

2020 Student Advising Program Report

The year 2020 was challenging in many ways, but it provided opportunity for the Student Advising Program to support students with critical and creative advising while maintaining fidelity to mission. Student Advisors constantly delivered objective, timely, and student-focused information and never wavered from a student-centered approach. Student Advisors continued to focus on delivering quality support, information, and guidance to students funded through the Foundation's interest-free loan and grant programs, as well as support for those navigating the path to college. However, campus visits to colleges were cancelled, large gatherings for workshops in high school auditoriums became a thing of the past, and in-person connection with high school seniors moved to video conference. As a result, the team quickly became versed in virtual delivery of workshops and other presentations, as well as video production, identifying new and creative ways to connect and ensure that useful information was available to students.

- Beginning March 13, all workshops and presentations were delivered online. Student Advisors delivered **97 workshops, reaching 2,589 individuals in 2020.**
- Before any grant or loan funds were disbursed for the 2020–21 academic year, Student Advisors undertook an extensive assessment process to ensure all Foundation students had sufficient plans in place for the fall semester to respond to possible situations and challenges caused by COVID-19. The assessment (an online instrument) was completed by 470 students and **Student Advisors followed-up with 423 of these students for further planning.**
- Student Advisors provided **individual guidance to 1,460 students and their family members.** After mid-March, such guidance was provided virtually by online video meetings, telephone conversations, and email. Advisors received referrals from school counselors, community partners, and community members.

In total, Student Advisors provided information, advising, and resources to 4,049 people through workshops and individual advising in 2020.¹

Each year, the Student Advising Program delivers workshops that are free and open to the public. Typically, those workshops are held at the Foundation's offices or at high schools, community organizations, and events organized by other partners. The goal of these workshops is to ensure that students and their families have objective, timely, and accurate information with which to plan and make informed decisions about college and affordability.



Content of core workshops remains constant, with Student Advisors regularly delivering *Financial Aid Basics*, *FAFSA*, and *Decision-Making: Using Financial Aid Offer Letters to Assess Affordability*. In addition, Student Advisors continue to be increasingly asked to speak on a wide range of topics including the feasibility of college, writing essays as storytelling, and financial aid processes such as FAFSA verification.

¹ There may be some duplication in this number, as it is possible someone received both individual advising and attended a workshop.

Student Advisors also serve as resources and trainers to other practitioners. The Advisors work to ensure school counselors, college advisers, and other college access professionals have updated and accurate information to best support students, particularly students marginalized by the current postsecondary system and financial aid policies, including students who are low-income and undocumented.



Due to COVID-19 and the disruption it created for schools and districts, as well as other student-serving organizations, Student Advisors facilitated fewer workshops in 2020. However, this decrease in events does not signal a decrease in need or quality provided. In fact, Student Advisors creatively developed new methods to reach students. They quickly adapted

workshops to virtual formats which were either delivered by video conference or filmed in [brief segments](#) to be shared at the request of others or on social media. Advisors developed short videos to introduce themselves and the Foundation’s services to seniors in high school. The pandemic also accelerated an effort to reach students throughout Missouri, allowing the Foundation to invite students to attend workshops that may not have been explored in the past due to distance.

Workshop/Event Type	Number of Workshops/Events	Participants
Decision-Making: Using Financial Aid Offer Letters to Assess Affordability	3	114
Financial Aid Basics or Financial Aid Basics 2.0	27	737
FAFSA: Workshops & Completion	14	233
Content Experts/Professional Development	10	373
College Fairs	1	145
Scholarship Foundation Information Presentations ²	17	321
Hybrid Workshops ³	13	330
Community Outreach ⁴	2	165
Campus Visits	3	14
Miscellaneous Workshops	7	157

² These presentations provide an overview of Scholarship Foundation programs and services and/or provide information to a group of students eligible for one (or more) specific grant opportunities, such as BJC Scholars Fund, New Era Scholarship, or rootEd Scholarship opportunities.

³ Hybrid workshops are typically a mixture of information from two or more workshops, blending content to respond to a specific request.

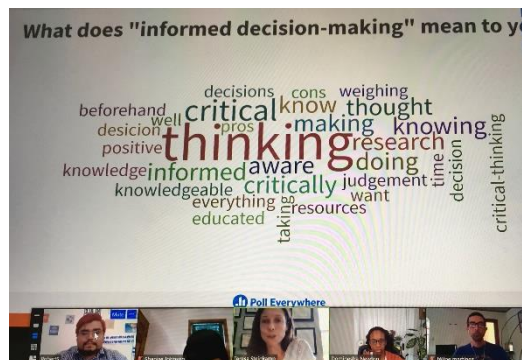
⁴ Events like this were few in 2020, for obvious reasons. They typically represent a wide array of public engagement opportunities with students, families, and the broader public that are not necessarily a workshop or presentation.

Persistence Advising

Each student awarded an interest-free loan and/or grant from The Scholarship Foundation is assigned a Student Advisor; this relationship serves as support to students as they matriculate through college—and intensive, personal advising was essential in 2020. When the pandemic disrupted in-person campus classes and on-campus housing in the spring semester, Advisors sprang into action. Beginning in March, Advisors assessed student needs related to unexpected moving costs, changes in housing, job losses, and other financial emergencies of the pandemic, referring students to resources and recommending students for emergency microgrants. In total, Advisors identified **74 students** needing emergency support; these students received a total of **\$49,429 in emergency microgrant funds** to cover COVID-19 related emergencies.

The Award Assessment: Student COVID-19 Planning

was sent to every student awarded for the 2020-21 academic year. Students were asked to respond to planning questions around academics, finances, health and safety, and basic needs. Questions were worded so that any “no” or “need to discuss” response would prompt a follow-up call with a Student Advisor. Advisors then engaged in phone or Zoom calls, helping students plan in greater detail how to succeed in online classes, review financial circumstances to ensure sufficient aid was in place to cover costs, create plans in case of a COVID-19 exposure or diagnosis, and identify resources on- or near-campus to help with basic needs if necessary.



In addition to the COVID-19 planning calls, Student Advisors supported students through **3,973 interactions** which occurred in-person (prior to March), over the phone, and through Zoom or video conference.

2020 Accomplishments and Goals for 2021

The advising program is evolving. The following progression of accomplishments and goals illustrates that evolution.

In 2020, the Advising Program:

- Developed several alternative methods of delivering services to students and families; in 2021, these methods will be further refined and improved upon.
- Expanded schedule of advising services, opening opportunities for students to connect with Advisors throughout a greater percentage of the academic year.⁵

In 2021, the Advising Program will:

- Bring back the Advising Institute in 2021, an annual training for Advisors, counselors, and other college access staff and lay the foundation for an expanded set of professional development offerings in 2022 and beyond.
- Identify baseline outcomes and implement a more comprehensive outcomes measurement system, supporting increased reach and stronger services to support students and their decision-making on the path to college and improving persistence efforts, assisting more students in reaching their educational and career goals.

⁵ In past years, advising services typically concluded in schools in early April. Beginning in 2020, and moving forward, services will be continued through the close of the school year, with clear mechanisms for students to pursue follow-up support into the summer.

Conclusion

There were evident and abundant challenges for students and families that began in 2020, which impacted the work of the Student Advising Program. These are the themes that summarize the year and provide direction as the program moves into 2021:

- **Technology:** Student Advisors had to learn new technology in 2020, adapting service delivery to a virtual model. The team learned a great deal about what works—and what does not—and will only improve its use of technology in the coming year. This includes better videos, which can be distributed to students and families navigating the path to and through college.
- **Teaching:** The Advising Program is moving toward a service delivery model that further prioritizes teaching. This move will undoubtedly mean a continued shift in the way services are delivered and the approach to sharing information.
- **Trauma:** All Foundation staff participated in a three-part workshop on secondary trauma in 2020. Moving into 2021, Student Advisors are building a peer process group as a means of supporting one another and promoting each other's wellbeing, in order to continue to be able to support students' educational journeys and goals.

Much about 2021 is unknown; however, the Student Advising Program enters the year with the right people in place, who have heart, compassion, and empathy, and are equipped with the right personal and professional expertise to support students on the path to and through college. Student Advisors are as committed as ever to meeting students where they are, literally and figuratively, and listening to their unique stories to offer honest, objective, and timely advising.