the primary objectives of the foundation. While community college tuition remains far lower

than tuition at four-year institutions, currently averaging about \$4,600 per year, the degree of poverty and financial hardship continues to keep college out of reach for many individuals.

(http://____.edu/Common/financial-aid/paying-for-college/tuition-and-fees/) The foundation provides an average of \$200,000 in scholarship awards to students every year, with awards to individual students averaging about \$1,000 per year. Scholarship funding remains a popular form of support to the foundation, as donors enjoy the feeling of giving direct and personal help to students in ways that have immediate impact on their ability to pursue their goals.

Although there is substantial scholarship funding available to students, and although the college currently serves more students than ever before in its 75-year history, the percentage of students applying for scholarships is low. Moreover, the internal processes involved in administering the scholarship program are cumbersome and time-consuming. In order to best serve the needs of students, to best use the gifts of donors, and to administer the scholarship program most efficiently, the researcher asks: "How can the scholarship program at the college work more efficiently to increase the number of applicants and streamline the selection and financial resolution processes?" This study will take place on the campus of the college and in communication with donors in the community and with other community college foundation offices which administer scholarship programs.



Chapter Two – The Issue

The researcher seeks to determine how the scholarship program at the college can work more efficiently to increase the number of applicants and streamline the selection and financial resolution processes.

Since assuming the position of executive director of the foundation, the researcher has witnessed unprecedented growth in enrollment and concurrent increases in tuition costs at the college. The degree of financial need among students has also increased and substantially greater amounts of federal and state aid are being distributed now compared to past years.

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Student Headcount	7,258	6,929	7,146	7,982	8,601
Headcount Change	+6.7%	-4.5%	+3.1%	+11.7%	+7.8%
Cost of Tuition	\$2,646	\$2,793	\$2,874	\$2,937	\$3,132
Tuition Change	+8.2%	+5.5%	+2.9%	+2.2%	+6.6%
Financial Aid Awards	\$7,907,327	\$8,680,722	\$10,176,593	\$12,958,302	\$19,351,681

Source: 2009-2010 Facts & Figures, pp. 11, 19, 41

With greater numbers of students and greater use of financial aid programs, the researcher has expected to see a proportional increase in the use of privately-donated funds available through the scholarship program. However, the number of applications for scholarships has not significantly increased.

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For the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years, as a result of investment losses on endowments, the overall number of scholarships available through the foundation decreased. Not only did the number of scholarships decrease, but the number of individual students receiving scholarships also decreased. The percentage of students who applied for and were awarded scholarships was very high in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, indicating that there were limited pools of qualified applicants in these years.

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
\$ of Scholarships	\$189,378	\$199,523	\$212,968	not available	\$139,488
# of Donors	71	70	72	not available	76
# of Scholarships	229	254	231	not available	101
# of Applicants	not available	not available	not available	441	493
# of Non-Duplicated Recipients	not available	not available	not available	139	78
% of Non-Duplicated Recipients Awarded	not available	not available	not available	not available	77%

Source: Scholarship Tracking and Review System; Foundation Files

Examining the issue of low numbers of scholarship applications is important for several reasons:

- Students are adversely affected by not gaining access to available funding. At Smalltown College, 31% of students are low-income, 20% are unemployed and a high percentage of students rely on financial assistance in order to afford college costs. (2009-2010 Facts & Figures, p. 9) Along with federal and state aid, foundation scholarship support helps

ensure that access remains open to students, allowing them the opportunity to pursue their academic and professional goals.

- The foundation and donors are adversely affected in that funding is not reaching the greatest possible number of students. More individuals donate to the scholarship program than to any other single foundation program, with many scholarships being established in honor of or in memory of specific individuals. Given the very personal nature of these gifts, it is important to donors that their gifts are used for the greatest possible good, and the foundation shares this desire. The foundation is completely committed to honoring the intent of donors and to the conscientious stewardship of donated funds. Selecting the best-qualified scholarship recipients relies on having the largest possible pool of applicants from which to choose. Future scholarship funding could be adversely affected were there a perception that existing scholarship funding is already sufficient to meet student need.

In addition to examining the low numbers of scholarship applications, the researcher is interested in identifying ways to streamline the process for selecting applicants and for financial resolution of scholarship funds. Currently, scholarship applications are reviewed by an internal committee comprised of faculty, exempt staff, and classified staff. Committee members review applications individually and then meet to discuss and weigh the merits of particular applicants. Recipient selections are made and the financial aid staff notifies the selected students. There are several problematic issues with the selection process:

- The size of the committee and the teaching and work schedules make it very difficult to schedule meeting times. This past year, the researcher served as a member of the committee and was concerned that selections were still being made in late August and

early September, instead of concluding in June, which is the target deadline. Late selections impact students' decisions about whether they will attend the college as well as impacting students' ability to register and pay for classes. Late selections also impact the ability of the foundation to plan its annual scholarship donor recognition event, at which donors meet their student recipients.

- The standard operating procedures for the committee are more than five years old and are completely out-dated. In 2007, the college and foundation jointly purchased an online scholarship program, Scholarship Tracking and Review System (STARS), and the procedures have not been updated to include use of this program.
- There is a lack of consistency among committee members in the scoring of scholarship applications. With an absence of an agreed-upon scoring rubric, the selection process is more subjective than is desirable.

The financial resolution process involves the foundation, the financial aid office, the cashiering office, the registration office, and the college business office. There is dissatisfaction from staff in several of these offices and a collective desire to simplify the process. Several issues contribute to the financial resolution challenges:

- Many individual staff members are involved and too much foundation staff time is consumed in working on this issue, overcomplicating a process that could be more straightforward.
- The offices involved use computer systems that are not integrated, resulting in difficulty finding necessary information and creating redundancy in work.

Given that the scholarship program is such a vital component of the overall mission of the foundation to provide support to students, the researcher looks forward with anticipation to

the insight that will be gained through this action research. Making the project all-the-more timely is the fact that there are many newly-hired staff members who are directly involved with scholarship processes. In the past year, the college has hired a new director of the business office; a new assistant director of financial aid; and a new vice president for student success, who oversees the financial aid, cashiering, and registration offices. The researcher has the support of these individuals as well as the direct support of the college president in conducting her research. The researcher will employ surveys, interviews, and observations, which will involve students, staff, and colleagues at other colleges.

It is the researcher's bias that the low numbers of scholarship applications is due to a lack of effective marketing of scholarship opportunities, misconceptions that students have about scholarships, and a lack of assistance to students and staff in becoming familiar with and using the STARS online scholarship program. It is the researcher's further bias that the inefficiency of the selection and financial resolution processes are primarily due to a lack of current, clear and consistence policies; having too many individuals involved with the processes; and the use of multiple computer systems that are not integrated with one another.

Literature Review

The need for a college degree is becoming increasingly important for ensuring future economic security (Rapp, 2005) and enrollment is soaring at two-year colleges across the nation. Community colleges enroll 44% of the country's undergraduates and enrollments have increased more than 25% over the last five years. However, as the numbers of students rise, community colleges still receive only nine percent of all federal campus-based financial aid funding. Just 27% of total federal, state, and local revenues for public degree-granting institutions go to community colleges. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010)

With financial barriers remaining a primary obstacle to students' pursuit of higher education, privately-funded scholarship support creates vital opportunities for individuals to achieve their educational and professional goals. Raising scholarship funds is a core function of community college foundations across the county. The good news is that education remains among the highest categories to which philanthropists donate. The bad news is that community colleges raise less than 5 percent of the philanthropic funds raised by four-year institutions. (Council for Aid to Education, 2009). Far more public funds are spent to educate each four-year college student than each community college student and private support seems to follow suit.

Scholarship programs provide a conduit through which to channel private funding to students that best qualify for need-based or merit-based financial assistance. Perhaps at no other time in the history of two-year colleges has it been more important to have an efficient system in place to funnel limited resources to an ever-increasing student population. This research is undertaken to explore methods of improving the efficiency of a community college scholarship program through eliciting ample student applications and streamlining the recipient selection and financial resolution processes.

Application

As critical as it is for scholarship programs to have sufficient funding with which to help students, it is equally critical to have sufficient numbers of qualified applicants to receive the funding. While it sounds counter-intuitive for students to "leave money on the table," this scenario is not uncommon. A recent article in *Community College Week* (2009, p. 10) describes this situation under the heading "College scholarships abound, but applicants grow scarce." The article relates the plight of three donating organizations with a lack of applicants for their

scholarships: “Lots of times a lot of these scholarships just sit there.” The researcher has encountered similar situations on her campus over the past few years.

With privately-funded scholarships, criteria are typically determined by the donor. Ideally, criteria are defined broadly enough to ensure that many students would be viable candidates for application. When criteria are defined too narrowly, it becomes difficult to find a qualified applicant to whom to make the award. Information from Jackson County, Oregon, reported in *Community College Week* (2009) cites scholarship availabilities for horticulture students that have been awarded just three out of seven years, with two additional scholarships having zero applicants last year. When the horticulture scholarship criteria were broadened to include any Oregon graduate, the scholarship was able to be awarded. The scenario of having inadequate numbers of applicants can have detrimental consequences for future funding if a perception is formed that there is so much scholarship money available that some goes unused. It is important to establish criteria, at the outset, that significant numbers of the student population could meet.

In order for scholarships to have their intended effect of providing access to students in their pursuit of higher education, students first need to be aware of the existence and availability of scholarships. Research indicates that information deficits, particularly among under-represented groups, are among the key barriers to access to higher education. In studies conducted by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) in 2006, 94% of Latino parents agreed that having a college education was “very important,” while 51% of Latino parents could not identify a single source of financial aid.

This study further identified specific challenges that students face that make the scholarship application process onerous and time consuming, including:

- Outdated scholarship information – a large majority of institutions list scholarship opportunities that are no longer funded or that have incorrect contact information.
- Varying Requirements and Deadlines – although applications often request the same basic information, students often have to compile a large, individualized packet for each scholarship-granting organization.
- No online submission capabilities – applications available only on paper add to the complexity of tracking multiple submissions.
- A passive information process – students are dissuaded by a lack of institutionalized effort to proactively disseminate information (p. 6).

Research by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in 2001, funded by the Ford Foundation, also examines tactics to increase access by women and other under-represented groups to scholarship programs. This research reinforces the need, as discussed previously, for scholarship programs to be as flexible as possible within the limitations of award terms. The research also identifies the following effective recruitment strategies employed by successful scholarship programs:

- Allow sufficient time for potential candidates to learn about scholarships and prepare for application.
- Engage in broad initial outreach efforts that go beyond the usual lists of agencies, institutions, and individuals who are routinely sent scholarship information.
- Use mass media including internet, TV, radio, and newspapers in the outreach plan.
- Include visuals of under-represented groups in publicity materials.
- Use careful and appropriate wording which sends a message of encouragement and inclusion to under-represented groups (pp. 4-5).

- Encourage alumni from under-represented groups to serve as recruiters and ambassadors for the scholarship program to other potential recipients from these groups.

Research repeatedly underscores the imperative for scholarship programs to provide students proactively with broad access to scholarship information through a variety of means and to facilitate and streamline the application processes. “Even those students with high ambitions and high implicit valuation of college education are discouraged by relatively minor hurdles in the application process” (Simplifying Student Aid, 2009, p. 5).

Furthermore, many myths and misconceptions abound about scholarships – what it takes to qualify, what is involved in applying, and what is required of recipients. The researcher has learned from faculty on her campus that some students intentionally avoid applying for scholarships because of perceived negative ramifications. There are concerns about how the receipt of private scholarship funds could impact a student’s taxable income and how it could be a factor in determining eligibility for other types of aid. In the researcher’s opinion, rumors shared among students may preclude applications from being submitted.

Interestingly, and unfortunately, school personnel tasked with disseminating scholarship information to students are often unwittingly part of the problem. Research indicates a potentially detrimental gap between college scholarship program practices and the advice given to students by their high school counselors. (Rapp, 2005) A survey administered to both high school counselors and college scholarship personnel indicates a misalignment between the counselors’ perceptions about the factors that influence scholarship awarding and college practices. The survey measured the importance placed on academics, personal qualities, and chance variables in awarding scholarships. Counselors placed statistically significantly more importance on personal qualities and chance variables in the scholarship awarding process than

college personnel. This type of discrepancy can lead to inaccurate advising with harmful effects on students.

Selection

In addition to the elements surrounding application, there are critical factors that effective scholarship programs must consider in the selection process. Institutions vary widely in the methods they employ to select scholarship recipients, but these methods bear thoughtful consideration as they impact the integrity and fairness of the overall program.

On the researcher's campus, students apply for scholarships through an online Scholarship Tracking and Review System (STARS) program that filters students based on the students' responses to a series of questions and directs them to the scholarships for which they qualify. The system is designed to ensure that students are considered for every scholarship for which they meet the criteria, through the submission of just a single application. This gives applicants broad access to available funds, but it also has ramifications for selection.

Broad and flexible scholarship criteria have been described previously as being preferable in garnering applications, as compared to narrow criteria which may result in few if any applications. Criteria have an impact on selection as well as application. The TRPI study (2006) examined the pros and cons of standardizing the scholarship application to facilitate the selection process. Half the respondents agreed that a standardized application would be beneficial to students, but standardization would have implications for staff involved in the selection process. Some respondents felt it would facilitate selection while others felt that standardization would ignore the specific needs of any particular scholarship.

Gearon (2010) describes the importance, in the competitive environment of private scholarships, of making the correct match of scholarship and recipient. This critical task falls to

the committee or panel designated to make scholarship selections. Research (IIE, 2010, pp. 6-8) indicates that the following seven elements are among the best practices used by selection panels in scholarship programs:

- Inform potential selection panel members that the program is committed to a policy of fairness, equity, and inclusiveness and ensure that members agree to abide by such a policy.

This has been viewed to be critical to the integrity of scholarship programs and it supports the goal of programs that are seriously working toward greater participation in the scholarship process from all students, including those from under-represented groups.

- Create a selection panels that is as diverse a group as possible.

A diverse pool of applicants is best served by a selection panel that is also diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, as well as expertise in relevant educational and professional fields.

- Minimize the impact of biases held by selection panels.

Programs should organize the applications so that non-essential and non-related student information can be kept separate from professional/educational credentials and personal essays, letting reviewers form their first impressions without knowledge of extraneous information that could influence their decision-making.

- Develop and apply a clear and consistent grading system for ranking applications.

A pre-established range of scores applied to applications increases the efficiency of the work of selection panels. While programs committed to affirmative action may build in flexibility in applying grading systems to under-represented groups, several case studies suggest

that when the applicant pool is sufficiently inclusive, nontraditional candidates need only fair treatment, not preferential treatment, to succeed.

- Be even-handed in disqualifying applicants who fail to obey the rules of application, i.e. observation of deadlines, completeness of answers, including all requested material.

Rather than adversely impact under-represented groups, the IIE study found evidence that these candidates benefit when less careful or serious applications from traditional candidates are eliminated.

- Brief selection panels not only about what constitutes criteria for selection, but what will be considered unacceptable criteria for inclusion or rejection.

This has been an issue of concern to the researcher on her campus, finding that selection committee members frequently consider criteria that should not be considered under the original terms of the scholarship set forth by donors. Primarily, the selection committee frequently applies a standard of financial need to applications, even when need is not a criteria for the scholarship. Similarly, relationships or familiarity that selection committee members have with students on campus can play a significant, though perhaps inappropriate, role in the decision-making process.

- Monitor the work of selection panels on an ongoing basis to assure that the commitment to fairness is being honored.

Transparency and accountability are critical to scholarship programs reliant on privately donated funds. Assessment is vital in a climate of diminishing resources and informs decision-making in the administration of scholarship programs. Maintaining detailed statistics and making comparisons over time can help selection panels determine if the selection process is screening in

or screening out particular groups of candidates and measures can be enacted to address fairness and equity in the process.

Awareness of a student's overall financial situation, including knowing the amount of expected federal and state aid, is also an important factor in selecting recipients for need-based scholarships (Simplifying Student Aid, 2009). Research by Ramsey and Gorgol (2010) also emphasizes the importance of addressing all aspects of a student's financial need and available resources. They further assert that it is important to provide early guarantees to students of financial aid or scholarship support.

Early knowledge of expected amounts of financial support influence students' decisions about which college to attend, whether to attend at all, and the credit levels for which they would be able to enroll. Just as the IIE research reflected the importance of allowing sufficient time for students to learn about and apply for scholarships, Ramsey and Gorgol's research reflects the importance of informing students early of their awards and allowing them adequate time to plan and prepare for college enrollment.

Based on this research, efficient scholarship program practices should include providing scholarship administrators with comprehensive information about students' federal and state financial aid in order to make better informed decisions about potential scholarship recipients and to make the decisions in a timely manner that best serves the interests of students.

Finance

Along with coordinating and disseminating financial aid and scholarship information among the parties involved with scholarship programs there are additional financial topics of importance. Finance-related elements of effective community college scholarship programs also include the manner in which funds are disbursed to students as well as the internal reconciliation processes that take place among various college offices involved with scholarship program operations.

In her community college foundation work, the researcher has found that there is frequently concern among private scholarship donors that funds be used strictly for tuition and fees – expenses that can be controlled and monitored by the college. There is a perception, not always untrue, that students might use funds for purposes unrelated to their pursuit of education. It is important to remember, however, that there are a myriad of expenses aside from tuition that students must consider when determining whether or not they can afford to attend college. Books, transportation, and living expenses add thousands of dollars more to college costs. (College Board, 2008)

Attending college often means that a student must cut back on work hours and pay for child care or other expenses. Research studies of performance-based community college scholarship programs in Louisiana and Ohio indicate that making direct payment to students, rather than applying funds toward tuition and fee expenses, permits students to use the funds for their most pressing needs, whether those needs are books, car repairs, child care, or other financial challenges that may disrupt their studies. (Cha & Patel, 2010)

The research further reveals that the design of the payment structure has an effect on student achievement and persistence. Disbursement schedules for scholarships vary greatly by institution, and may or may not be based on factors related to a student's overall success. At the researcher's campus, disbursement schedules have been determined strictly by the amount of the scholarship award. Annual awards of \$1000.00 or more are disbursed in three equal quarterly installments and awards less than \$1000.00 are disbursed in a single lump-sum payment, typically made in the fall quarter. Students are required to maintain good academic standing as defined by the college, and they must remain in compliance with scholarship eligibility criteria in order to continue to receive continued funding. This approach denies continued funding to students who fall out of compliance, whereas other programs incentivize student achievement through a tiered payment system designed to encourage success.

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In the Louisiana study, scholarships of up to \$2000.00 were paid in increments based on each recipient's success in meeting specific benchmarks:

- \$250 upon enrollment (at least half-time, defined as six or more credit hours),
- \$250 after midterms, contingent upon staying enrolled at least half-time and earning a "C" average or better,
- \$500 upon completion of courses, with a "C" average or better across courses overall (p. 6).

This approach was shown to substantially improve student's grades, accumulation of credits, and term-to-term persistence. (Cha & Patel, 2010)

An area of great interest to the researcher is the streamlining of the processes involved in ultimately reconciling the amount of scholarship support disbursed to students with the amounts initially funded by donors. The researcher believes that considerable inefficiencies exist between the financial aid office, the admissions office, the business office, and the development office that are uneconomical and drain time and resources. Particularly in the current economic and educational climate, practices that are not cost-effective must be closely scrutinized and solutions developed to increase efficiency.

The processes involved with literally tracking and reconciling money from the moment it is received by the organization to the moment it is disbursed to a student are unique to every scholarship-granting organization and the researcher has found little literature addressing the topic specifically. Processes vary from institution to institution and financial aid laws also vary from state to state.

Even on a single campus there can be a myriad of obstacles to efficiency, such as the lack of centralized scholarship program management; lack of comprehensive written policies and procedures; the use of separate, non-integrated computer systems across campus; and a lack of communication and coordination among various offices. Through this research project, the

researcher hopes to add to the limited knowledge about financial resolution practices of scholarship-granting organizations.

Summary

Earning a college degree is critical for success in the current economic climate and private scholarship support plays an important role for students in times where public funding of education is diminishing. In order to see that philanthropic dollars serve the greatest good, scholarship programs must operate with the greatest possible efficiency.

Research about application, selection, and financial resolution brings to light many “best practices” as well as pitfalls to avoid in scholarship program operations. The more depth and breadth in the scholarship applicant pool, the greater the likelihood that the most worthy candidates will be selected as scholarship recipients. This, in turn, can generate positive feedback to donors upon whom continued scholarship funding depends.

The practices of scholarship selection panels have significant impact on students’ access to education and fairness and equity are critical attributes of effective selection processes. Research has shown that scholarship recipients may become ambassadors who are instrumental in encouraging more students to apply, helping to build a robust program.

The manner and method that funds are disbursed to students also have direct implications for student success. These and other elements should be comprehensively examined in determining a course of action for the creation of an efficient scholarship program.

Chapter Three – The Goal of the Research Project

The goal of this action research project is to increase the efficiency of a community college scholarship program through increasing the number of qualified scholarship applications, streamlining the recipient selection process, and streamlining the financial resolution process. This research project is undertaken with the full support and permission of the college president, as well as the vice president for student success, who supervises the financial aid office and other offices involved with scholarship processes.

The literature review in the preceding chapter discusses many factors associated with scholarship applications as well as issues related to recipient selection and disbursement and reconciliation of scholarship funds. The researcher seeks to improve the operation of her foundation's scholarship program to the benefit of students, campus staff, and scholarship donors in her community. With increased efficiency in the scholarship program, students will have broader access to donated scholarship funds to support their educational and career goals, staff will expend less time and fewer resources in administering the program, and donors' funds will be used to their best effect in improving the lives and supporting the future success of students at the college.

In conducting this action research project, the researcher will employ four methods of data collection:

- Survey,
- Interview,
- Observation, and
- Examination of institutional records.

Survey

The researcher will employ surveys to collect information from students, from staff, and from other community college foundation directors who administer scholarship programs. Student surveys will focus on students' knowledge of scholarship application processes and their actions related to applying for scholarships. Staff surveys will focus on the perceived efficacy of the existing application, selection, and financial resolution processes and will solicit suggestions for improvement and revisions of processes. External foundation surveys will be administered to voluntary participants at community colleges across the state to increase knowledge about practices at other institutions that might inform future policy and procedural changes at the research site.

Interview

The researcher will supplement information gathered through surveys by conducting face-to-face and telephone interviews with a subset of individuals about their personal experiences with the scholarship program. Interview subjects will include students, college staff, and foundation staff at other state community colleges. Interview questions will include those related to students' experiences accessing information and applying for scholarships, staff experiences in serving on scholarship selection panels and in reconciling scholarship finances, and external foundation staff experiences in administering scholarship programs.

Observation

The researcher will be a nonparticipant observer in student financial aid workshops during which students will be provided with information about scholarship application processes. The researcher will observe student engagement in workshop activities, questions or concerns expressed by students, and subsequent student action or inaction in applying for scholarships.

The researcher will be an active participant observer in serving on the financial aid committee responsible for scholarship recipient selection. The researcher is currently a member of this committee and has existing relationships and positive rapport with committee members. The researcher will record descriptive information about committee activities and reactions to observations and experiences during committee meetings.

Examination of Institutional Records

The researcher will examine records including those from the Scholarship Tracking and Review System (STARS), foundation scholarship files, and internal college financial records.

The STARS system will provide information related to the number scholarship applications received as well as the status of the applications, application review notes recorded by scholarship selection committee members, and information about scholarship recipients. Foundation files and college financial records will be used to gather information about disbursement of scholarship funds to students and reconciliation of the scholarship billing submitted by the college for payment by the foundation.

In summary, the researcher will compile and analyze the collected data to determine the effectiveness of various strategies employed to increase student scholarship applications, and strategies employed to streamline recipient selection and financial resolution processes.

The goals in conducting this research project include achieving the following outcomes:

Application Goals:

- A 10% increase in scholarship applications, measured through examination of records;
- Identification of most effective scholarship marketing strategies, measured through survey and interview; and

- Identification of reasons that students do not apply for scholarships, measured through survey and interview.

Selection Goals:

- A 10% increase in staff satisfaction, measured through survey and interview, and
- A 10% decrease in multiple scholarship awards given to single individuals, measured through examination of records.

Finance Goals:

- A 10% increase in staff satisfaction, measured through survey and interview.

The outcomes of the research project will inform decision-making and result in improvements to scholarship program management and will better serve the students, donors, and campus staff involved with the scholarship program.



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Chapter Four – The Action Plan

The goal of this action research project is to increase the efficiency of the community college scholarship program at the research site through increasing the number of scholarship applications, and streamlining the recipient selection and financial resolution processes.

Possible Solutions

Application Solutions

The literature review detailed previously indicates that a lack of applications for privately-funded scholarships is not an uncommon phenomenon in higher education. Pierce, 2004, as well as Johnson, 2007, and Cochran and Kubitz, 2010, all found that a lack of awareness and proactive dissemination of scholarship information to students and parents created impediments for students on a college-bound path.

Rapp, 2005, found that proper advising of students seeking scholarship awards is a solution to increasing applications. Rhodes and Rosqueta, 2008, similarly suggested that providing a range of support services to students helped them successfully navigate the scholarship process. The researcher considers the provision of advising and services to potential scholarship applicants an excellent solution. The research site already mandates advising for degree and certificate-seeking students and provides a myriad of services that support students' academic and personal achievement. The researcher sees potential to increase scholarship applications by enlisting current staff and faculty advisors to proactively assist students with the application process.

The Institute of International Education (IIE), 2001, identified further obstacles that potential applicants encounter, including outdated scholarship information, varying requirements

and deadlines, lack of online submission capabilities, and a passive information process on the part of the scholarship granting institutions.

Possible solutions put forth by IIE to increase applications include allowing several months time for candidates to learn about and prepare for application, engaging in broad outreach efforts, using mass media, including visuals of under-represented groups in publicity materials, using encouraging and inclusive wording in materials, and encouraging former recipients to serve as recruiters and ambassadors for the scholarship program.

The researcher wholeheartedly accepts this solution, with some necessary modification. It is the researcher's opinion that there is insufficient time within the scope of this research project to optimally teach and prepare students for application. Rather than being able to provide a broader window of time to students to apply for scholarships during this project, the time frame is actually shorter by several weeks than it has been in the past. This is due primarily to technical issues with the online scholarship application system as well as staffing and time constraints in the offices tasked with updating and maintaining this system at the research site. The researcher will need to work within a pre-determined and shortened time frame to inform students about the scholarship application process.

Similarly, the researcher fully supports the idea of using student ambassadors and recognizes the benefits of peer-to-peer communication. However, additional time would be required to fully optimize the solution of using former scholarship recipients to recruit future applicants. She will employ students in scholarship recruitment activities to the greatest extent possible in the scope of the project, including at scholarship workshops and in other marketing strategies.

The researcher enthusiastically accepts the solution of engaging in broad outreach efforts using a variety of media and messaging to increase scholarship applications. She has had ongoing conversations with the college relations and marketing offices as well as the outreach specialist and others at the research site to develop a comprehensive scholarship marketing plan and looks forward to implementing the strategies.

Selection Solutions

In the researcher's opinion, the recipient selection process for need-based scholarships is hampered by the lack of knowledge of students' federal and state financial aid awards at the time that selections are being made. Ramsey and Gorgol, 2010, found that timely determination of financial aid awards and early guarantees of scholarship assistance to students was a solution to reducing barriers to college for low-income individuals. Simplifying Student Aid, 2009, similarly emphasized the importance of providing early information about the amounts of expected federal and state aid in order to help students plan and prepare for college enrollment.

This solution is reluctantly rejected by the researcher, as the researcher is informed by financial aid staff that it is currently not feasible at the research site to make a determination about a student's federal financial aid award prior to the selection of scholarship recipients. The selection panel must use tax information provided by the student in conjunction with federal poverty guidelines and college policies to determine a student's financial need. The possibility, and often probability, that a student will receive federal or state aid can undermine the intent of private scholarship donors to provide "last dollar" support to students to address need unmet through other avenues of support.

Other obstacles in the selection process include potential biases held by selection panel members, lack of clear and consistently applied grading systems for ranking applications, and a

lack of shared understanding among panel members of what constitutes criteria for selection as well as that which is considered unacceptable criteria for inclusion or rejection.

Possible solutions to these issues identified by IIE are keeping extraneous, non-related student information separate from the information needed by reviewers in their decision-making. The researcher accepts this solution and believes it will minimize the potential for bias and support the fairness of the review process.

The researcher also fully supports the solution of applying clear and consistent grading systems to streamline the selection process. Concerted efforts have already been undertaken by members of the selection committee to define such systems and the researcher anticipates support from the committee to making further improvements to these systems. Subsumed in a clear and consistent grading system is the proper consideration of acceptable criteria for inclusion or rejection of a scholarship application. The researcher, thus, accepts this third solution as well.

Finance Solutions

Cha and Patel, 2010, found that disbursing scholarship funds to students based on each student's success in meeting key benchmarks resulted in substantial improvements in recipients' grades, progress, and persistence. In the researcher's opinion, this method of disbursement would not only simplify the financial resolution process, but also encourage student persistence and achievement. This system would eliminate the risk of making payments to students who could potentially withdraw or drop out of classes. It would also provide a safeguard that scholarship funds were being used solely for their designated purpose. However, in the Cha and Patel study, this type of disbursement system was used for merit or performance-based scholarships only, not for scholarships based on financial need. At the researcher's college, disbursements currently

follow a uniform process, irrespective of financial need or other criteria. Creating distinct disbursement processes for various categories of scholarships would be cumbersome and would exacerbate the current inefficiencies at the research site. Employing this disbursement method is therefore rejected by the researcher in the scope of this research project.

The overarching financial inefficiencies that the researcher perceives at the research site concern the complexity of the existing processes, the number of offices and individual staff members involved, redundancy of work, non-integrated computer systems, and a lack of current comprehensive written procedures. The researcher found no existing literature directly addressing these issues due, in her opinion, to financial reconciliation practices that vary greatly among scholarship granting institutions. The researcher plans to seek out solutions through collaboration among staff at the research site as well as through practices used by other community college scholarship programs.

Action Plan

January 2011

Application:

- Develop and implement scholarship marketing strategies, including website information, printed materials, scholarship workshops on campus, scholarship information to high schools, emails and phone calls to students.
- Observe scholarship workshops

Selection:

- Identify survey and interview participants from research site staff and external foundation staff.
- Construct survey and interview questions.

Finance:

- Identify survey and interview participants from research site staff and external foundation staff.
- Construct survey and interview questions.

February 2011

Application:

- Scholarship applications open February 11th.
- Continue marketing strategies.
- Observe scholarship workshops.
- Examine records and record data related to applications in STARS.
- Construct survey and interview questions and identify student participants.

Selection:

- Conduct surveys and interviews with campus staff and external participants.

Finance:

- Conduct surveys and interviews with campus staff and external participants.

March 2011

Application:

- Continue marketing strategies.
- Examine records and record data related to applications in STARS.
- Conduct surveys and interviews with students.

Selection:

- Compile survey and interview results and review with selection committee.

Finance:

- Compile survey and interview results and review with staff.

April 2011

Application:

- Applications close April 15th.
- Examine records and record data related to applications in STARS.
- Conduct follow-up survey and interviews.
- Compile and analyze responses.

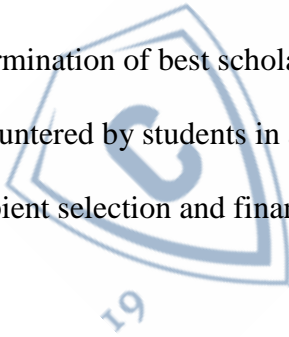
Selection:

- Conduct follow-up survey and interviews.
- Compile and analyze responses.

Finance:

- Conduct follow-up survey and interviews.
- Compile and analyze responses.

Data collection will be completed by mid- to late April, after which data will be analyzed to determine the success of the project relative to the goals of increased scholarship applications, determination of best scholarship marketing strategies, determination of primary obstacles encountered by students in applying for scholarships, and employee satisfaction with scholarship recipient selection and financial resolution processes.



Chapter Five – Results and Next Steps

The goal of this research was to increase the efficiency of the community college scholarship program at the research site through increasing the number of scholarship applications and streamlining the recipient selection and financial resolution processes.

Some modifications were made to the original research plan. The scholarship application and selection timeline at the research site did not allow for the selection committee to meet during the period of this action research. Interview responses will inform the pending process.

The researcher initially planned to interview colleagues who administer scholarship programs through other community college foundations. She sought, specifically, to speak with colleagues who use the STARS online scholarship system, which is used at the research site, in order to obtain information most relevant to the research goals. As there was no effective means of identifying this subset of scholarship program administrators to interview, the researcher opted to instead to survey the listserv of the Council for Resource Development (CRD), a national membership organization of community college development officers to which the researcher belongs.

It was deemed unnecessary to survey external foundation colleagues on the issue of financial resolution. These processes vary quite broadly among colleges and among different states. The research site is restricted to using a state system without flexibility to incorporate significant changes. Rather than seek external information about financial processes, the researcher focused on examining internal processes to try to identify areas for increased efficiency.

Another change that occurred during the research period was the reassignment of scholarship responsibilities from the financial aid office to the foundation. This included the

development of print materials, website content, scholarship application instructions, and resource information for students. This change was predicated on the idea that since the foundation is the office that establishes the college's scholarships, has first-hand knowledge of criteria, and has ultimate stewardship responsibility, it is more efficient for this office to generate information directly than to pass it along to another office, which results in the ongoing need for clarification and correction of information. The change establishes a centralized source for scholarship information with the intent of providing consistent up-to-date information to students and other constituencies.

The research focused on three areas related to scholarship program administration: application, selection, and finance. The research methodology included survey, interview, observation, and examination of institutional records. The following specific methods were used for the three focus areas.

Application

The researcher constructed and administered three separate student surveys to learn about students experiences with, and attitudes about, the existing scholarship processes at the research site. Survey 1 was administered to students who had previously applied for and received scholarships. Survey 2 was administered to students who previously applied but did not receive scholarships. Survey three was administered to students who had not previously applied for scholarships.

The researcher constructed and distributed a survey to the CRD listserv to learn about scholarship processes at other community colleges. The survey included questions related to application, selection, and general program management. The researcher was a non-participant

observer at a scholarship workshop held on campus, designed to inform students about the scholarship application process.

Selection

The survey to the CRD listserv, referenced above, provided information related to scholarship recipient selection process at other community colleges.

The researcher conducted personal interviews with five of the six scholarship committee members on campus to learn about their experiences with and ideas about the current recipient selection processes at the research site.

Finance

The researcher conducted personal interviews with staff in the campus offices that participate in the disbursement of scholarship funds to students including Financial Aid, Cashiering, Business Office, and Foundation. The researcher observed as staff in each area demonstrated the actions they take in their part of the overall finance process. The researcher also examined records in each of these offices related to the disbursement of scholarship funds and financial reconciliation.

Results for Application

The researcher developed three separate student surveys to ascertain differences in students' experiences with the scholarship process. The researcher was interested to learn whether perceptions of the process varied among three groups:

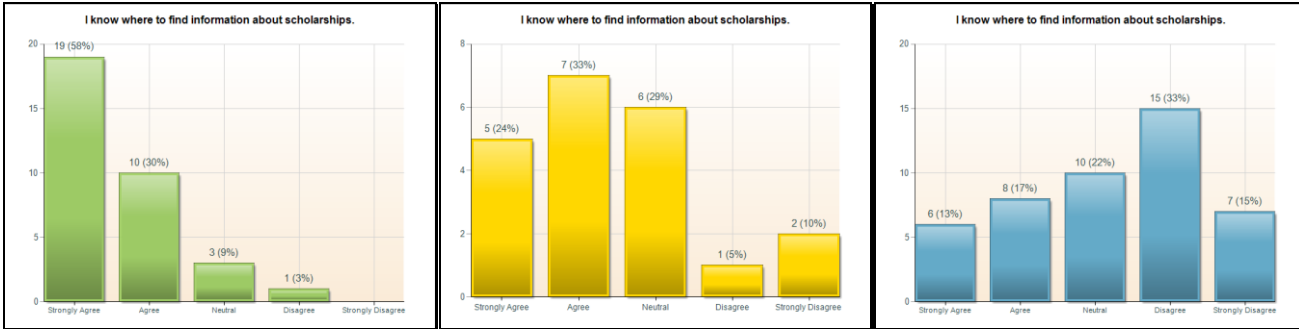
- students who applied and received scholarships,
- students who applied and did not receive scholarships, and
- students who did not apply for scholarships.

The charts below show responses to identical survey questions answer by all three student groups.

Survey 1: Applied / Received

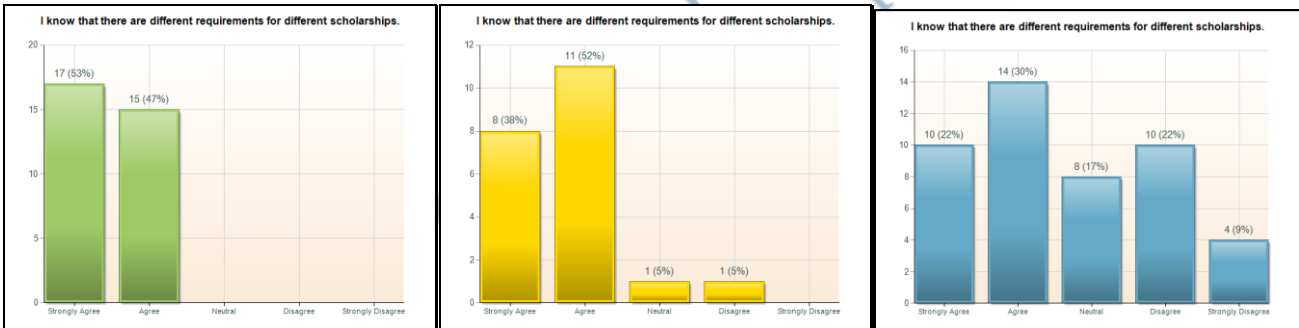
Survey 2: Applied/ Did Not Receive

Survey 3: Did Not Apply



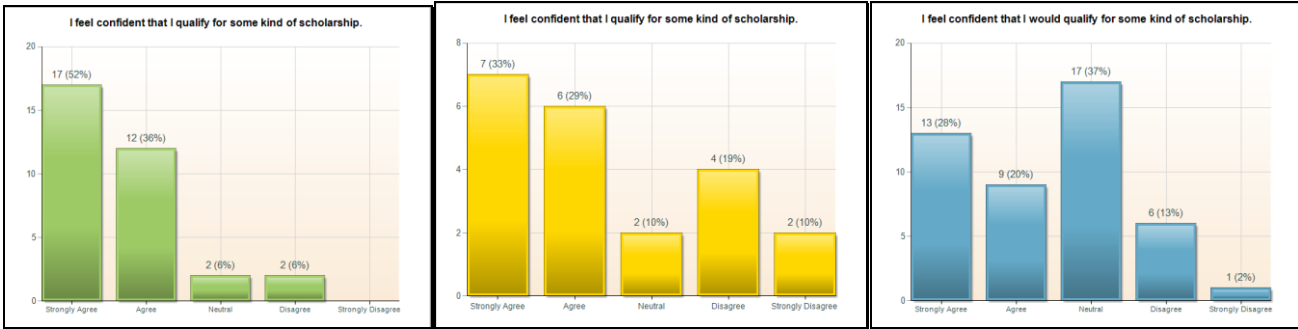
Item A: I know where to find information about scholarships.

Survey 1 respondents overwhelmingly felt they knew where to find information. Survey 2 respondents, despite having applied, felt less knowledgeable about where to find information. Survey 3 respondents felt the least knowledgeable about where to find information.



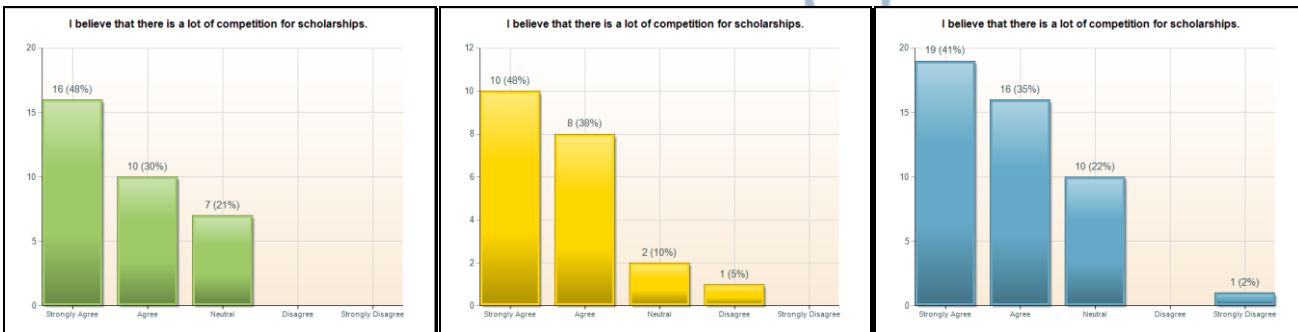
Item B: I know that there are different requirements for different scholarships.

Survey 1 respondents all agreed or strongly agreed that they knew about differences in scholarship criteria. Results were very similar in Survey 2, with 90% of respondents agreeing. Only about 50% of Survey 3 respondents felt knowledgeable on this topic.



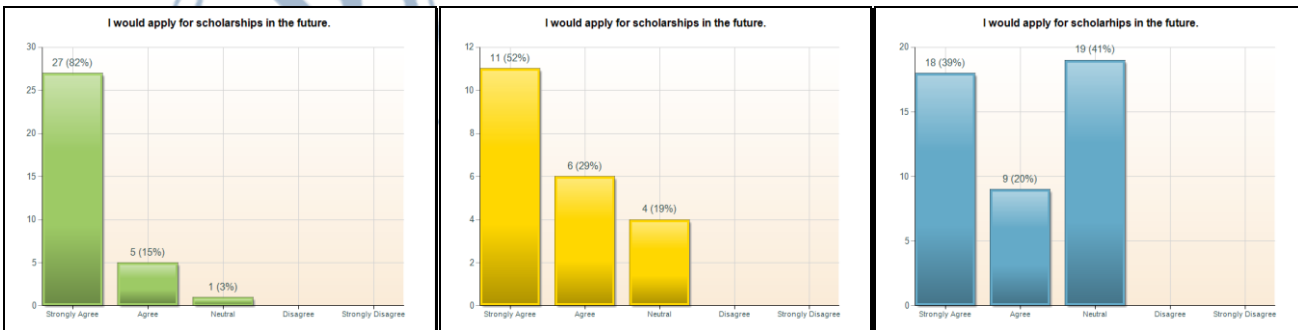
Item C: I feel confident that I qualify for some kind of scholarship.

Survey 1 respondents overwhelmingly felt that they qualified for scholarships. In Survey 2, 62% felt confident, while 29% did not feel confident that they qualified. Of Survey 3 respondents, 48% felt confident, and 15% did not feel confident that they qualified for scholarships.



Item D: I believe that there is a lot of competition for scholarships.

Results for this item indicate that respondents for all three surveys felt similarly that there is a lot of competition for scholarships. Agreement on Surveys 1, 2, and 3, was 78%, 85%, and 76% respectively.



Item E: I would apply for scholarships in the future.

Results for this item show that 97% of Survey 1 respondents would apply in the future, 81% of Survey 2 respondents would apply in the future, and 59% of Survey 3 respondents would apply for scholarships in the future.

The student survey data reveals certain patterns. For all five identical survey items, Survey 1 respondents, who applied and received scholarships, felt the most knowledgeable and confident about scholarship processes by far, and were also the most likely to apply again in the future, with 97% responding in the affirmative.

Survey 2 respondents, who applied but did not receive scholarships, felt significantly less knowledgeable about where to find information and far less confident that they would qualify for scholarships. They were also less likely to apply again in the future, with 80% responding in the affirmative.

Survey 3 respondents, who did not apply for scholarships, felt the least knowledgeable and confident about scholarship processes, and were the least likely to apply in the future. Only 30% agreed that they knew where to find information about scholarships, and only 59% indicated that they would apply in the future.

Survey 3 respondents were markedly less knowledgeable about differences in scholarship criteria than respondents to the other surveys.

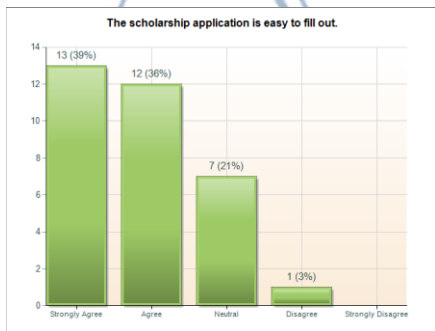
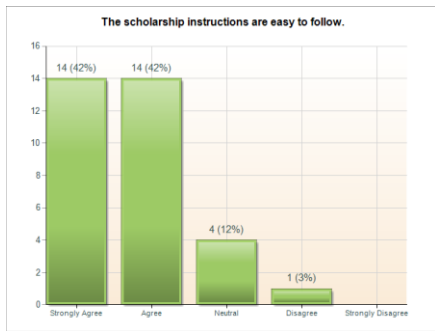
The researcher was not surprised to learn that scholarship applicants who received scholarships felt the most knowledgeable and confident about scholarship application, and were the most likely to apply again in the future. The efforts they put forth in applying were rewarded by receiving a scholarship, which reinforced their assessment of their degree of knowledge about the process and confidence in qualifying for scholarships. It was similarly unsurprising that students who did not receive scholarships felt less knowledgeable, confident, and likely to apply

again; and those students who had not applied for scholarships felt the least knowledgeable, confident, and likely to apply in the future.

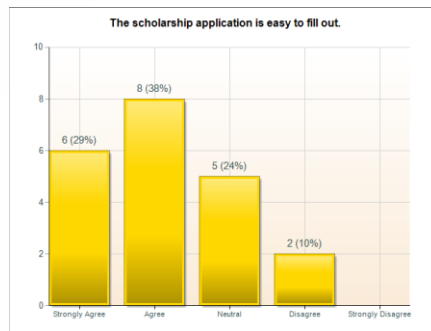
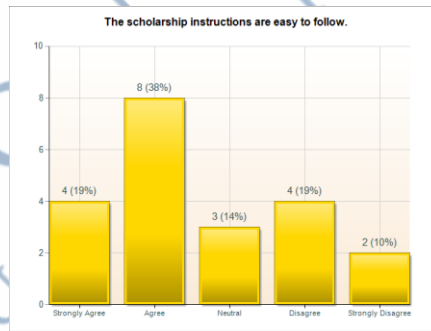
Respondents to all three surveys indicated similar beliefs that there is a lot of competition for scholarships. The researcher was surprised by this outcome, given that rates of application are actually quite low.

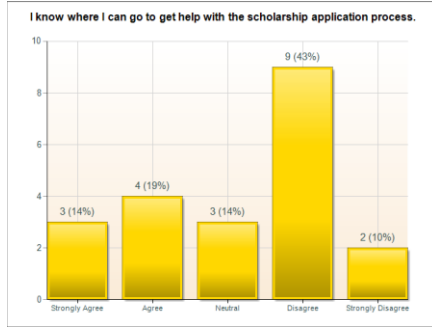
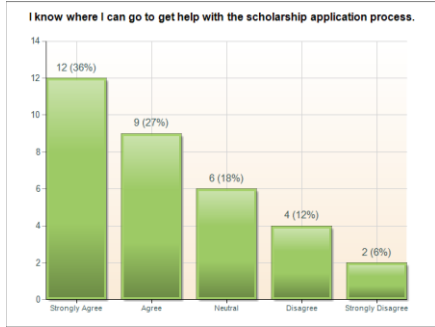
In addition to the identical items on all three student surveys, certain information was sought from the groups individually. The researcher was interested to learn about experiences specific to completing the STARS online scholarship application from Survey groups 1 and 2. The following charts show items included on Surveys 1 and 2, where respondents had applied for scholarships.

Survey 1: Applied / Received



Survey 2: Applied/ Did Not Receive

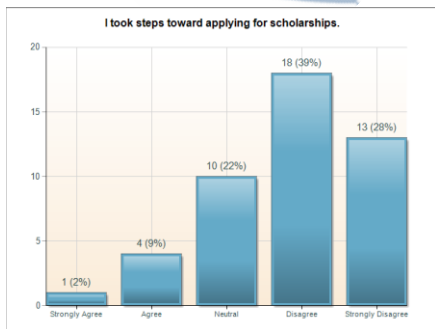
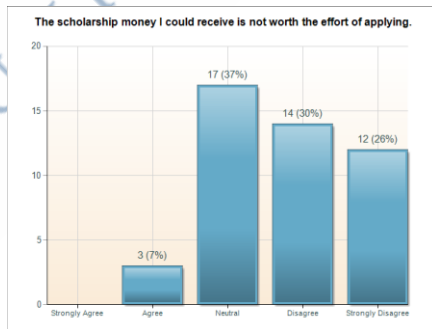
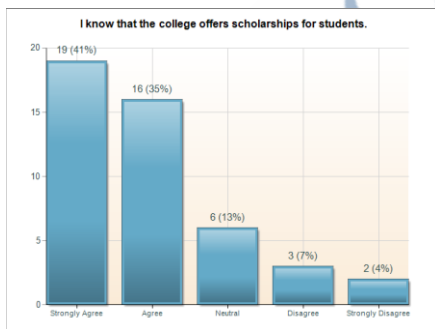




Survey 1 applicants, who applied and received scholarships, felt more strongly than Survey 2 applicants, who applied but did not receive scholarships, that scholarship instructions were easy to follow, that the application was easy to fill out, and that they were knowledgeable about where to get help with the process.

The researcher was also interested in learning about the experiences of students who have not applied for scholarships. The following charts show items included only on Survey 3, where respondents did not apply.

Survey 3: Did Not Apply



Of Survey 3 respondents, who have not applied for scholarships, 76% indicated that they knew the college offered scholarships. Over 50% believed that the effort of applying was worth the scholarship money they could potentially receive, with 37% remaining neutral on the topic. However, only 11% indicated that they took steps toward applying for scholarships.

In addition to surveying students, the researcher conducted a survey of scholarship program administrators at other colleges through the listserv for the Council for Resource Development (CRD). Thirteen colleagues at other colleges responded to the survey.

CRD Survey: Application-Related Items

1. In relation to the number of students at your college, is your number of scholarship applicants:

- High: 1 8%
- About Right: 3 23%
- Low: 9 69%

2. Are your students required to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to apply for need-based scholarships? Yes: 10 No: 3

3. How well does your STAR system work to sort applicants to appropriate scholarships?

- Okay, I guess. The main problem is that students seem not to know what their degree is, and hence sometimes don't get into the right basket for program-oriented scholarships. For example, all our career/tech programs are AAS degrees. If the applicant puts in something different, even though their major is "drafting" or "diesel," they won't be directed to those scholarships.

- Better each year...we've improved our ability to link students to scholarships based on their questionnaire answers. We've learned how to funnel the specific awards to the right students.
 - It works well. But it all depends on the way the user sets up the questionnaire. We refine ours every year so it gets better at only showing applicants what they qualify for.
 - STARS does not sort into many categories, so it is helpful, but not much. Students are recommended for many scholarships that they are not eligible for. Our biggest headache is that STARS allows students to apply for as many scholarships as they want, but we cannot read that many applications. We tell students to apply for no more than three scholarships, but they apply for more and we have to go into each scholarship and delete the extras.
4. What additional materials, aside from questions in STARS, are students required to submit?
- Transcripts
 - Depends on individual scholarship criteria
 - Recommendation Forms or Letters of Recommendation
 - Separate Foundation Scholarship Application
5. What do you think are the primary reasons that students don't apply for scholarships?
- They think they won't qualify because: 1) they are already getting Pell Grant; 2) they think their parents make too much money; 3) they don't want to answer the essay questions; 4) they think their GPA is too low.
 - Lack of ambition and motivation.

- Lack of awareness
- There were 1442 students that started an application, but 605 never completed one. Of those, 54% stopped when they reached the essay questions. 1) Students don't know about applying for scholarships; 2) they already have financial aid, so don't understand why they should apply for scholarships; 3) don't want to or haven't filled out a FAFSA; 4) don't understand how to "upload" documents; 6) procrastination; 7) fear of writing.
- Time
- Too much trouble, they don't hear about them, they don't think they qualify, they don't think they have enough financial need.
- We consistently hear from financial aid and other sources that some students don't want to go to the trouble, or perceive that they won't qualify anyhow. With our student population, there is a lack of knowledge about what financial aid is out there and how to access it.
- Not paying attention, don't think they have a chance of winning. We send emails announcements and reminders with links to the online application to their college email addresses
- Our process is very time consuming for them.
- They think they won't qualify and/or it's too much work given the uncertainty of an award.
- Huge misconceptions about qualifications, and flat out laziness. Seriously.

The CRD data supports the idea, identified in the literature search, that application rates for privately-donated scholarships are low.

The CRD data also indicates that low rates of scholarship application are due to students' lack of knowledge, understanding, and awareness of scholarship processes. However, 76% of students who did not apply for scholarships indicated that they were aware that the college offers scholarships to students.

CRD Survey respondents indicated that students think it is too much trouble to apply for scholarships, and that students lack motivation. The student data in from Survey 3 indicates that while 76% of students were aware of scholarships, only 11% indicated that they took steps toward applying.

Results for Selection

The second focus area of the research was scholarship recipient selection. The CRD Survey, which included application-related items, also included items related to selection. The researcher was interested to learn how scholarship recipient determinations were made and to what degree the STARS system was used on other campuses to aid in the selection process.

CRD Survey: Selection-Related Items

6. Do scholarship reviewers record information directly in STARS?
 - No. The recording/tracking of the scholarship selection is done manually, on paper.
 - Yes. We use a scoring rubric and the numerical value is recorded in the STARS module.
 - Yes, we give them a rubric to evaluate their scores and a paper score sheet to record their scores as they go, but ultimately they need to record the info in STARS. These

folks don't get financial information because the college doesn't have the FAFSA's all entered until later in the spring.

- No, not at this point. Hopefully, next year.
 - No. Staff pulls student data from Datatel and adds reviewer essay scores to the scholarship database.
 - No.
 - Yes. Reviewers record directly into STARS, but also maintain notes about specific students on their spreadsheet. We have 6 – 8 review members on a large committee, assigned the top 200 applicants; they score their group, and at the committee level, nominate particular students for specific awards. The committee votes on each award. However, the committee only handles 1/4th of the awards. The remaining scholarships are reviewed by a team of two in collaboration with Deans and Directors of academic departments that are related to the scholarship criteria.
 - No. The first year we had STARS, we had reviewers read and record scores in the system, but it was slower than using paper applications and recording on paper so we print everything now.
 - Yes. They use the review system set up by stars. We love the paper free method.
7. Is each application read by just one or by multiple reviewers?
- All 13 respondents indicated that applications are read by multiple reviewers, ranging from two to ten individuals.
8. What types of scoring rubrics do you use?
- We use 2 scoring rubrics, one for our general and endowed scholarships and one for our high school honors scholarship.

- Scoring Table: including points for community service, achievements, honors and awards, educational goals, changes in finances, recommendation letter, financial need
 - Have formulas for academic success (GPA and hours attempted/completed), financial need, essays and community service.
 - We use a spreadsheet with the criteria outlined for each scholarship. Top GPA students who qualify get first priority. Selection is by a vote.
 - Simple Excel worksheets with formulas & macros set up.
 - We don't. With the way we have STARS set up, it's unnecessary to have additional spreadsheets. Some reviewers prefer it, but we allow them to come up with their own.
9. How do you ensure consistency in scoring and reduce bias in the selection process?
- Currently, the Foundation relies on the mix/makeup of the selection committee members. With the blended members (faculty, board, staff), it is expected that they balance and temper each other's decision.
 - With three people rating each application, I think that ensures fairness.
 - Our scoring bias is reduced by having a rubric; but how the score is determined is hard to monitor. We trust the judgment of our scorers.
 - By having three readers, doing a thorough orientation, and by using a scoring rubric. Last year, when we only had two readers per group, we evaluated the scores and if reviewers had more than 30 point spread, we asked a third reader to read. But still, we had one group read by two really "easy graders" and when we got to the selection process for our best scholarships, we found that everyone we were awarding them to had a last name that started with "W". So we modified our awarding and awarded the top scholarships to the top five in each group! This year, we're going to look at the

average scores of each person to see if they're an "easy" or "hard" grader and do some kind of statistical thing. Not clear yet.

- The major awards are decided upon in a group. The Foundation office audits the awards to ensure adherence to scholarship criteria.
- We provide a short training before each reading session. This helps somewhat with consistency, but we ask each pair of readers to discuss and rank their pool. As long as each reader is consistent in her own ratings, it doesn't matter if she is consistent with her partner. As far as bias, a staff person is in the room during the sessions and can intervene if she overhears inappropriate comments. Staff also reviews the score sheets to look for obvious bias. This has not been a frequent problem.
- By using rubrics and moderating discussion (reminding reviewers what the criteria is for the scholarship they are considering at any given moment during the meeting)
- Multiple folks on the committee who don't usually know the students.
- We try to keep the scoring as blind as possible, as well as include reviewers from multiple sources (College faculty from various disciplines and departments, a board member, and our Executive Director).
- Review is blind (no student names or demographic info is available to the reviewer unless the applicant puts it in their essay answer) and we prepare them for only looking at the essay answers and recommendation for rating. But we do ask that reviewers use their experience and background to rate scholarships.

10. Who makes the ultimate decision about selection? Individual reviewer? Committee vote?
Other?

- One of thirteen respondents indicated that the financial aid office assigned scholarships to students
- Five of thirteen respondents indicated that selection is made by committee vote.
- Seven of thirteen respondents indicated that selection is made based on application scores.

A summary and analysis of the selection-related items of the CRD survey will be provided following an overview of the campus committee interview responses.

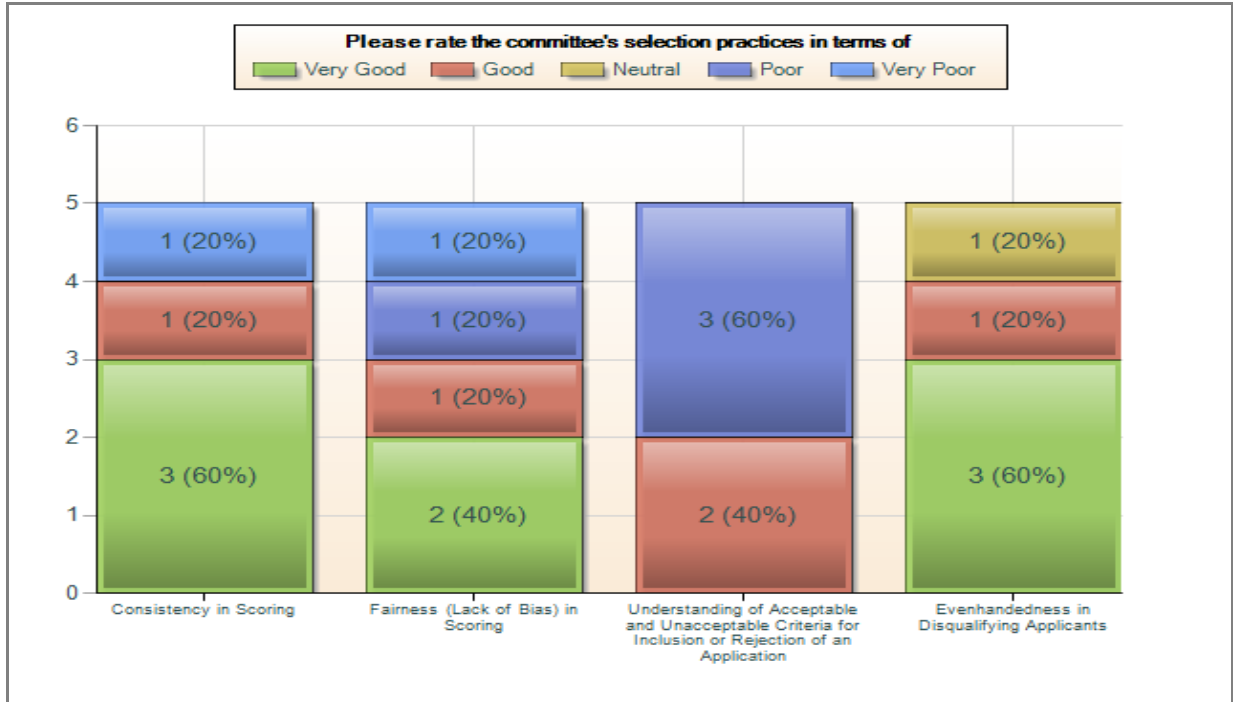
In addition to surveying colleagues at other colleges to learn about selection practices, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with five campus scholarship committee members at the research site to learn about existing selection practices, the role of the STARS system, and the committee's perception of the effectiveness of current practices.

Campus Committee Interview Responses

Interviewees were asked to rate the committee's selection practices in four areas:

- consistency in scoring
- lack of bias in scoring
- understanding of acceptable criteria for inclusion or rejection of an application, and
- evenhandedness in disqualifying applicants.

The chart below summarizes the responses of the five interviewees to interview item 1.



Responses to additional interview questions are below.

2. Did you use the STARS system to review applications? Yes: 1 No: 4
3. Describe what your approach has been to ranking and scoring applications.
 - Personal five-point system. What am I looking for from the personal letter? What's the cutoff for financial need?
 - Used existing rubric my first year; second year no one wanted to use it.
 - Scholarship criteria, amount, applicants. Report of who has already received (to get them off my list).
 - Comments better than assigning a number. I want to see why they were rated at that number.
 - "Yes" and "No" piles. The "No" pile was from little red flags. Transcripts important – very grade conscious. If I see one F, they're in the "No" pile.

4. How well did your approach work in conjunction with the rest of the committee?
 - Worked well. We all had our own individual system that worked.
 - Hard to say – everyone had their own way.
 - Worked fine. Balanced getting work done and maintaining good harmony in the group.
 - Committee members may rate things completely differently. Differences between pre-STARS and post-STARS members. People use too much emotion. If it comes down between two I'll definitely go with the emotion, but it shouldn't be top criteria.
 - Everyone seemed to be on the same wave length.
5. Describe your understanding of how scholarship recipients have been selected.
 - Process was democratic although whoever was most persuasive could sway committee. Not just clear numbers, but also “stumping.” Committee could get emotionally charged; we'd lose our objectivity.
 - Committee meetings give everyone a chance to talk. Somebody knew something specific about the person they were going to bat for and I like that.
 - Selected by consensus of committee.
 - Problem with breaking up groups of application to review. We each have different things we're looking at and we need to look at all students equally. Should have same weight – everybody reads, everybody brings top two. Will help remove bias.
 - Worked well; people were open and willing to accept other viewpoints.
6. How well do you think scholarship applicants have been served by the committee process?

- Some really good students do get overlooked. Good job, not excellent.
 - On a scale of 1 to 5, score of 4. I can't be assured that the best person is receiving the scholarship; that's why it takes the committee. You have to know a person personally to know that they'll make the best use of it. If someone knows a person personally, that's good enough for me. I count on the diversity of the committee. I think we do a good job, 95 out of 100.
 - Seventy percent positive. We do lose some people – looking at the same scholarship applications over and over burns people out. Sometime the committee just plugs people in, to get it over with.
 - Good. Everyone reads things differently, so good to have different perspectives on the committee.
7. What changes would you recommend so that students are better served by the process?
- Focus attention on entering freshmen – they're a group that gets overlooked. Make sure you have people that actually read. Create a snapshot / profile of student. Work in teams to actually make selections, instead of whole committee being involved. People on the committee have tried to advocate for certain groups (athletes, minorities). Try to eliminate bias, eliminate tensions in committee meetings. Develop a more efficient system for communication.
 - Can't think of any, other than more time.
 - Rectify inconsistency in scoring. When everyone used a uniform process, things worked.
 - Look at students' applications once, then plug them into scholarships. Reverse the process.

- Look at need-based first. The system almost penalizes students who aren't poor, but who work hard and fit all criteria.
 - Make STARS more user-friendly with more clarity. Sometimes you know things about the student that might be unfair. Application and review checklists. Clearer criteria and qualifications, especially financial.
8. Describe any preparation or training you received to fulfill your role on the committee.
- Three of five respondents indicated they received no training in scholarship selection, other than how to access the STARS system.
 - Two respondents stated that they learned informally from previous committee members or were provided with written operating procedures for the committee.
9. What have your biggest challenges been in serving on the committee?
- Politics were involved before. Devoting sufficient time to get work done.
 - Time. No access to STARS from home.
 - People coming in unprepared to deal with the population we serve. Inappropriateness. Negative comments about people who have been incarcerated, etc. Opinions are powerful and can sway people – can increase bias. Committee dynamic often at odds with what's right or fair.
 - Frustration with having to wait for externally selected scholarships. Not crazy about STARS – old system was more fair to students. Easier now for committee, but less fair to students. Time consuming. No access from home.
 - Time commitment was a big challenge. Unclear expectations or job description for the committee.

10. What suggestions do you have for addressing these challenges?

- Involve retirees – they have more time. Involve high schools – different people with different areas of expertise. Broaden committee participation.
- More time.
- Clarifying distinctions between personal opinions and college expectations around controversial issues. In representing college, what should we be reflecting? Clarify expectations.
- Check out college laptops for at-home review. Re-do system so that it's less redundant. Re-order externally selected candidates (have committee review early then get word back to make students eligible for other scholarships).
- Cleaner, refined process. Pre-screening to make sure applicants qualify.

Research by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in 2001 identified several elements that are among best practices used by selection panels in scholarship programs. Included among these elements was minimizing the impact of biases held by selection panels. The CRD survey respondents indicated that they reduced bias by using scoring rubrics, having multiple readers, holding training sessions, and using blind scoring. The research indicates that all of these efforts are effective in minimizing bias.

When the campus committee was asked to rank the committee's practices in terms of fairness and lack of bias, three of five respondents ranked the practices "good," while two of five ranked the practices "poor." However, in responses to other interview questions, comments related to bias arose which suggested that committee members did not share a mutual understanding of what constituted bias. For instance, one committee member who ranked the

committee “very good” or “good” in terms of fairness, also said in response to another item that, “If someone knows a person personally, that’s good enough for me.”

Another best practice element identified in the literature review for selection panels is being clear and consistent about what constitutes criteria for selection, and for inclusion or rejection of an application. The CRD respondents described “easy” and “hard” graders, and inconsistencies among scholarship application reviewers in applying scholarship criteria.

The campus committee’s responses similarly indicated an overall lack of clarity as to appropriate and inappropriate items to consider in reviewing applications. In terms of consistency in scoring, four out of five committee members ranked the committee’s practices “very good” or “good” in this area. However, contradictory statements arose in response to other interview items. One committee member stated, “If I see one F, they’re in the “No” pile,” regardless of the scholarship criteria; while another said, “People use too much emotion. If it comes down between two I’ll definitely go with the emotion, but it shouldn’t be top criteria.”

Appropriate training for selection panels was another best practice identified in the IIE research. Three out of five of the campus committee members had received no training, with the other two members having received only informal or inconsistent training from prior committee members. When asked to recommend how students could be better served and how the committee could address internal challenges, committee members cited a cleaner process, clearer expectations, adequate preparation to serve on the committee, and job descriptions for committee members.

The CRD survey and campus committee interviews also yielded information about the use of the STARS system in recipient selection. Only half of the CRD respondents used the STARS system in the selection process and most that used STARS still used additional

spreadsheets or other documents in the selection process. The campus committee members were inconsistent in their use of STARS and each committee member had, out of necessity, developed a unique scoring and selection method, which is at odds with the previously described best practices.

Results for Finance

The third focus area of this research project was the examination of financial reconciliation practices related to the scholarship program. Given that the research site is restricted to using a state system without flexibility to incorporate significant changes, the researcher focused on examining internal financial processes to try to identify areas for increased efficiency.

In researching this topic, the researcher “followed the money” by visiting, in turn, each office involved with scholarship finance, and witnessing demonstrations by each staff member as they performed their separate duties in the financial process. Scholarship funds followed this route at the research site:

- the foundation office received scholarship funds from private donors
- the foundation established a scholarship account and a student was selected to receive the funds
- the foundation communicated the amount of the scholarship funds and the name of the recipient to the financial aid office
- the financial aid office recorded this information in the Financial Aid Management (FAM) software application, which is only accessible by financial aid office personnel

- the FAM application connected, in selected ways, to the Financial Management System (FMS) and the information about the amount of the scholarship funds and the name of the recipient were electronically shared between FAM and FMS
- the cashiering office accessed FMS and could see the amount of the scholarship funds and the name of the recipient
- the cashiering office applied the amount of the scholarship to the recipients student account
- a staff member in the registration office generated a report from the Student Management System (SMS), which showed the student's name, student ID number, and an overall amount disbursed to the student during the month
- the SMS report was sent to the business office
- the business office generated a separate report from FMS, which shows the detail of each transaction that occurred in the student's account during the month, but did not show the student's name or student ID number
- the business office sent both the SMS and the FMS reports to the foundation office
- the foundation office received the two separate reports: one containing student-specific information such as name and student ID number, and the other containing transaction-specific information such as the detail of each charge or credit to the student's account
- the foundation accountant manually generated a third report combining the student and financial details necessary to reconcile and confirm the scholarship disbursement amount

The financial disbursement and reconciliation processes for the scholarship program were very inefficient in that they involved five separate college offices and three separate computer

systems that are were integrated. Staff members in each office had one piece of the process without having the ability to see or affect what came prior or what would follow.

The foundation accountant was ultimately tasked with creating a report that contained redundant information because the information could not otherwise be shared among the computer systems used in each office. The monthly reconciliation took several hours and there were discrepancies that were unable to be resolved until the next month's reports were received.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of this research project was to determine how to increase efficiency in a community college scholarship program by increasing the number of applications and streamlining the selection and financial resolution processes.

The literature review indicated that a low rate of scholarship applications is a common occurrence at colleges across the country. CRD survey respondents, who administer scholarship programs at other community colleges, also indicated low rates of application on their campuses. Studies conducted by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) in 2006, identified specific challenges that students face in the scholarship application process including outdated information, varying requirements and deadlines, and a passive information process. The researcher's results were in keeping with the TRPI study. CRD survey respondents cited similar reasons when asked why students don't apply for scholarships. Survey responses from students who had not applied for scholarships confirmed that they felt unknowledgeable about varying scholarship requirements and that they did not know how to find help with the application process.

Several CRD respondents perceived that lack of motivation was also an important factor in low rates of application. The researcher was interested and surprised to learn that while 76%

of non-applicants were aware that the college offered scholarships, only 11% took any steps toward applying. Of these respondents 50% indicated that a scholarship award would be worth the effort of applying, while 37% were neutral on this specific issue. The high rate of neutral responses indicated a significant degree of apathy on the part of these students and added a degree of support to the CRD assumptions about lack of motivation.

The researcher recommends increasing rates of student application through proactive dissemination of application information, especially to students who have never applied for scholarships. The researcher further recommends revisions to the STARS online application process, including easy-to-follow application instructions, information on where to find help, and clearly defined scholarship criteria.

In examining ways to streamline the selection process, the outcomes of this research supported the validity of the IIE best practices identified in the literature search. The important factors in an efficient selection process included minimizing biases held by selection panels, developing clear and consistently-applied scoring systems, and training and monitoring committee members.

Responses to both the CRD survey and the campus committee interviews illustrated a lack of common and consistent practices related to scholarship recipient selection. The campus committee respondents overwhelmingly felt that the committee would operate more efficiently, and that students would be better served, through clarifying expectations, developing job descriptions, and using consistent scoring methods. The researcher was intrigued that campus committee members contradicted themselves in various statements made throughout the interview process.

The researcher recommends increasing efficiency in the selection process by developing and implementing a comprehensive committee training process and by consistently monitoring committee practices to ensure the integrity of the selection process. The researcher also recommends the development and use of common, consistently-applied scoring rubric to rank scholarship applications as well as the implementation of a blind application review. Furthermore, refining the STARS system to enable paperless review and scoring by committee members would greatly reduce the number of staff hours and redundancy in the selection processes.

The research related to streamlining the financial resolution processes of the scholarship, unfortunately, failed to yield any viable solutions. Through interview and observation, the researcher is better informed about the processes undertaken in the various offices involved with finance. However, the inflexibility and incompatibility of computer systems on campus restrict the ability to make any substantive changes to the process.

The nature of privately-funded scholarship programs is that donor-designated scholarship criteria, application processes, and selection practices vary widely from one institution to another. New technologies, such as the STARS program, contribute additional challenges to scholarship program management, but also present opportunities for increased efficiency.

Certain practices have emerged as being universally beneficial, despite differences among donors, students, and college scholarship programs. Implementing these practices and remaining vigilant and responsive to change will ensure that donors' funds are used to the greatest good in support of the educational, professional, and personal goals of students.

Suggestions for Further Study

For further study related to scholarship application, the researcher suggests seeking ways to identify the factors most relevant in motivating students to apply for scholarships. In surveying students who had not applied for scholarships, this research project revealed a large disparity between the percentage of students who said they were aware that the college offered scholarships to students (76%) and the percentage of these students who actually took steps toward applying for scholarships (11%). The researcher suggests examining the extent to which this disparity is related to a lack of motivation on the part of students, as is perceived by many of the CRD survey respondents, and the extent to which it is related to other identifiable issues.

Another suggestion for further study is ascertaining whether low rates of application are related to the criteria of the scholarships available at the college. All of the student groups surveyed in this research project felt that there was a lot of competition for scholarships. Agreement on Surveys 1, 2, and 3, was 78%, 85%, and 76% respectively. Since this is not the case, it would be interesting to learn how students form this perception.

Perhaps students who see scholarships with very broad or general criteria perceive that there would be a lot of competition, since many students would qualify. The researcher wonders whether students would be more likely to apply if scholarship criteria were more restrictive. For instance, would a business major be more likely to apply for a business-specific scholarship than a general scholarship for which she was also qualified, believing she had a higher likelihood of receiving the business-specific scholarship.

Another suggestion for further study is addressing the question of whether student demographics, such as age, gender, or marital status, have any influence on a student's likelihood to apply for scholarships. The results of this type of study could inform the ways that scholarship

information might most effectively be disseminated to specific groups of students to increase rates of application.



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Appendix A

Student Survey 1
Applied / Received Scholarship

The following scale will be used in this survey, except for a question at the end. Please respond by circling the letter that best fits your experience with the scholarship process.

SA = Strongly Agree **A** = Agree **N** = Neutral **D** = Disagree **SD** = Strongly Disagree

1. I know where to find information about scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
2. The scholarship instructions are easy to follow.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
3. The scholarship application is easy to fill out.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
4. I know where I can go to get help with the scholarship application process.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
5. I know that there are different requirements for different scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
6. I feel confident that I qualify for some kind of scholarship.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
7. I believe that there is a lot of competition for scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
8. I am satisfied with the scholarship application process.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
9. I would apply for scholarships in the future.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
10. What improvements can we make to the scholarship process?

Appendix B

Student Survey 2
Applied / Did Not Receive a Scholarship

The following scale will be used in this survey, except for a question at the end. Please respond by circling the letter that best fits your experience with the scholarship process.

SA = Strongly Agree **A** = Agree **N** = Neutral **D** = Disagree **SD** = Strongly Disagree

1. I know where to find information about scholarships.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
2. The scholarship instructions are easy to follow.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
3. The scholarship application is easy to fill out.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
4. I know where I can go to get help with the scholarship application process.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
5. I know that there are different requirements for different scholarships.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
6. I feel confident that I qualify for some kind of scholarship.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
7. I believe that there is a lot of competition for scholarships.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
8. I completed the scholarship application process.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
9. I would apply for scholarships in the future.

SA	A	N	D	SD
-----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------
10. What improvements can we make to the scholarship process?

Appendix C

Student Survey 3
Did Not Apply for a Scholarship

The following scale will be used in this survey, except for two questions at the end. Please respond by circling the letter that best fits your experience with the scholarship process.

SA = Strongly Agree **A** = Agree **N** = Neutral **D** = Disagree **SD** = Strongly Disagree

1. I know that the college offers scholarships for students.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
2. I know where to find information about scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
3. I took steps toward applying for scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
4. I know that there are different requirements for different scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
5. I feel confident that I would qualify for some kind of scholarship.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
6. I believe that there is a lot of competition for scholarships.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
7. The scholarship money I could receive is not worth the effort of applying.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
8. I plan to apply for scholarships in the future.
SA **A** **N** **D** **SD**
9. Why haven't you applied for scholarships?
10. What would make it more likely for you to apply for scholarships in the future?

Appendix D

CRD Survey

1. In relation to the number of students on your campus, is your number of scholarship applicants
 - a. High
 - b. About Right
 - c. Low
2. Are your students required to complete a FAFSA in order to apply for scholarships? If not, how do you determine need?
3. How well does your STARS system work to sort applicants to appropriate scholarships?
4. What additional application materials, aside from questions in STARS, are students required to submit?
5. What do you think are the primary reasons that students don't apply for scholarships?
6. Do reviewers record information directly in STARS? Please describe the process.
7. Is each application read by just one or by multiple reviewers?
8. What types of scoring rubrics or matrices do you use?
9. How do you ensure consistency in scoring and reduce bias in the selection process?
10. How are scholarship recipients ultimately determined? By individual reviewers? By committee vote? Other?

Appendix E

Campus Committee Interview Questions

1. Please rate the committee's selection practices in terms of:

a) Consistency in scoring

Very Good Somewhat Good Neutral Poor Very Poor

b) Lack of bias in scoring

Very Good Somewhat Good Neutral Poor Very Poor

c) Understanding of acceptable criteria for inclusion or rejection of an application

Very Good Somewhat Good Neutral Poor Very Poor

d) Evenhandedness in disqualifying applicants

Very Good Somewhat Good Neutral Poor Very Poor

- 2. Did you use the STARS system to review applications?
- 3. Describe what your approach has been to ranking and scoring applications.
- 4. How well did your approach work in conjunction with the rest of the committee?
- 5. Describe your understanding of how scholarship recipients have been selected.
- 6. How well do you think scholarship applicants have been served by the committee process?
- 7. What changes would you recommend so that students are better served by the process?
- 8. Describe any preparation you had, or training you received, to fulfill your role on the committee.
- 9. What have your biggest challenges been in serving on the committee?
- 10. What suggestions do you have for addressing these challenges?