WASHINGTON STATE ACHIEVERS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM CASE STUDY

Final Report

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WASHINGTON STATE ACHIEVERS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM CASE STUDY

Summary
Summary

The Center for Technology in Learning (CTL) at SRI International conducted a case study of the first cohort of the Washington State Achievers Program. This qualitative study utilized life history and focus group interviews to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of the first cohort of Achievers Scholars and how the Achievers Program has contributed to these experiences. In the following sections, our analysis describes the influence of the Achievers Program on students’ (a) achievement, (b) personal lives, (c) professional aspirations, and (d) community and school involvement.

College graduation is associated with many professional, social, and health benefits (Porter, 2002), yet access to these benefits is not evenly distributed among students in the United States. Students from low-income families have lower college enrollment (Pell Institute, 2004) and greater college attrition rates (Choy, 2000). The Washington State Achievers Program was created to increase the college enrollment and retention of students, especially those from low-income backgrounds. In addition to the scholarship funding and a living allowance, this program provides academic advice and individual support, two of the institutional factors that are associated with college persistence (Tinto, 2003).

The interview questions for this study, determined in conjunction with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Washington Education Foundation, were designed to address the study’s overarching research questions. These questions included the following:

- **Achievement.** What factors are associated with the academic achievement and personal success of students selected to serve as Achievers Scholars? What barriers have Achievers Scholars overcome?

- **Personal Lives.** Has the Achievers Program affected or changed the lives of scholars? If so, how? Does the Achievers Program enhance the lives of Achievers Scholars? If so, in what ways?

- **Professional Aspirations.** Has the Achievers Program influenced Achievers Scholars’ professional aspirations? If so, in what ways?

- **Community and School Involvement.** To what extent does participation in the Achievers Program facilitate and
motivate scholars to participate, volunteer, or become leaders in their communities or schools?

Research findings are reported for both life history and focus group interview data. In some cases, additional themes that emerged across life history and focus group interviews are also reported.

There were several important differences in size, context, and sampling between the life history and focus group interview samples that may influence the interpretation of key findings. There were only eight life history participants in our analysis whereas there were 43 focus group participants. In terms of context, life history interviews were conducted with individuals and therefore allowed for a greater number of questions as well as greater depth of response. Life history interview participants were selected based on their participation in the original press release of the Achievers Program. Selection of focus group interview participants was primarily based on college and program status: students were drawn from colleges or locations in Washington with the greatest concentration of Achievers Scholars, and students selected for participation were still active in the program as recipients or were recent graduates. The focus group samples were drawn to reflect the major gender/ethnic groups in approximately equal proportions as they appeared in the first cohort, with attention to including students with various first languages, from a range of high schools, in addition to students who had attended community and private colleges. While the focus group and life history participants reported generally consistent experiences, there were some differences between the groups. For example, proportionally fewer focus group participants expected to attend college prior to receiving the Achievers scholarship, had a college mentor, or felt prepared for college. The analysis dealt with these differences not as conflicting, but as providing a broader view of students’ experiences.

The life history interview participants included in our analysis were as follows: Leslie Riesenmay, graduate of Brigham Young University, Idaho; Liliya Svintozelsky, first-year graduate student at Washington State University; Missy Goff, senior at Saint Martin’s University; Monica Prado, senior at Western Washington University; Painted Sky Warrior, senior at Washington State University; Seth Sather, first-year graduate student at Evergreen State College; Oscar Ng, senior at University of Washington; and John Hines, first-year graduate student at the University of Puget Sound. Summaries and transcripts of the life history interviews are provided in separate documents. In
addition, Demetrius Forte, graduate of Central Washington University, participated in an interview, a summary of which is available in the Life History Interview Report. Though we found his experiences consistent with the findings reported in this study, due to the late date of his interview, data from it were not included in our analysis.

Focus groups were conducted with scholarship recipients at seven undergraduate institutions in Washington that were selected because they had sufficient numbers of Achievers Scholars to warrant a focus group. Sites were Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, University of Washington, Western Washington University, Washington State University, Tacoma Community College and Yakima Valley Community College. In addition to students enrolled or graduated from the schools at which the focus group interviews were held, students from Heritage College participated in the Yakima focus group interview, and students from Pacific Lutheran College and Saint Martin’s College participated in the Tacoma focus group interview.
Key Findings

Influences on Student Achievement

Achievers Scholars faced many obstacles even before they enrolled in college. Once they matriculated, the challenges they faced and their resourcefulness in overcoming these barriers were important to their academic success.

College Aspirations

The life history interview participants indicated that they had aspirations to attend college early in their childhoods, though the sources of their aspirations varied. Students were influenced by friends, high school teachers and counselors, and their parents and families.

Students’ knowledge of college was as varied as their sources of inspiration. In an abstract sense, they all knew what it was. For most of the life history interview participants, the expectation of attending college was instilled in them by parents or teachers, though understanding of the research, application, and financial aid processes eluded them for the most part. The students therefore relied heavily on teachers and counselors for assistance.

When they heard that they had won the scholarship, the majority of focus group participants reported a range of pleased responses, from “surprise” to “relief” to being “happy,” “excited,” “ecstatic,” or “euphoric.” For a few students, receiving the Achievers scholarship was “something to be proud of,” or it meant that “somebody recognized our potential.”

Nearly half of the focus group participants said that, without the scholarship, they would not have gone to college. Instead, these students often mentioned joining the military. As one student said, the military was “my only option, my parents didn’t have the money to pay for [college], so it was either scholarship or military.” The other common option for these students was to “just [get] a job and start working.” As one student put it, the scholarship allowed freedom to not have to work at “some little 9 to 5 job that I wasn’t happy with. Now I’m actually able to do things that I want to do.”

For these students, the scholarship provided the financial means necessary to attend college. As one student stated, winning the scholarship was “like this whole new door opened up.” Receiving the scholarship meant that college became a reality for them. One student commented, the scholarship meant that “I know that I am
going to get to go to college.” As stated by another student, without the scholarship: “Bottom line, we couldn’t come to school.” The scholarship meant college and college meant for some students “two very different branches of where I would have been” in life. As one student reported, the scholarship and, in turn, college meant that “I don’t have to become the restaurant manager that my mom was.”

The students who had planned to attend college prior to receiving their Achievers scholarships, felt strongly, nonetheless, that receiving the scholarship improved their college experience by, first of all, simply making a college degree possible, and further by having the option to not work while in school, relieving anxieties about finances, and having funding that allowed for 5 years to complete their degrees.

**Barriers Encountered Prior to College**

Life history and focus group interview participants described the barriers, both academic and personal, that they faced prior to attending college. Academic barriers included limited English proficiency and lack of encouragement or support from teachers or counselors. Personal barriers included family dysfunctions such as drug or alcohol abuse by parents or siblings, parental divorce, poverty, homelessness, families without the knowledge or resources to support the student’s college aspirations, as well as behavioral difficulties for the students themselves.

**Preparation for College**

All life history interview students said that they felt academically prepared for college, though it may have taken them some time to acclimate to the heightened expectations and demands of college life. In contrast, many focus group participants felt that high school had not prepared them adequately for college-level work, and that they did not receive encouragement or assistance from most teachers or counselors.

**College Barriers**

Once in college, most life history and focus group students indicated that they encountered barriers there as well. Typical obstacles included financial struggles, academic adjustments, social acclimation, and family crises. Making ends meet presented challenges for many students, and some discussed needing to take out loans or hold down jobs while in school to cover basic living expenses, pay for unexpected medical or dental expenses, or help out their families. Academically, students struggled with their college courses, including keeping up with the increased workload.
and extensive reading assignments, and being required to enroll in English as a second language classes. Socially, some of the interview students experienced difficulties adjusting to the college environment. Some students found their living situations difficult, either because of living at home with family or being required to live in a dormitory. Finally, family crises presented challenges to some students’ academic achievement as well.

**Student Agency in Seeking Supports**

Across interviews and focus groups, student agency in “getting help from people and reaching out” emerged as an important theme in overcoming barriers. As one student said: “There are a lot of, like, [re]sources out there that you can go to, to get help, but some students are just afraid to ask…my first year I was reluctant to ask, but now that I learned from that mistake I am, like, ‘hey...help me.’” Similarly, when struggling academically during his transition to college, a student actively sought the help he needed: “I talked with professors, I started talking to them, and I got better at it in the process, and I became a much better student.”

Achievers mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators also may have mediated some students’ development of agency in seeking needed assistance. As one student said: “I had a really good mentor for the last 4 years, so every time I had a question I could either go to my mentor or go to [the Achievers College Mentor Coordinator]...’Hey, I need help with this,’ and she is like, ‘Okay I will hook you up with the right, you know, people to help you figure it out.’ So that helps a lot just, like, knowing all the resources on campus and everything.” This student’s mentor played a role not only in connecting her with college resources, but also in helping her learn how to access assistance when she needed it, and, importantly, helping her understand that it’s appropriate to ask for help.

In contrast to those who sought help, not all students were as resourceful. As one student explained: “I didn’t like, I didn’t reach out. I didn’t know who I was supposed to reach out to...I am from a little tiny town, so this is already a huge city...So, no, I didn’t know who to reach out to, or where to go to even find assistance. I got by my classes barely.”

When asked for their advice for other students, two students discussed the importance of seeking support. One said: “Keep working, finish the race. Ask for help.” Another student acknowledged: “It’s hard to ask for it, hard to say you need it,”
and advised: “Take the help where you can get help, and don’t be afraid to ask.”

Though Achievers Scholars encountered many obstacles prior to and throughout college, many demonstrated initiative in seeking needed assistance, while others were guided to develop that skill by others, including their Achievers mentors and College Mentor Coordinators.

Influence of the Achievers Program on Students’ Personal Lives

**Personal Worth**

Several students in both the life history and focus groups interviews expressed that having others taking personal interest in them greatly increased their sense of personal worth. For example, one student recalled vividly how “really special” it was when his fourth grade teacher purchased encyclopedias for him. The incident “registered in my mind…somebody besides my parents saw that I could be something and was going to help me do that.”

For some students, just receiving the scholarship served a similar purpose in their lives. As one student said of receiving the scholarship: “I guess the main thing [the scholarship has] meant to me is just the fact that I was worth the opportunity to get an education, to go on…I can’t even place a value on it…it was priceless to me…[it] changed my life.” A focus group participant said that to her, receiving the scholarship meant that “someone is investing in me.”

Some students felt that receiving their Achievers scholarship and becoming identified as an Achievers Scholar served as a personal motivation them. One focus group participant said that receiving the scholarship meant “stepping up your game as far as being a college student. It meant…you are an Achiever Scholar, so you have to represent what that name stands for. And so that meant excelling in classes and that meant doing the right things, present[ing] yourself in a respectable manner around campus, getting involved.”

**Personal Development**

Across interviews and focus groups, many students expressed that receiving the Achievers scholarship provided greater opportunities for personal development. For example, one student said that not having to “worry about” finances allowed her to use her “talents in developing new ones,” to focus on her studies and “participate in extracurricular activities” on campus. Another student said: “[The scholarship] allowed me to work at my own
pace because it’s a 5-year scholarship. If it was only a 4-year, I probably would have pushed myself to hurry up and get here in 4 years. I may not have done as well as I am doing right now.”

**Influence of the Achievers Program on Students’ Academic and Professional Aspirations**

When asked how the scholarship influenced their professional aspirations, life history interview participants described the process of change they underwent as a result of going to college. Although students most often talked about the financial benefits of the program, they also talked about the new opportunities created by the financial support of the Achievers Program. They discussed how their college education greatly broadened their perspectives. For example, one student said that his education opened up “completely new ideas” to him. Another student said that his degree in political science has opened him up to “different ideas, different opinions, different philosophies” and different cultures, all of which are important to his career goal of working in foreign societies. Another student expressed: “It just opened my eyes to a lot more possibilities that are out there...when you’re in high school, your world view is pretty limited...[Attending college] opened my eyes to all the possibilities.”

Similarly, focus group participants described how receiving the Achievers scholarship sparked new aspirations they would not have had otherwise. The ability to go directly to a 4-year school rather than a community college, the flexibility to change between schools and degree programs, and the stability of continual financial support for 5 years allowed them to define and redefine their aspirations over their careers as Achievers Scholars. As one student put it: “To me it meant more opportunity, less stress, [and] more mental free time to focus on my classes.” Another student said that the certainty of the support allowed her to plan and reevaluate her college experience. She said: “Since it was for 5 years, I went ahead and took advantage of that and said...'I can take life a little slower, [I] don’t have to rush through things. I can figure out what I really want to do.’”

**Graduate School**

All life history interview participants and nearly half of the focus group participants mentioned the possibility of attending graduate school, and three have already begun their graduate programs. Liliya is in her first year of a graduate program in Pharmacy at Washington State University, Seth is in the first
year of a graduate program in Public Administration at Evergreen State College, and John is working on a master’s degree in teaching at the University of Puget Sound. Leslie might consider pursuing graduate work in occupational therapy sometime in the future, but family is her priority right now; Missy is considering either a second bachelor’s degree in nursing, or a master’s degree in social work; Monica plans to attend law school; and Oscar would like to get his doctorate in robotics at Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Stanford, or Cal Tech.

Influence of the Achievers Program on Community and School Involvement

Some interview students said that the connections they made through the Achievers Program led to opportunities to become more involved and participate in volunteering. For example, Monica said about volunteer and student government activities: “For the first 2 years, I had a lot of time with the security of the scholarship [to]...get involved.”

Most of the volunteer work students described was done through school, community, or church organizations. For example, Liliya checked glucose and cholesterol levels through her college’s Professional Pharmacy Student Organization; Sky established the Achievers Club of Excellence that included a mentor program for new scholars; and Oscar led campus tours for prospective students and incoming freshmen. Monica volunteered through her community Hispanic Law Firm Organization and Seth volunteered through the Center for Justice and the United Community Aids Network. Missy participated in various volunteer activities through her church.

In contrast, most focus group participants described themselves as less involved in volunteer activities, stating that the pressures of school and work precluded opportunities for volunteer activities.

Other Influences of the Achievers Program

Role of Supportive Relationships

Across interviews and focus groups, students discussed the role that various supportive relationships played in their personal and academic success. Supportive relationships with college advisors, mentors, and in particular, the Achievers mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators were important in helping students through their transitions to college, when they encountered barriers and for personal and emotional support.
Mentors and College Mentor Coordinators served a critical role in students’ transitions. Students expressed the personal value they placed on knowing they would have a designated person to go to for assistance when they arrived at college. One student said: “It’s really comforting to know that there is someone on campus who knows you. And, if you need help, you can just go [to] them.”

Mentors and coordinators were instrumental for many students in helping them find campus resources. A focus group participant said: “The College Mentor Coordinator, she’s a really good resource, she can sort of connect you all around campus and say...‘if you’re having problems with financial aid, this is the lady you go to.’”

Coordinators did not limit their assistance to academics. Students said that they would approach their mentors or coordinators for a broad range of needs. For instance, one student said that her coordinator provided her with help with her personal issues and also with paperwork and travel for a study abroad program. She said: “I always used to go into the office...with...family problems, or something like that. I did a study abroad not too long [ago] and she helped me fill [out] paper work and [locate] where I can go to find stuff [when abroad].”

Possibly the most important function the mentors fulfilled was helping students emotionally through times of personal crisis, thus playing a key role in retaining students. One student told us the coordinator at her college “has been a huge support to me.” She continued: “A lot of the Achievers...we don’t know how to go through the processes of things, it gets so frustrating at times that I want to quit, I’m tired of dealing with this. [The coordinator] would be like, ‘No, you’re not going to quit.’”

According to another student: “There’s many times throughout the year where I would just freak out and I would need somebody to, like, [help me find] a way out and organize, like, what was going on, because it could be so overwhelming. And [the Achievers staff] have, like, they have been a big help and they pretty much are the reason I’ve stuck with the path that I’m trying to do.”

Several focus group participants mentioned a diminishing relationship with their mentor or coordinator after their first or second year of college, as they became more comfortable with college. One student described seeing his mentor “a couple of times in the first year when I transferred there and then I was fine after that.”
Though it is apparent that the mentors and coordinators served critical functions for many students, the program was not consistently offered across campuses. In contrast to those who relied heavily on mentors and coordinators, several students from the focus groups said that they were never assigned a mentor. As one student said: “Everybody’s talking about all these mentors and I am like, ‘what is that?’”

**Recommendations and Next Steps**

The life history and focus group interviews with the first cohort of Achievers Scholars reveal that these students consider their participation in the program to have had an important influence on the quality of their lives. For many, the scholarship provided them with the opportunity to achieve their academic goals of completing a 4-year college education. Some even spoke of the scholarship as changing the course of their lives. Although students reported modest levels of involvement in their schools and communities, they have developed notable professional aspirations, and some had even begun graduate-level studies. Key understandings about the Achievers Scholars program derived from the experiences of this first cohort include how critical it was for these students, often the first in their families to attend college, to ask for and accept assistance from others and the key role that program mentors and coordinators played in assisting students with finding the help they needed and accessing resources available to them.

On the basis of the understanding we have developed of the experiences, successes, and struggles of the first cohort of Achievers Scholars, we offer the following recommendations to the program providers. First, it is very important to ensure that all students establish a relationship with a mentor. Doing so may be difficult, given that it requires a degree of willingness and commitment on the part of both students and mentors, but every effort should be made to ensure that these relationships are established early on. Second, on a practical level, given the low-income backgrounds of these students, it is likely that some arrive at college with unaddressed medical, dental, or vision needs. Certainly over 4 or 5 years of college, such needs will arise for some students and if not addressed, may become barriers to their success in school and academic persistence. Therefore, it is important that students have access to health care when the medical plans of their colleges and universities are inadequate to meet the needs.
Our final recommendation concerns possible follow-up studies. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has made a substantial investment in changing the lives of many young people. At the time of the study approximately 69% of the first cohort of students were either in their final year of college or had already graduated. This is substantially greater than the national graduation rates of 41% for public and 55% for private institutions (ACT, Inc., 2003). Even in light of this success, it is important to understand the reasons why some students do not persist in their college programs, so that the Achievers Program can further increase the college completion rates of students of low-income backgrounds (see Appendix, “Students Who Dropped from the Program,” for some initial indications). Though locating the students who left their colleges prior to degree completion is difficult, a follow-up study of these students would be valuable in identifying the barriers they face even with a scholarship and in implicating additional strategies the program could use to better assist future students along the path that the scholarship provides. Additionally, Achievers College Mentor Coordinators serve such a critical role for many students, a follow-up study should be conducted to determine what are the best mentoring practices and how mentors influence the retention and graduation rates, and disseminate those practices beyond the Achievers Program, potentially increasing the retention and graduation rates for even greater numbers of students.

1 In a longitudinal study on college access and persistence, Choy (2002) found that institutional retention rates underestimate college persistence because they do not take into account student transfer to other institutions.
Participant Characteristics

Life History Interviews

Life History 1, Leslie Riesenmay
Sex/Gender: Female
Race/Ethnicity: White
College/University: Brigham Young University, Idaho
Major: Health Science

Life History 2, Liliya Svintozelsky
Sex/Gender: Female
Race/Ethnicity: White (Ukrainian)
College/University: Washington State University
Major: Pharmacy, first-year graduate student

Life History 3, Missy Goff
Sex/Gender: Female
Race/Ethnicity: White
College/University: Saint Martin’s University
Major: Social Work

Life History 4, Monica Prado
Sex/Gender: Female
Race/Ethnicity: Hispanic
College/University: Western Washington University
Major: Political Science

Life History 5, Painted Sky Warrior
Sex/Gender: Male
Race/Ethnicity: Native American/Alaska Native
(Sinixt from B.C.; enrolled with the Little Shell Pembina from North Dakota)
College/University: Washington State University
Major: Double major, International Business and Management Operations

Life History 6, Seth Sather
Sex/Gender: Male
Race/Ethnicity: White
College/University: Evergreen State College
Major: First-year graduate studies, Public Administration
B.A., Political Science, Whitworth College

Life History 7, Oscar Ng
Sex/Gender: Male
Race/Ethnicity: Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (Chinese)
College/University: University of Washington  
Major: Double major, Engineering and Business

Life History 8, John Hines  
Sex/Gender: Male  
Race/Ethnicity: White  
College/University: University of Puget Sound  
Major: First-year graduate studies, Master’s of Arts, Teaching  
B.A., History and B.A., U.S. Politics, University of Puget Sound

Life History 9, Demetrius Forte
Sex/Gender: Male  
Race/Ethnicity: African-American  
College/University: Central Washington University  
Major: B.A., Business Administration

**Focus Group Interviews**

Focus Group 1, Part 1  
Number of Participants: 3  
Sex/Gender: Female (3), Male (0)  
Race/Ethnicity: White (2); Multi-racial (1)  
Major: IT Administrative Management; Nutrition/Dietetics; Exercise Science

Focus Group 1, Part 2  
Number of Participants: 1  
Sex/Gender: Female (1), Male (0)  
Race/Ethnicity: Black or African-American (1)  
Major: Administrative Management

Focus Group 2  
Number of Participants: 6  
Sex/Gender: Female (4), Male (2)  
Race/Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino (6)  
Major: Social Work; Communications; Biological Sciences; Undecided (2); currently applying to an undergraduate Nursing (BSN) program

Focus Group 3  
Number of Participants: 6  
Sex/Gender: Female (4); Male (2)  
Race/Ethnicity: White (3); Black or African-American (1); Asian,

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Demetrius Forte participated in a Life History Interview and his interview summary is provided in Life History Interview Summaries Report submitted to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on March 31, 2006. Though we found his experiences to be consistent with the findings of this study, due to the late date of his interview, data from it were not included as part of this analysis.
Asian-American, or Pacific Islander (2)
Major: Sociology; International Studies; Linguistics; Biology; Sociology; Mathematics/Statistics

Focus Group 4
Number of Participants: 6
Sex/Gender: Female (4), Male (2)
Race/Ethnicity: White (4); Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander (1); Multiracial (1)
Major: Art/Design (2); Marketing; Geology; Special Education; Communications; Liberal Studies

Focus Group 5
Number of Participants: 6
Sex/Gender: Female (4), Male (2)
Race/Ethnicity: White (2); Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander (4)
Major: Accounting (2); Psychology; Business Administration; Community Service (2)

Focus Group 6, Part 1
Number of Participants: 4
Sex/Gender: Female (3), Male (1)
Race/Ethnicity: White (1); Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander (1); Black or African-American (1); Hispanic or Latino (1)
Major: English; Communications (2); Social Work

Focus Group 6, Part 2
Number of Participants: 3
Sex/Gender: Female (3), Male (0)
Race/Ethnicity: White (1); Black or African-American (1); Hispanic or Latino (1)
Major: Human Resources; Government, English/Creative Writing

Focus Group 7, Part 1
Number of Participants: 5
Sex/Gender: Female (4), Male (1)
Race/Ethnicity: White (4); Black or African-American (1)
Major: Hospitality, Psychology, Biology, Graduate Student, Communications

Focus Group 7, Part 2
Number of Participants: 3
Sex/Gender: Female (2), Male (1)
Race/Ethnicity: White (2); Native American/Alaskan Native (1)
Major: Fine Arts; Apparel Design; International Business and Management Operations
Topic Summaries
To answer the study’s overarching research questions, interview questions addressed several topics pertaining to students’ personal, social, and academic experiences. There was a great overlap between the topics addressed in the focus group and life history interviews. To inquire further into the lives of life history participants, the life history interview questions covered several topics not asked of focus group participants.

Each topic addressed in both the life history and focus group interviews is summarized separately, under the headings “Life History Interviews” and “Focus Group Interviews,” respectively. In some cases, themes also are reported that emerged in the responses across life history and focus group interviews; these are discussed under the heading, “Additional Findings.”
I. Early Academic Achievement

Early Thoughts of College

Life History Interviews

All of the students indicated that they began thinking about attending college early in their childhoods, though the sources of their thoughts varied. Liliya, for example, witnessed her family being nursed back to health in a hospital after a car accident; she decided soon after that she wanted to be in the medical field. Monica’s impetus for attending college stemmed from her desire to escape a life of menial labor. A movie about Notre Dame’s football team captured Sky’s imagination and moved him to want to attend college there.

Two students, Leslie and Oscar, mentioned that their friends influenced their decisions to attend college. Oscar had older friends who were attending 4-year colleges and their discussions of what they were learning in school interested him in pursuing a college education. For Leslie, peer pressure pushed her toward college. She said: “A lot of my friends, like, my senior year...applied to the same school there and...supported of each other. [We] wanted to be roommates, so that kind of helped; you didn’t want to be, like, to be left out, you don’t want to, kind of, not go on with them.”

Several students indicated that high school teachers took an interest in them as individuals, which for some, kindled their desire and enthusiasm to attend college. Monica, John, and Oscar reported close relationships with teachers. Seth’s interaction as a young child with a youth minister moved him to consider the seminary. Liliya immigrated to the United States from the Ukraine as a high school sophomore and became close with her high school mathematics teachers, who recognized her academic talents and encouraged her to apply to college. She eventually chose Seattle Pacific University, a local private school attended by one of her high school advisor’s. Unlike Liliya, Sky was known to his teachers to be an underachieving student and was frequently cajoled by them to apply himself in school. When the Achievers scholarship was announced, his teachers practically forced him to submit an application.

All of the life history interview participants reported that their parents played a significant role in their early thoughts about going to college. Parental encouragement was displayed either through a spoken expectation regarding learning and
education or through establishing a supportive academic environment in the home. Leslie’s father gave her “kind of a push” to attend college. Seth’s parents wanted him to be the first in the family to graduate from college. He explained: “I was going to be the first one to go [to college] from my family...My parents have a big influence, like, really pushing us, got to make sure your grades are up so you get into a good college.” John’s parents bought him a set of encyclopedias that he read every day and he knew, implicitly, that they wanted something better for him. He said: “People expected me to go on and I think that was something that I liked because I like to learn a lot. So I knew that my learning wouldn’t end at the high school level. And I think my parents were big motivators in that. And...I think they knew that they wanted me to move on to something more than that. So they used to push me a lot.”

High School Experiences

Life History Interviews

While students expressed that they liked most of their classes, they also distinguished those classes that they enjoyed most in high school. Typically, the subjects identified were those in which the students felt they had a natural affinity or gift. The quality of the teacher and the creativity of the instruction also played a role in their preferences. Math stood at the top of the list for Sky, Monica, and Oscar (who also enjoyed physics). Seth and John, meanwhile, excelled in their history classes and English ranked as Missy’s favorite. Biology most captured Leslie’s attention: “We got to pick the projects that we got to do...[and] we got to do advanced projects.”

All but one of the students indicated that their high school classes required a great deal of effort. Sky admitted that he did little “studying, it just came natural to me.” In contrast, Monica commented that her academic requirements were “pretty intense.” For their core academic subjects, most of the students reported that they were enrolled in their respective schools’ most advanced courses (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or Honors). Liliya and Oscar, however, because of their recent arrival in the United States, were enrolled in English as a second language classes. Liliya, for example, explained that her limited English skills required her to put in more effort than her peers.

All of the students except Seth and Missy indicated that they felt comfortable, socially, in their high schools. While Sky considered his high school to be “very cliquish,” he was able to
cross the social boundaries and make friends among the various student groups. Monica had a similar experience and Leslie’s school was so small (150 students), her “class was a clique.” For Seth, however, some of his teachers had negative perceptions of his siblings, which colored their interactions with him. He did acknowledge that he had found a zone of comfort competing on the cross-country and track teams. Missy’s challenging home environment, meanwhile, kept her from feeling part of the social milieu at her high school. She recalled: “I didn’t fit in because I had, like, these horror stories of what was going on and, you know, and no high school kid knows how to relate to that except for my husband.”

Each of the students indicated that teachers or counselors played a critical role in their development and success in elementary and high school. The bond between the teachers and students extended beyond the academic realm; the students felt connected to them in a personal and emotional way, and still fondly recall the impact they had on their lives. Missy said her guidance counselor, for example: “really believed in me.” Without his teachers’ encouragement and support, Sky would not have applied for the scholarship nor attended college. Seth and Leslie still keep in touch with those teachers who had a positive impact on them. John remembered the influence his fourth-grade teacher had on him. He stated that she was “the first teacher [who] really tried to help me out and…noticed that I was talented and…really pushed me.”

Students’ knowledge of college was varied. In an abstract sense, they all knew what it was. Most of them had the expectation of attending inculcated in them by parents or teachers throughout their lives. Understanding the research, application, and financial aid processes, for the most part, eluded them and they relied on teachers and counselors to sort it out. Leslie described her college knowledge as “slim to none,” but that changed after her school won the Achievers scholarship and the staff began working with qualified students on applying to schools. Sky, who never took the PSAT, admitted that he “never went and visited any colleges...[and] didn’t really look into any information about it.” Missy had a close relationship with her high school counselor who coached her through the different college application processes and recommended Evergreen State College to her. Liliya had a similar level of support from her teachers. Monica explained that she “didn’t know what to expect” because no one in her immediate family had gone to college, but felt that the counselors at her school helped her by holding workshops about the process.
All of the students either participated in extracurricular activities or worked, or did both, during their high school years. The activities included student government, sports, student clubs, student newspapers, internships, and church. Monica, for example, was student body president and Oscar served as an officer in a few clubs, while Liliya volunteered as a translator for recent immigrants.

Influence of High School on Academic Achievement

Life History Interviews

Students indicated that their precollege academic achievement was influenced by peers, parents, teachers, counselors, or their own internal drive to succeed. Sky, for example, described a competitive relationship with a close friend over who could earn the best grades on exams. Leslie also engaged in a healthy competition with her fellow students to “be the smarter one,” but she also added: “I liked school and I liked to learn, so I always pushed myself.” John maintained that his parents had a “huge influence” on him. Seth reported that it was a mix of his “motivation and drive” along with the encouragement of his mentors that spurred his academic achievement. He explained: “Because I realized that I didn’t want to be working in a movie theater my whole life or working in the food industry my whole life...I was pretty pragmatic...I can work part-time, full-time minimum wage, or I can have a good salary, and so I chose the latter.” Liliya explained that a mix of “everything” produced an attitude in her that “everything that is worth doing is worth doing well.” Monica similarly set goals and high standards for herself and wanted to escape a life of menial labor in which she thought she would be trapped without academic success.

Sources of Encouragement and Support

Life History Interviews

Most of the students mentioned their teachers as being key sources of encouragement and support during their precollege years. Leslie, for example, stated that her art teacher “would push me to do better and to go college and still do art” and her home health teacher “actually inspired me to major in health science.” Sky also experienced a similar level of support from his teachers, even if his lackadaisical approach to school frustrated them. Sky noted: “I got a lot of encouragement from all my teachers. Like, they were always telling me, like, how good I can do, and this and that, and they are always trying to encourage me to keep on track.” He added: “They definitely pushed
me and helped me.” Oscar felt that his physics teacher supported him, and Liliya found encouragement from her mathematics teachers to continue to do mathematics the way she learned it in the Ukraine. Seth, however, aside from a close relationship with his Spanish teacher, did not experience a great deal of encouragement from other teachers.

**Early Successes**

**Life History Interviews**

Students indicated a range of achievements that they identified as their biggest success in high school. For Missy, Sky, and Seth, graduating ranked at the top of their list. Liliya’s learning of the English language and Leslie’s winning the Achievers scholarship made them most proud, while Monica’s successful campaign for student body president stood out amongst her other achievements. John and Oscar did not mention any achievement in particular.

**Role of Background or Ethnicity in High School Experiences**

**Life History Interviews**

Students’ backgrounds affected their high school experiences in both positive and negative ways. For some, like Monica, Seth, and John, it motivated them to work harder. All of them wanted to have academic and career opportunities beyond what they saw other people in their communities having. Seth and John also experienced a great deal of pressure from their parents because of their working class roots. Monica, meanwhile, found that despite her academic achievements, her peers thought she received awards and recognition simply because she was a minority. Her participation in the Hispanic Academic Achievers Scholars Program and its annual celebration of students’ achievements (including her own), however, helped her feel “pretty proud of myself.” For Missy, her relationship with her sister only influenced her in an “oppositional” way. She explained that her sister “said horrible things to my brother and sister. She would say horrible things to me. She would say that she wanted us to succeed but then do all these things that would sabotage you...I don’t think I had any support from my home.” Lastly, Liliya’s strong Ukrainian mathematics schooling placed her far ahead of her peers in the United States. She noticed that “here it [her training] helped me to be good at math because...we studied in [the] fifth grade...[what] kids study here in tenth grade.”
College Outreach Programs

Life History Interviews

None of the students reported participating in college outreach programs. Oscar, however, did participate in a “tech prep” program through Washington’s Running Start initiative.

Influences on College Aspirations

Life History Interviews

The students identified teachers, counselors, and themselves as the key influences in their decision to attend college. In the Ukraine, Liliya’s teachers told her and her classmates about college, informing them that they have to be good students starting in elementary school in order to become professionals. When she was in high school, her teachers informed her that with her GPA she could attend whichever college she wanted. Missy’s relationship with her high school counselor also influenced her decision. Unfortunately, her sister, who was serving as Missy’s guardian, thwarted her attempts to participate in Running Start. Her counselor did not give up, however; she told Missy to “look at these colleges; look at these prices, and what programs they have and take tests to see what field you might fit in.” Sky’s teachers and counselors also pushed him to apply to colleges and for scholarships. For Monica, her career goals influenced her decision to attend college. She said: “I wanted to be a lawyer...my whole life. When I was little...I had a little gavel, and used to walk around the house...I knew in order to do that I would have to go college, and it wasn’t a question for me.” Oscar was not sure what he wanted to do with his life and thought that college would give him the opportunity to mature and determine which goals he wanted to pursue. John expressed that he loved learning “too much” to stop at high school and he saw college as an avenue to continue his education. He stated that “I don’t think I ever thought that I was going to stop after high school. I really don’t think [there was] a time where I thought that.”

College Selection

Life History Interviews

Students made their original college selections based on a variety of criteria, including personal relationships, independent research, proximity to home, and finances. Sky did not undertake an intensive review of the schools he applied to, something he regrets, and chose to attend Washington State University because his then-girlfriend enrolled there. Missy and
Liliya chose their respective schools based on the recommendations of counselors and teachers. Monica picked Western Washington University after attending a college workshop at her high school. Leslie selected Central Washington University and Oscar selected the University of Washington due to the proximities to their homes. Seth noted that Whitworth College gave him the best financial aid package: “so it made it the most feasible place to go.”

**Level of Preparation for College**

**Life History Interviews**

All of the students felt academically prepared for college, even if it took them some time to acclimate to the heightened expectations and demands of college life. Leslie and Liliya found their colleges classes, for the most part, easier than expected. Missy thought her Advanced Placement (AP) high school courses were more rigorous than the ones she took at Evergreen State College. Monica, who struggled during her first quarter at Western Washington University, had to adapt the strategies she’d used in high school to succeed academically. She said: “Academically, once I realized that I had instilled in me hard work and staying on task and doing the things that I had done in high school, I just realized that I just needed to carry it over in a different way.”

**Early Barriers to Academic Achievement and Aspirations**

**Life History Interviews**

All but two of the students explicitly described the barriers, both academic and personal, that they faced prior to attending college. An academic barrier for both Liliya and Oscar, recent immigrants to the United States, was learning to read and speak English as teenagers. Oscar described that in high school “probably the most important barrier was…the SAT. I was pretty worried about the verbal. I was pretty sure I’d do well on the math, but verbal is another thing [I’m] not too sure [about], you know.”

A personal barrier for Leslie was her parents’ divorce when she was in middle school. It was difficult because her friends ostracized her, she stopped speaking with her father, and she and her mother were financially strained. Missy described a litany of challenges, including homelessness, evictions, and the loss of all her personal belongings, that she encountered due to her mother’s struggle against alcoholism. For Sky, a felony
conviction sent him to jail, nearly costing him the ability to graduate from high school, and postponed his arrival at Washington State University for a semester.

**Focus Groups**

Consistent with the individual experiences described above, the two general types of barriers students described in the focus group interviews were also academic and personal in nature. However, unlike life history participants, focus group participants felt that high school had left them academically unprepared for college-level work (“I was not prepared for the English, the math, or any of that stuff”) and provided little encouragement or assistance from most teachers or counselors (“We had an advisor that helps you out but, you know, they just shun you away, or whatever, unless you’re really adamant about going to college”). Three focus group students described being relatively new to the United States and having to learn English while in high school.

Regarding personal barriers, students reported difficult family challenges. Some felt that their families did not support their college aspirations (“I actually fought my way here because my mom did not want me to stay away from home”) or were not able to be of help (“I didn’t have the experience or exposure to the college atmosphere because neither of my parents were college graduates… I had to kind of do research on my own and get my information that way”). A few students reported having to deal with the illness of a parent or homelessness.
II. College Experiences

Barriers Encountered in College

Life History Interviews

All but two of the interview students indicated that they encountered barriers during their college careers. Typical obstacles included financial struggles, academic preparedness, social acclimation, and family crises. Financially, making ends meet presented challenges for three of these students. Although Liliya received the scholarship and was aware of other financial aid, she was uneasy about financing her education. Monica expressed a similar concern. She said: “I just, I have never been financially stable to where I can say, ‘hey, I can’t work right now.’ That has always been an uphill struggle for me, to, like, sustain myself financially, and have no worries financially.” Sky also indicated that: “the most noticeable barrier was finances.” He took out a loan to cover some of his living and medical expenses.

Academically, Oscar, a second-language learner, was required to enroll in English as a second language classes. Liliya stumbled briefly in a challenging organic chemistry class during her sophomore year, and Monica struggled to keep up with the increased workload, particularly the heavy reading load in her classes. Sky struggled in the requisite mathematics classes for his engineering major.

Socially, some of the interview students experienced difficulties adjusting to the college environment. For Oscar, commuting from his parents’ home each day hindered his ability to make friends on campus. Sky, who matriculated during the spring semester, felt constrained by the requirement to live in a dormitory after having lived on his own in his final 2 years of high school. Monica had to learn to strike a balance between the abundant social opportunities and the rigorous academic demands of college life.

Finally, family crises presented challenges to some students’ academic achievement as well. For example, Missy’s mother and Leslie’s grandmother died, and these challenging events made school more difficult for them.

Focus Groups

The focus group participants also described their challenges while in college. They most frequently mentioned the financial
strain of higher education, and discussed needing to take out loans or holding down jobs while in school. One student referred to the Financial Aid office as “the worst office on campus” and said “it is a fight every time” she has to go there. Another student said she was unable to do any volunteer work while in college because she was going to school and working at the same time. And because she will be participating in a student teaching program, she said: “I don’t know what I am going to do because we are not supposed to work during student teaching.” Other students mentioned having their car and their computer fail—resources needed in their daily lives—and having funds to pay for the necessary repairs.

Other focus group participants had to deal with difficult health issues. Students with ongoing or sudden medical needs found it difficult to pay for the needed care. One student explained: “A lot of [Achievers Scholars] don’t have health insurance because to get the Gates scholarship you have to be lower income…Besides the scholarship, the school did nothing to help. And when you really are…in trauma, you’re hurt…no one can help you.” Along with the concern of how to pay for medical and dental care, students had to take time to recover. One student “had to drop out of some classes I was taking during that semester because my teachers were unwilling to work around my surgery because I had to miss a week or two weeks of class.”

A third type of barrier focus group participants faced was selecting courses, selecting a major, and finding a college advisor to help with these decisions. Students described having trouble identifying the courses that fulfilled academic requirements, having advisors discourage them from certain courses of study, and changing their majors several times. For some students this lack of clarity around courses and majors meant spending more time in school. As one student reflected: “I could’ve been done a lot sooner, but I went from psychology to premed, from premed to biology, to communications, and then back to psychology. So having a good advisor would have helped a lot.”

Other focus group participants mentioned struggling with college-level mathematics, not having family support, and several students struggled with learning English as a second language.

**Overcoming Barriers in College**

**Life History Interviews**

Students tapped different resources to help surmount their individual hurdles. Students described reaching out for help and
drawing on personal strengths. For example, Missy described being “adopted” as an adult by two individuals who essentially became surrogate parents to her and her (now) husband. She said: “I had to ask for help. I had to ask if I could live with Dustin and Carol, the Wilsons, which was great because I then learned about a healthy relationship, and healthy boundaries, healthy communication, all the stuff that prepared me for marriage; because I was really set up to have a really rotten way about things. And they really were influential and mentored Nathan and me, not just for marriage, but also for life stuff, finances. No debt. No credit cards until you learn how to budget. No overspending. They were really strict, but in a loving way, you know. Like, but, that was a challenge for me. That was something I had to decide to do personally because I hadn’t had parents my entire life up until then. And so to get parents when you’re 18, 19 years old, it just really, kind of threw you for a loop. What do you mean you have this boundary? So I had to make a choice then. Am I going to listen and take the wisdom that they’re offering me or am I going to try and do things my way and really jack things up. So that was important.” Monica reached into her past, drawing on lessons about hard work and dedication she had learned during her K-12 education. She said: “You always have to revert back to where you started…You just have to do what you have to do.”

**Focus Groups**

Students in the focus groups also described a number of resources they used to overcome the barriers they faced while in college.

Some students reported using student services centers on campus to locate services such as advising and tutors. One student described a difficult situation with her family, about which she spoke with a counselor. She said: “Even though it was a really hard time the school seemed to [support me]” with counseling and the help of professors. Other sources of support students named were a student’s ROTC unit, having attended community college before going to a 4-year university, and the emotional support of some family members.

**Influence of the Achievers Program in Overcoming College Barriers**

**Life History Interviews**

Three students said they relied on resources from the Achievers Program to overcome barriers. Monica explained that the “mentoring program helped a lot when I first got here.” Sky
relied on a close personal relationship with Carla Michaelson and the financial support provided by the scholarship. Liliya sought the counsel of her Achiever advisor when she was struggling with her organic chemistry class. She said: “I was doing different things, but I was, like, about to quit because I was not getting the grade I wanted and so...But the coordinator for the Achievers scholarship, she like really supported me through that and I won’t forget it...she showed me, like, different skills and like tips that could, like, help me study that tough, real tough subject for me.”

**Focus Groups**

When discussing the support provided to them in college from the Achievers Program, students described the extent to which they relied on Achievers mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators for guidance and assistance. As one student said: “I think the Achievers Scholars office really has done a good job. I mean [the Achievers staff] really put a tremendous amount of work with us too and she would seek out help for us.” Others added that they regularly visited with their mentor and/or the program coordinator, and credited mentors and coordinators with helping them make it through classes and through financial aid and other campus services.

Interestingly, several students mentioned a diminishing relationship with their mentor or coordinator after their first or second year of college, as they became more comfortable with college. One student described seeing his mentor “a couple of times in the first year when I transferred there and then I was fine after that.”

In contrast to those who relied on mentors and coordinators early on or throughout their college experience, several students from the focus groups said that they were never assigned a mentor or never saw their mentors. As one student said: “Everybody’s talking about all these mentors and I am like, ‘what is that?’”

**Additional Findings**

Among the 43 focus group participants, 40 described whether they would have gone to college had they not received their scholarships. Nineteen of the 40 (47.5%) said that, without the scholarship, they would not have gone to college. Instead, these students often mentioned joining the military. As one student said, the military was “my only option, my parents didn’t have the money to pay for [college], so it was either scholarship or military.” The other common option for these students was to
“just [get] a job and start working.” As one student put it, the scholarship allowed freedom to not have to work at “some little 9 to 5 job that I wasn’t happy with. Now I’m actually able to do things that I want to do.” The students who were not anticipating going to college acknowledged that their futures were less promising before the scholarship. Another student said: “I was terrified of being stuck in poverty. I had been poor my whole life...I was really afraid to be stuck there.”

Twenty-one of the 40 (52.5%) felt they would have gone to college anyway. Prior to receiving their Achievers scholarships, only about half of the focus group participants had serious college plans. These students felt strongly, however, that the scholarship improved their college experience by, first of all, simply making a college degree possible, and further by having the option to not work while in school, relieving anxieties about finances, and having funding that allowed for 5 years to complete their degrees.

**Financing College**

**Life History Interviews**

All of the life history interview students worked during college. The types of jobs students held were varied and included restaurant work, website maintenance, computer lab support, tutoring, and factory work. Most students worked only half time, although some worked full time. For example, Monica worked full-time as a manager at McDonald’s, and Missy worked full-time at a psychiatric treatment center and received course credit in addition to her wages.

Approximately half of the students reported that working was beneficial to them either academically, socially, or for their future career goals; the other students thought that working hindered their studies. Leslie said her job in a computer lab was beneficial because it allowed her to study and complete assignments while working. Liliya said that her tutoring job at a local elementary school helped expand her social circle. Missy, Oscar, and Seth’s work was related to their career goals. Missy’s job, for example, was in her field of study, mental health services, and allowed her to “be part of building a program and revamping policy and procedure, and working with the clients.”

Sky, Monica, and John held jobs that either hindered their studies or were unrelated to their career goals. Sky worked at a local creamery that was far from campus; getting to and from work was time consuming and proved to be a challenge given that he did
not have a car. Monica’s position at McDonald’s required early morning hours, from 4 a.m. until 11 or 12 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, which negatively impacted her ability to concentrate in her afternoon classes and ate into her study time. She said: “I’ll come home from class and then I’ll just go to sleep because I’m just so tired. I did that for a long time.”

**Focus Groups**

Among the students participating in the focus groups, at least 28 of the 43 students worked or took out loans at some point in college. Several of the students commented, though, that the scholarship "completely" or "definitely" "helped" and "eased" their financial burdens; without the scholarship, they said they would have had to "work a few more hours" or would have "ended up with more loans." Like the interview participants, a small number of students added that they had worked for the "experience" and not primarily for a paycheck.

**Additional Findings**

A few students stated that one effect of receiving the Achievers scholarship on their college experience was that they spent more time as an undergraduate than they might have done had they not received the scholarship. The relief of not having to rush through school, for one student "made me reevaluate my college life and how I wanted to plan out my life. Since it was for 5 years, I went on ahead and took advantage of that and said...I don't have to rush through school...I can take life a little slower, [I] don’t have to rush through things. I can figure out what I really want to do."

In looking toward the future, a few students mentioned that the scholarship has indirectly helped them to fund graduate school. As one student stated, because of the scholarship, “I kind of saved up money [during college]...this [saved] money is now helping me go through graduate school.”

**Uses of Work and Loan Money**

**Life History Interviews**

For the most part, the students used the money they earned or obtained through loans to pay for their basic living expenses. Sky, for example, said: “It is so expensive to live in the dorm. There is no way I could afford it...I took out a loan like that, but that was just to cover my basic living expenses of living here.”
Focus Groups

Most students in the focus groups also reported that they used the money they earned or borrowed to pay for books or “general living expenses,” including rent, utilities, and food. As one student said, without the scholarship “I’d have to work a lot more, because my parents weren’t helping me pay for school. I mean, it’s given me the opportunity to work part time, and not have to worry so much about being able to pay my bills, pay for tuition, and being in debt, as much in debt as I could be. I still have loans, you know, but it’s definitely a smaller loan that it would have been.”

In addition, 4 of the 43 focus group participants mentioned that they sent earned, borrowed, or scholarship money to their parents or other family members to help out with expenses. One student, for example, said that her college education was a burden to her mother. She said: “My mom is a single parent. There is no way that she can afford to put me through college while she is paying the house loan...Yeah, I try to help her out.”

Regarding family financial support, students generally reported that they either received a little money (ranging from “every now and then” to a total “forty dollar contribution” over the past 4 years) or no financial support from their families. The most common answer as to why they did not receive more monetary assistance was that their family “doesn’t have money to help.” This finding is consistent with the financial need criteria used in the Achievers Scholar selection process.

Transition to College

Life History Interviews

All of the interview students reported some difficulty transitioning from high school to college. Some of the concerns were fairly typical of all college students, such as campus orientation (finding classes, learning bus schedules, etc.), and were smoothed over in a brief time period. Social challenges, like making friends and overcoming isolation, took longer and more effort and initiative from the students to accomplish. Seth said: “It was not positive, I’ll tell you that much. And I [was] originally going there to be a pastor and when I got there and saw what religion was like to those people...I completely turned a one-eighty...If you don’t gel and you don’t go to [a] small group, do Bible studies, if you don’t go to Young Life, if you don’t go to church on Sundays, you’re automatically ostracized. And it was a really a negative. I was going to leave after my first
semester. I was not having it. I loved the education so much that I stayed and stuck it out and had a great experience.”

Monica felt a sense of apprehension when she arrived at Western Washington University. She said: “I was very intimidated. It’s like, I think a lot of other people were as well. I wasn’t sure about success and the whole new, like, been thrown into this situation. Now you’re living with 20 people and you have to share one bathroom, you know.” Leslie expressed similar fears when she transferred from Central Washington University to Brigham Young University, Idaho. She said: “Oh, it was scary at first because I didn’t know anybody and it was a new experience for me. I have never actually moved where I had no clue who anybody was. And so when I moved in, that was really hard.” Missy felt a similar sense of isolation when she arrived at Evergreen State College.

Similarly, adjusting to the new academic challenges of college life—increased work load, higher expectations, relationships with professors, and advanced study skills—also took some time to get used to. Monica, for example, said: “College, school-wise, it was quite an adjustment. It was taking notes, taking notes, reading, taking notes. And so it was quite different. I was in, like, 400-people classes and I thought that but I wasn’t prepared for it. You see on TV sometimes, and that’s not, like, what college is really like. Freshman year, that’s what it is like. Yeah, it was very intimidating, very stressful. There was so much you had to juggle.” John’s wake-up call also came early in his academic career. He said: “I remember I came in, I wrote my first paper and I got a C on it and, like, I hadn’t got a C in the last, you know, 8 years. I said, ‘Well, okay, what’s going on?’ So, like, I had another paper, I worked even harder. I worked on that and I got a D. And I said, ‘Oh man.’ I was like, ‘what am I going to do?’…And that so I think that’s what most students experience but that was definitely the shock. It was like I thought that I could walk in and not put that much effort in because I had been pretty successful throughout high school without, you know, a lot; I mean I worked hard when I needed to, but not as the intense effort that you need in college, and so that was big shock for me and that was kind of, like, wow, I can’t just walk through this.”

Other factors also affected students’ transition. A few of the students, for example, indicated that they had interactions, both positive and negative, with their family members during college. For Missy, the interaction consisted primarily of her relationship with her surrogate parents, who helped provide structure and guidance for her at a critical time in her life. John mentioned that his parents attended all of his football
games—continuing a tradition they began during his youth. Monica’s family situation created some obstacles for her during college. Her sister’s continuing battle with drug addiction spilled over into her college life in a distracting and, at one point, embarrassing way. She said: “I had a police officer come to my dorm...My sister had stolen some stuff, and she had given it to me, and I thought it was a gift for Christmas, but, I didn’t know, and so the Yakima Police Department had to come up and confiscate this, like, stolen property from my dorm.” Her troubled younger brother also came to live with her for a short period.

To survive the transition from high school to college, all of the students indicated that they relied on a variety of resources for support. Achievers Program staff, university staff members, faculty, and peers (including student groups). For the most part, these individuals helped the students get oriented on campus, resolve problems with class schedules and other logistics, and provide instructional and emotional support. Monica, for example, relied heavily on Sonia during her transition to Western Washington. Oscar, likewise, had a mentor who ran the instructional center at the University of Washington. Sky took advantage of his close relationship with Carla Michaelson (“my second mom”) and became more active in the Multicultural Student Center at Washington State University. Liliya sought out Achievers Program staff when she arrived at Washington State University for graduate school. Leslie has found the faculty members in her husband’s department to be extremely helpful at Brigham Young University, Idaho. Lastly, John joined the football team. “Well, I think the biggest one that helped me was I played football and, like, that’s not, I guess I don’t know if that’s a special group or not, but just that coming and being part of the team early on. I knew guys who were older and knew guys could help me out and, well, if you need help, this is what you can do. That’s probably the professor you should avoid or just give me clues about that and I thought that was really valuable, and, for me at least.”

**Focus Groups**

Like the interview students, focus group participants reported that their transition from high school to college was difficult. The initial adjustment these students faced was the short time span between learning of the scholarship, needing to submit their applications, and then receiving the notification of their scholarship awards, an experience unique to this first group of Achievers Scholars. As one student said that “everything was so
new” and described the shift from “not planning on going to college and then a month later, all of a sudden you’re there” as “kind of overwhelming.”

Students encountered three kinds of challenges upon their arrival at college: increased academic rigor, social adjustments, and lack of awareness of the services available to them in college.

Some students said that their high school education inadequately prepared them for success in college courses. As one student said: “High school didn’t prepare me at all for the college-level math.” Many students were further challenged by the workload required in their college courses. Their experience was that college “took a little bit more effort than you expected,” and there was “way more homework” in college than high school. As a result, some students described receiving “bad grades” in their first year of college. In order to handle the workload, students used tutoring services, learned time management skills, and some found an initial year or two in a community college helped them acclimate to college demands.

Social challenges posed another difficulty in transitioning to college. Many students left their families and hometown social networks to attend college. As one student said: “I have a brother, a twin brother, him and I would do everything together and he didn’t come here and so, that was kind of, like, one thing that was like, ‘what do I do without him?’” Not knowing others at college and making new friends was an initial challenge, but most students who had Achievers advisors or mentors found them helpful, particularly in their first year. One student put it: “My mentor really helped me...It’s really comforting to know that there is someone on campus who knows you. And if you need help, you can just go [to] them.” Another student felt relieved that the scholarship provided “some support there for us...that there was one less thing that we were going to have to worry about in the transition at, you know, leaving your family and going to a different place.”

Several students struggled to identify and locate campus resources. One student said: “I know there [are] counselors above the financial aid office, like career counselors and there is actually a Health and Counseling Center that I didn’t know about last quarter...I have an appointment set up today to go see about it.” Several students reported missing their freshman orientations, and those who participated in their freshman seminar described it at “pointless” and of “no help.” For those students who were able to tap into resources such as campus
student support services, including tutoring and academic counseling, found them to be “really useful.”

Typical of these students’ descriptions of their transition to college was a statement by one student who summed up her freshman year: “You are still trying to acclimate and get used to where everything is and everything. And then on top of that trying to get to all your classes and like focus on your academics, like, you have to go in and meet with your mentor...Because your freshman year is really crazy anyway and...it was just tough to have to schedule around work, around school, [and] around the mentor.”

Additional Findings

Several findings emerged in discussions on the transition to college having to do with living in college dormitories, community college experiences, and students’ agency in seeking assistance. Students had both negative and positive experiences living in college dormitories. Negative experiences included having to grapple with what was to them an exorbitant expense, poor food quality, shared living arrangements, peer pressures to not attend class, time management, and pressure to be part of the “constant drinking and partying.” One African-American student encountered racist treatment by other students in his dormitory, for which he did not receive any response from the Resident Assistant; he consequently moved out of the dormitory. The benefits students mentioned included having a supportive Resident Assistant, getting to know students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and building social networks with other students.

Community college experiences were for the most part positive. Though two students at 4-year universities had heard from others that “the transfer” from a community college to a 4-year college “is horrible” in terms of the transfer of credits, no students who had attended a community college in the focus groups or interviews discussed having that difficulty. On the contrary, most students who discussed their community college experiences spoke positively of the smaller campus and their counseling, mentoring, extracurricular, and Student Service Center experiences. Two students said they felt their community college experience had helped with their transition to a 4-year college.

Across interviews and focus groups, student agency in “getting help from people, and reaching out” emerged as important in overcoming barriers. As one student said: “There are a lot of, like, [re]sources out there that you can go to, to get help, but some students are just afraid to ask...my first year I was
reluctant to ask, but now that I learned from that mistake I am, like, ‘hey...help me.’” Similarly, when struggling academically during his transition, John actively sought the help he needed: “I talked with professors, I started talking to them, and I got better at it in the process, and I became a much better student.”

Mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators also may have mediated some students’ development of agency in seeking needed assistance. As one student said: “I had a really good mentor for the last 4 years, so every time I had a question I could either go to my mentor or go to [the Achievers College Mentor Coordinator]...’Hey, I need help with this,’ and she is like, ‘Okay I will hook you up with the right, you know, people to help you figure it out.’ So that helps a lot just, like, knowing all the resources on campus and everything.” This student’s mentor played a role not only in connecting her with college resources, but also in helping her learn to access assistance when she needed it.

In contrast to those who sought help, not all students were as resourceful. As one student explained: “I didn’t like, I didn’t reach out. I didn’t know who I was supposed to reach out to...I am from a little tiny town, so this is already a huge city. When I got here, I was like, ‘wow, stop lights,’ you know what I’m saying?...So, no, I didn’t know who to reach out to, or where to go to even find assistance. I got by my classes barely. I had a couple of friends that had come here from high school and my girlfriend that was here, she had already been here for a semester. So, she helped me out and I pretty much just stuck to myself, try to do the best I could while I was here.”

When asked for advice for other students, two students discussed seeking supports. Missy said: “Keep working, finish the race. Ask for help.” Monica acknowledged: “It’s hard to ask for it, hard to say you need it.” She advised: “Take the help where you can get help, and don’t be afraid to ask.”

Comfort on Campus

Life History Interviews

With the aid of personal initiative and various supports, most of the interview students reported that they began to feel comfortable, academically and socially, on their respective campuses by the end of their first year or the beginning of their second year. Seth, however, said that he never felt part of the social fabric of Whitworth College, instead finding his close friends and social network primarily among people he met off-
campus. He explained that that situation was a function of what he felt was the overly pious nature of the student body. For Sky and Monica connecting with student clubs and ethnic student groups on campus helped them find their niches on campus. Leslie joined intramural sports teams at Central Washington University, but found that joining clubs was unnecessary at Brigham Young University, Idaho, because of the close-knit student body. Additionally, both Missy and Leslie used their respective religions to build social support networks. John joined a fraternity and the football team, relying on the more senior students in both entities to integrate him into the campus social scene.

Acclimating to the academic expectations also contributed to students’ sense of comfort on campus. Most indicated that they simply had to adjust the level of effort that had been required of them in high school to that required in college and that exhibited by their peers. Monica, for example, said: “My fall quarter I wasn’t happy with myself, and...my performance and stuff. So in winter, like, I picked myself up and dusted myself off and did a lot better.” For Sky, changing from an engineering major to business helped get him out of his academic slump. He said: “I switched to business and once I got into the business college, my GPA shot right up and I started to like the professors. People seemed much more friendly, much more outgoing. My advisor was much more helpful.”

**Role of Background/Ethnicity**

**Life History Interviews**

Two interview students, Oscar and Sky, mentioned that their racial backgrounds played a role in their college experience. Sky, for example, made great use of the Multicultural Student Center and took on a leadership role in the Native American student group. Other than occasional “racial issues on campus” and a general lack of diversity, he did not believe being an ethnic minority “made it anymore difficult” for him on campus. Oscar believed that he occupied a “unique” position on a campus with more African-American and white students. That role allows him to stand out more from the crowd. He said: “Sometimes when you do certain things, you know, you might be recognized by the professor or the TA, you know, rather than looking like a lot of people that look about the same...so, you know, it kind of makes you feel special.”
College, Diversity on Campus

Life History Interviews
Interview students indicated that there was little racial, ethnic, and class diversity on the private school campuses, but more diversity at the public universities. John, for example, having grown up in the racially-diverse city of Tacoma, had a visceral reaction upon his arrival at the predominantly white University of Puget Sound campus. He said: “I walk in and I am looking around and, I will be honest, I had never seen so many white people before in my life...But there are 3000 white people...and I am a white person too and it was just, it was a culture shock for me because I used to go to a very diverse school. And here I am going to a school now it’s 90-95% white.” Seth, similarly, found Whitworth College’s lack of ideological and ethnic diversity to be disheartening. He said: “I mean, even on the campus, there were so many exchange students who came and they were in the same position as me. Like, we just didn’t fit in because they wanted to go out and drink or something like that. They’d come back and people were like, ‘You’re going to hell’...and they were just like, ‘I don’t want to be here. I hate the U.S.’ It’s because they came there [to Whitworth].”

Oscar, on the other hand, was quite pleased with the diversity he encountered at the University of Washington, and Sky, while acknowledging that there had been incidents of racism on campus and that campus leadership seemed oblivious to underlying tension, said that the various ethnic student groups supported each other in various ways.

Focus Groups
Like the interview students, focus group participants reported both positive and negative experiences regarding racial and diversity issues on campus. Students at one college, for example, described their school as “moderately diverse,” students at this university felt “a lot of people do get along” and “the community is the best part of the school to us.” Students at another college had a mixture of opinions and experiences about the ethnic/racial climate at their school. One student, who came from a town of “all white people,” felt it was “neat” that she lived in a dormitory with people of different races/ethnicities and that “everyone [got] along” and she was able to interact with them. Other students from this school who experienced incidents they perceived as minor yet motivated by race or gender, felt the school administration responded with
either “life and death” seriousness or students were told to “brush it off.”

Students at a third school felt that there was racial tension on their campus, and that the school lacked diversity in its student body. Several students described incidents of racial bias, including receiving “disgusted looks” from peers for being married to someone of Japanese descent and having concerns ignored by a dormitory hall director. Students felt that the administration at this college did not effectively respond to this racial tension, and that it “sweeps it under the rug.” One student felt that the administration’s response was inadequate because “when] something bad happens, we throw a diversity [cue] to “make everything better.”

Influence of Achievers Scholarship on College Experiences

Life History Interviews

All of the interview students said that the primary impact of the scholarship on their college experience was financial. Liliya said: “The financial aspect of scholarship is the most obvious benefit. It reduced financial barriers and [in] that way motivated me more to attend college. And it helped me to fund my tuition of course, which opened the doors to opportunities...Since I don't have to worry about the financial part, it allowed me to use my talents in developing new ones, to pursue my future goals. And it allowed me not only [to], like, focus on my studies but it also has given me the freedom to participate in extracurricular activities here in campus without having to struggle financially.” For Missy, the thought of having to repay the scholarship kept her motivated to complete her degree.

Oscar thought the mentoring component of the Achievers Program also had a great impact on his experience. He said: “One thing for certain is they provide you with a mentor so that is something, you know, you have when you come to college rather than searching for everything. You actually have someone you can go to, and they will direct you to a...certain resource...when they introduce you to a different person they will say, ‘Oh, so this one is sort of special.’ And so they will pay more attention just because there is that connection rather than you just going anonymously.”

Focus Groups

Focus group participants mentioned similar advantages of being an Achievers Scholar including the ability to attend college, less financial stress and less need for work or student loans, and
access to mentors, Achievers College Mentor Coordinators, and other program resources. One student emphasized: “A lot of the people I went to high school with...[are] not even in school or some of them chose a different lifestyle. So it’s definitely an advantage [to] set something up for myself for the future.”

Many focus group participants reported that, because few of their peers know about their Achievers scholarship, they are not perceived differently from other students on campus. Among those who reported receiving reactions from others, some of their peers responded in a negative manner. As one student said: “Sometimes there might be a little bit of animosity from students who are taking out all loans.” More often, however, the reaction was positive. As one student said: “Most people don’t really have any idea what it is, unless they have it or the school advertised it, but it doesn’t come up really, and if it does it’s like ‘Oh, that’s cool.’”

**Opportunities Afforded by the Achievers Scholarship**

**Life History Interviews**

Interview students said that the primary benefit the scholarship provided in helping them prepare for their future was financial. Their scholarship award allowed them to complete college and start their post-graduate careers without the burden of loans and with less need to work. Missy, for example, said: “Well, I don’t have any loans. But I’ll have to take loans out for grad school, but that’s kind of cool to not have loans for undergrad and grad. And had I not had the scholarship, there was a pretty solid chance that I wouldn’t have graduated. And if I didn’t graduate my undergrad, I definitely wouldn’t go to my grad school.” Students said it was up to them to make the most of the experiences and opportunities the scholarship afforded them. Seth, for example, said: “It gave me the opportunity, but I can’t say that a scholarship directly played that role, but it definitely prepared me and made me much more apt and willing to keep going on with schooling and everything. It definitely prepared me, well allowed me to prepare my undergrad for my post graduate.”

**Focus Groups**

Similarly, focus group participants perceived the benefit of the scholarship as primarily financial, but they too were actually talking about how the scholarship supported the development of new aspirations they would not have had otherwise. The ability to go directly to a 4-year school rather than a community college,
the flexibility to change between schools and degree programs, and the stability of continual financial support for 5 years allowed them to define and redefine their aspirations over their careers as Achievers Scholars. As one student put it, the program provided “bigger future aspirations.” Another student said that the certainty of the support allowed her to plan and reevaluate her college experience. She said: “Since it was for 5 years, I went on ahead and took advantage of that and said...I don't have to rush through school...I can take life a little slower, [I] don’t have to rush through things. I can figure out what I really want to do.”

Additional opportunities the scholarship afforded students included building greater social networks and providing more opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. One student explained that the scholarship provided the “freedom to fully participate in extracurricular activities.”

**College Mentors**

**Life History Interviews**

All of the students reported having a mentor on campus, either through the Achievers Program or through their personal connections with staff or faculty on campus. They relied on these people for guidance, advice, inspiration, and opportunities. For several of the students, professors played a key role in their academic development and their career aspirations. Dr. John Yoder, for example, had a significant impact on Seth’s student development and his plans for the future. Seth said: “I was actually assigned to him as he was my advisor. It just happened to be that I liked political science. He was my first taste of it and I just stuck with him the whole time and I’m still in touch with him, [we] still shoot each other e-mails and I recommend readings to him, ‘You really have to check this book out, maybe offer it as an undergrad course...’ I mean, also he’s a Mennonite, so he really had a strong basis in peace studies conflict resolution, so he’s the one that kind of gave me the idea about going into the Peace Corps.”

**Additional Findings**

Across interviews and focus groups, students discussed the role that various supportive relationships played in their personal and academic success. Supportive relationships with college advisors, mentors, and in particular, the Achievers mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators were important in helping...
students through their transitions to college, when they encountered barriers, and for personal and emotional support.

Mentors and mentor coordinators served a critical role in students’ transitions. Students expressed the personal value they placed on knowing they would have a designated person to go to for assistance when they arrived at college. One student said she felt relieved that the scholarship provided “some support there for us…that there was one less thing that we were going to have to worry about in the transition at, you know, leaving your family and going to a different place.”

Mentors and coordinators were instrumental for many students in helping them find campus resources. A focus group participant said: “The College Mentor Coordinator, she’s a really good resource, she can sort of connect you all around campus and say…if you’re having problems with financial aid, this is the lady you go to.

Coordinators did not limit their assistance to academics. Students said that they would approach their mentors or coordinators for a broad range of needs. For instance, one student said that her coordinator provided her with help with her personal issues and also with paperwork and travel for a study abroad program. She said: “I always used to go into the office...with...family problems, or something like that. I did a study abroad not too long [ago] and she helped me fill [out] paper work and [locate] where I can go to find stuff [when abroad].”

Another important function that mentors served was to advise students of options they might not otherwise have known about. As one student put it: “I was just going to get my and that’s only, like, 2 years here and then they called me and they were like, I think it was [the coordinator], she’s like ‘well, you do know if you get your transfer degree and you go and get your master’s, you know, you will still keep on getting your scholarship if you try and go get your masters.’ Well, I was just, like, ‘well, yeah, why not?’”

Possibly the most important function the mentors fulfilled was helping students emotionally through times of personal crisis, thus playing a key role in retaining students. One student told us the coordinator at her college “has been a huge support to me.” She continued: “A lot of the Achievers...we don’t know how to go through the processes of things, it gets so frustrating at times that I want to quit, I’m tired of dealing with this. [The coordinator] would be like, ‘No, you’re not going to quit.’”
According to another student: “There’s many times throughout the year where I would just freak out and I would need somebody to, like, [help me find] a way out and organize, like, what was going on, because it could be so overwhelming. And [the Achievers staff] have, like, they have been a big help and they pretty much are the reason I’ve stuck with the path that I’m trying to do.”

**College Mentorship Roles**

**Life History Interviews**

Only one interview student, Sky, reported mentoring others. He initiated an Achievers club called the Achievers Club of Excellence, has been president of the group for 2 years, and is involved with mentoring new students on campus.

**College Leadership Roles**

**Life History Interviews**

Four students took on leadership roles on campus or in their families. Sky, as mentioned above, started the Achievers Club of Excellence at Washington State University and will be running for student body president next year. If he wins, he believes he will be the first Native American to hold that office. John assumed leadership roles in his fraternity, the Order of Omega (a Greek honor and leadership society), and student government (he was a senator and chair of the student senate). Monica served on her dorm’s Hall Council. Oscar took on a leadership role at home because his parents do not speak English well and have some difficulty understanding certain American customs and practices. Interpreting for them has been an important activity for him.

**Expectations of College**

**Life History Interviews**

Students indicated that their academic experiences, in terms of rigor and difficulty, met their expectations. That is, they had heard that college would be much more demanding and challenging than high school; for the most part, the students found this supposition to be true—if not overall, then at least for certain classes or academic assessments.

Students expressed mixed reactions as to how their social experiences met their expectations of college life. Liliya, for example, expressed a greater sense of comfort with the academic orientation of her college peers compared to what she had experience in high school. Sky, on the other hand, found that his
fellow students lacked that level of sophistication. He said: “Actually, I was under the impression that people that came to college came here primarily to get an education. And it seems to be mostly people are here spending their parents’ money and having the party of their lives. Yeah, so it’s not quite what I expected.”

Four of the interview students expressed that their first impressions of college life had been shaped by what they had seen on television or in movies. For Sky, his image of college came from a movie about Notre Dame football, but he found college did not meet his expectation and was disappointed by the party atmosphere. Leslie thought the party-going campus culture at Central Washington University closely resembled what she had been exposed to through the movies; Brigham Young University, Idaho was the polar opposite, however. Monica and Seth both expressed dismay when they discovered that the reality of college life was far different from their expectations, which had been based on fictional images observed in films during their childhoods.

**Desired Changes for College**

**Life History Interviews**

Nearly all of the interview students indicated that they would have like to have changed some aspect of their college experience, either academic or personal. Most, however, expressed that despite their misgivings, their choices have had positive consequences for them and their current situations. Sky and Seth would have chosen different colleges to attend. Seth said: “I probably would have picked a different college. But then again I wouldn’t be where I’m at right now and that’s the only thing that makes me want to think that I...don’t know if I would have changed it.” Monica would have liked to have been more focused on her studies. She said: “I wish sometimes that I was more focused, that I had been more focused; there’s a couple [of] blips on my transcripts that I wish were not there. And so all those things I wish I could change, but, like, overall I don’t know that I would change it because that’s life, that’s experience and you think you [have] got to live and learn and keep going, whatever happens.” Missy expressed that she wished her family situation had been different. She said: “I would have liked to have my family supporting me. I would have liked to have had a home to go to for the holidays. But because I didn’t, I met a lot of wonderful people who supported me more than I could have ever imagined. It worked out. I have a family, but they’re just not biological.”
Unlike the others, Oscar felt satisfied with his experience at the University of Washington. He said: “At this point it’s hard to say; I’m actually pretty satisfied with my college life so far, just because there are a lot of things that I didn’t think I would accomplish, and as I move forward I kind of add them to my list and I accomplish a lot more of them. And there are always things you can do over...”
III. Future Aspirations

Immediate Goals

Life History Interviews

Interview students’ immediate goals varied greatly, from starting a family to completing their bachelor’s degrees to finishing graduate school. Students also mentioned work and travel. Monica would like to work to save money for law school, and she had already begun studying for the LSAT; Missy planned to continue in her current position as a social worker. She said: “I’m pretty sure I’m going to keep the job that I have now because it’s a real job, and it’s a good one.” Missy also hoped to travel to Scotland, England and Ireland, and Seth was considering traveling for a year with the Peace Corps or possibly traveling across Europe and Asia.

Focus Groups

As with interview students, focus group participants’ plans for their post-college life varied greatly, from having no plans to immediately applying to graduate schools. A few students planned to travel abroad for immediately following their college graduation. In general, though, graduating seniors were starting to think about full-time jobs possibly related to their majors and some were thinking about applying to graduate school, typically a master’s program, at some point in the future. Students knew they wanted to do something after graduation, either get a job or go to graduate school, but when and which jobs were common questions. One student stated to the focus group while describing her future options that she had “all kinds of internal battles.” “Don’t we all” was the response from another. A few students did comment that their previous or current internships may result in full-time job offers after graduation.

Although students said their backgrounds played a role in their college experiences, neither gender nor ethnicity seemed to significantly influence most of students’ decisions about their future plans. Instead, what was relevant to students was being selected for the scholarship or being the first in their families to go to college. Several students stated that they themselves or their parents and families were “proud” of their achievements, and becoming an Achievers Scholar was among them. As one student commented: “My parents were, like, really excited that, you know, I got the scholarship.” This was especially since she and her sibling were the only two in their family to graduate from high school. Another student, the first in her family to graduate from
college as well, said that her family is coordinating the timing of their family reunion “so that everybody can come to my graduation.” One student added that her mother was “telling everybody about it [winning the scholarship]” and that it had become “kind of embarrassing.” Some students, however, mentioned that their families were not always encouraging of their college endeavors. One first-generation college student explained that to his family: “Now that I’m in college, it’s [college] a big deal. Before it was like, whatever.” Another, the first in his family to graduate from high school, stated: “My brothers had a total weird reaction to this [winning the scholarship and attending college]...It [was] almost like they were more resentful.” Some students reported that it was these individual factors including the lack of family support that made them “try harder” to succeed in school.

**Graduate School**

**Life History Interviews**

All students interviewed mentioned the possibility of attending graduate school, and three have already begun their graduate programs: Liliya is in her first year of a doctoral program in pharmacy at Washington State University, Seth is in the first year of a graduate program in public administration at Washington State College, and John is working on a master’s degree in teaching at the University of Puget Sound. Leslie might consider pursuing graduate work in occupational therapy sometime in the future, but family is her priority right now; Missy is considering either a second bachelor’s degree in nursing, or a master’s degree in social work; Monica plans to attend law school; and Oscar would like to get his doctorate in robotics at Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Stanford, or Cal Tech.

**Longer-Term Plans**

**Life History Interviews**

Interview students’ longer-term personal plans, apart from attending graduate school, include having children, purchasing a home, community involvement and taking on leadership roles in church. Three students have set high standards for their work-related goals. For example, in 10 years Sky hopes to be the executive of his own international consulting business; Missy plans to be working in the mental health or advocacy fields for children or vulnerable adults; Monica plans to be practicing or teaching law; Seth is hoping to be a university professor; and
John plans to be on the Tacoma City Council with his eye on becoming the mayor.

Ideal Job

Life History Interviews

When describing their ideal job, both Liliya and Missy said their ideal job would allow them to help others. Seth’s ideal job is to become a professional in the Peace Corps to work in nations plagued with genocide—or, possibly to be the lead singer and rhythm guitarist in a fusion music band. To Monica, an ideal job would be to teach law or to become a judge. For John, becoming the mayor of Tacoma would be ideal. He said: “I love Tacoma. I’d love to be the face of Tacoma. And I think the mayor is, like, the face of the city.”

Life Priorities

Life History Interviews

Of the students interviewed, life priorities were ranged from personal, to family, to desiring to help others. Many students expressed the importance of personal happiness. For Leslie, Monica, and John, happiness is a high priority. Several students mentioned the importance of family: Leslie hopes to raise her children in her church and aspires for their success in life; Missy greatly values her marriage, and said: “We support each other and challenge each other.” Monica hopes be able to provide her future family with happiness and financial stability.

Several students said that a high priority for them is to help others: Liliya hopes to contribute to society, and John said that he hopes to “help kids be successful like I was helped.” Some students expressed the influence of their spirituality on their lives: Missy shared: “My spirituality is my real motivator, my reason for staying healthy, for taking care of myself.” Other priorities mentioned were education, career, making national and global contributions, and for two students: “get[ting] back my social life” (after the demands of college) is important.

Influence of College on Future Plans

Life History Interviews

When asked how their college experience influenced their future plans and aspirations, students said it greatly broadened their perspectives. For example, Sky said that his education has opened up “completely new ideas” to him. Seth said that his degree in
political science has opened him to “different ideas, different opinions, different philosophies” and different cultures, all of which are important to his career goal of working with different foreign societies. John expressed: “It just opened my eyes to a lot more possibilities that are out there...when you’re in high school, your world view is pretty limited...[college] opened my eyes to all the possibilities.” Lastly, Liliya said that her education has prepared her to help others throughout her life.

**Influence of Achievers Program on Future Plans**

**Focus Groups**

Most students did not mention that being an Achievers Scholar or knowing other Achievers Scholars as direct influences on their future plans. However, minimal (or no) loan payments to look forward to was the most mentioned indirect effect of the scholarship on students’ lives and future plans. Students commented that because of the scholarship “[there] wasn’t as much pressure for me to worry about other things” and that the scholarship gives their lives “some leeway because I haven’t had to take out loans.” Specifically, with regard to working after graduation: “Starting out without a great amount of debt is good for everybody. You don’t have to automatically start paying on thousands of dollars. So that helps.” With regard to attending graduate school, as one student stated “I don’t have to think about ‘Okay, well, even if I want to go to [graduate] school, I still have $40,000 to pay off on my undergrad.’” Overall, students saw the scholarship as allowing them to start a relatively unencumbered post-college life compared to many of their peers.

**Achievers Scholars’ Advice to Other Students**

**Life History Interviews**

Interview students shared their sincere advice for other students based on their own experiences and what they now know and understand. Some students advised others to make the most of their college experience. For example, John advised students to “try to not take college for granted” because “this is the one time when you can really focus on trying to learn as much as possible and becoming informed.” In addition to setting a clear goal, Oscar advised students to “try different things” and to experience college “with your own style.” Leslie’s advice to other students was: “When you graduate, that’s who you are and that’s what you are going to be doing, and so, you know, make it count.” Seth advised students to “understand the campus before
you choose it” and to “make the best of it” because “college is a pretty amazing time.” Sky provided practical advice to “keep a planner” for “all your appointments.” He also advised other students to “figure out what your strengths and weaknesses are,” and “find something that you really enjoy doing.”

Several students mentioned the importance of staying focused on a goal. Monica said: “Stay focused and work hard...always know what you want and always set that goal to get it.” Most importantly, students provided advice for overcoming the inevitable barriers they would encounter. Monica advised students to not to get discouraged, not let others put you down, and most importantly to get “help where you can” and not to “be afraid to ask for help” because “you can’t function without [it].” Missy’s advice was similar: “ask for help,” and trust “there are bigger things out there and the degree is important.” Liliya advised students to “never quit” and said “it’s never [too] late to start over.”
IV. Community Involvement, Volunteerism, and Leadership

Volunteering in College

Life History Interviews
Most interview students described volunteer work that they have engaged in while in college, primarily through school organizations, and some through community or church organizations. For example, Liliya checked glucose and cholesterol levels through her college’s Professional Pharmacy Student Organization; Sky established the Achievers Club of Excellence that included a mentor program for new students; and Oscar led campus tours for prospective students and incoming freshmen. As for community and church volunteerism, Monica volunteered through the Hispanic Law Firm Organization, Seth volunteered through the Center for Justice and the United Community Aids Network, and Missy participated in various volunteer activities through her church.

Some students said that the connections they made through the Achievers Scholars led to opportunities to become more involved and participate in volunteering. For example, Monica said about volunteer and student government activities: “For the first 2 years, I had a lot of time…with the security of the scholarship [to]…get involved” in campus.

Focus Groups
Many students joined on-campus extracurricular clubs. Activities ranged from playing on school sports teams to participating in racially- or ethnically-focused groups, such as the NAACP or MECHA, to joining pre-professional societies to attending Achievers Program events. A few students mentioned that they had assumed formal roles in these clubs, such as peer counselor, treasurer, or vice president. Although some students stated that they did not volunteer, of those that did, many did so as participants of these student clubs. Other students volunteered within established community service or nonprofit organizations, such as hospitals or food banks.

Generally, focus group participants who volunteered or participated in extracurricular clubs, unlike the interview students, reported that the scholarship did not directly impact their motivation to partake in such activities. As one student quipped, volunteering was more of a function of “who you are and what kind of things you are interested in;” a scholarship in and of itself “is not necessarily going to make me get involved
more.” However, similar to interview students, a few focus group participants did mention that because the scholarship has reduced their financial need, they have more time “to fully participate in extracurricular activities.” As one student athlete stated, because of the scholarship, she was able to be involved in other campus organizations “that I might not have been able to if I had to work more or was more worried about being able to support myself.” Essentially, as another commented, the “financial support” of the scholarship “gives you a lot of extra time to do extra stuff.”

**Additional Findings**

Across interviews and focus groups, some students expressed their desire to contribute or “give back” to family, community, or society because of the help they received. For example, John said he is indebted to those who have contributed to his happiness and hopes to “give back to my family and give back to my community.” A focus group participant said: “When I was growing up, a lot of people put time and effort into me...and I want to be that person for somebody else.”

**College Leadership Roles**

**Life History Interviews**

Few students interviewed took on leadership roles in their volunteer work, though Sky served as president for the Achievers Club of Excellence, which he established. Two students did mention, however, that they took on leadership roles in helping their families: Oscar helped his parents by translating for them, and Seth took on family responsibilities when his father suffered a heart attack.

**Focus Groups**

A small number of students mentioned starting their own clubs on campus, including Achievers student groups, and few students stated that they had assumed formal leadership positions on campus or in their communities. Other students commented, however, that they served as mentors for fellow students, extracurricular club members, or younger siblings. Six students mentioned explicitly that they volunteered either formally or informally as mentors to young people. Two of these students were involved in structured programs that encourage black high school students to attend college; one taught, through a youth group, Vietnamese-language classes to children; two others, a Russian immigrant and a Cambodian-American, have visited their former high schools to inspire students from their ethnic communities to
apply for scholarships and attend college; and one student, until recently, had volunteered since October 2004 for two hours a day tutoring math and teaching science classes to Spanish-speaking elementary school students. The student explained that when she learned that the elementary school students were not attending science classes and were enrolled in English as a second language classes instead, she thought it was “unfair” and began volunteering to teach the science classes in the students’ native language. Of her teaching, she believes she “helps them [the elementary school students] to be more encouraged to go to school, to get a higher education.” In general, students said that such mentoring served to let young people know that “opportunities are there” for them.
V. The Achievers Program

The Meaning of Being an Achievers Scholar

Life History Interviews

When asked what it meant to be an Achievers Scholar, students discussed the ways that receiving the scholarship motivated them. Many students expressed that receiving the scholarship motivated them to work hard and persevere in college. Missy said that receiving the scholarship “gave me hope and motivation to go to school, and not just start, but finish.” John said what motivated him was his view of the scholarship as a responsibility, adding: “This big investment was being made in me, you know, they gave [me] a lot of money...I need to show their investment has been a wise one.”

Several students mentioned two program factors in addition to receiving the scholarship that contributed to their motivation to persevere through difficulties: the 5-year time limit to complete their degree and the requirement to pay-back money if they did not finish. Missy said: “I was told when I first got the scholarship, that if you dropped out you had to pay it back. So that was really a motivator for me to go and finish the race.” She also said that the “5-year cap,” motivated her to complete her studies within that time frame.

Focus Groups

When they heard that they had won the scholarship, the majority of focus group participants reported a range of pleased responses, from “surprise” to “relief” to being “happy,” “excited,” “ecstatic,” or “euphoric.” For a few students, the scholarship was “something to be proud of” or it meant that “somebody recognized our potential.” For most students, the pleased responses were due to the opportunities the scholarship provided for them. Some students said that the scholarship has “meant more opportunity” to “focus on my classes” or to “have the free time to do the things that I wouldn’t otherwise have the chance to do.” To some students, the scholarship meant the opportunity to attend college without worrying about postgraduate “debt to pay off” or paying “as much [tuition] out of my pocket.” As one student stated, the scholarship has meant not being in “as much in debt as I could be, I still have loans, you know, but it’s definitely a smaller loan that it would have been.”

For several students, the scholarship provided the financial means necessary to attend college. As one student stated, winning
the scholarship was “like this whole new door opened up.” Several students who had not planned to attend college until after they won the scholarship reported that the scholarship meant that college became a reality for them. As one student commented, the scholarship meant that “I know that I am going to get to go to college.” As stated by another student, without the scholarship: “Bottom line, we couldn’t come to school.” The scholarship meant college and college meant for some students “two very different branches of where I would have been” in life. As one student reported, the scholarship and, in turn, college meant that “I don’t have to become the restaurant manager that my mom was.”

As in the interviews, focus group participants felt the scholarship was a motivating factor for them personally and academically. One focus group participant said that receiving the scholarship meant “stepping up your game as far as being a college student. It meant...you are an Achiever Scholar, so you have to represent what that name stands for. And so that meant excelling in classes and that meant doing the right things, present[ing] yourself in a respectable manner around campus, getting involved.”

**Additional Findings**

Several students in both the interviews and focus groups expressed that their self-value increased due to someone taking a personal interest in them. Missy, Sky, and John mentioned teachers who gave them special attention. During very stressful times at home, Missy “had a couple of teachers take an interest” in her, telling her she “was pretty bright.” Sky recalled that in his turbulent high school years he had “a lot of teachers that really encouraged me...pushed me and helped me.” John recalled vividly how “really special” it was when his fourth grade teacher purchased encyclopedias to give to him. He said the incident “registered in my mind...somebody besides my parents saw that I could be something and was going to help me do that.”

For some students, receiving the scholarship served a similar purpose in their lives. Seth said of receiving the scholarship: “I guess the main thing it’s meant to me is just the fact that I was worth the opportunity to get an education, to go on...I can’t even place a value on it...it was priceless to me...[It] changed my life.” Oscar said it was important to him “knowing that someone out there is recognizing...your potential, willing to invest the money in you so that eventually you’ll do some good, and contribute back to the community...saying that you can do it...that was really encouraging.” A focus group participant said she had
low self-esteem and “put in my application for the Achievers scholarship, way last-minute, and then I didn’t even apply for college until I knew I had the scholarship…I didn’t think I could do it. And I am graduating in May.” She continued: “I was terrified of being stuck in poverty. I didn’t think that I had the support or the courage to move away from it.” Receiving the scholarship meant to her that “someone is investing in me.”

Benefits of Receiving the Achievers Scholarship

Life History Interviews
When asked what the biggest positive is of being an Achievers Scholar, interview students’ responses ranged from practical to personal. Practically, positive aspects of the scholarship were getting a “new computer” and help in financing their college education. More personally, positive aspects of the scholarship were improved “self-confidence,” “hope and motivation to go to school,” “my mentor,” “the people that I’ve met” and “the personal promotion,” the “opportunity to make your own decisions and keep going and make a future for yourself,” and “the network” of people: “something money cannot buy.”

Focus Groups
As in the interviews, focus group participants reported a variety of positives with regard to being an Achievers Scholar. The most-mentioned benefit in the focus groups was “money.” For some students the scholarship itself was the enabler to attend college. One student stated: “it’s the money that helped me get to the point where I could get a college degree.” Another student commented that the biggest positive “is just being able to go to school, and get your education and learning so much while here, and having all of it paid for.” For those students who had planned to attend college regardless of whether they received the scholarship, the echoed sentiment was that the scholarship “just makes everything easier.”

Aside from having their tuition paid, some focus group participants also stated that their mentors, including the Achievers College Mentor Coordinator, were the biggest positives to being an Achievers Scholar. The mentors were a “huge support” to students: “academically, as well as just personally.” Support provided by mentors ranged from general course and degree advising to, as one student stated, finding herself crying in the coordinator’s office insisting that she was “going to quit” school and the coordinator replying: “No, you are not.” The
mentors supplemented the universities’ advising capacities and helped students navigate their college experiences.

Other positives mentioned by a few students about being an Achievers Scholar included the motivating force that the scholarship had on their schoolwork, as well as the personal connections fostered by the program. In terms of motivation, students commented that the scholarship “makes me work harder in school” and has “driven me more.” Receiving the scholarship facilitated students’ academic persistence and achievement. As one student stated, the scholarship “helps me motivate myself, like it helps me, I feel better about myself and just feeling better about myself makes me do better.” A few other students mentioned that the Achievers Program allowed them to meet other Achievers Scholars or make a “job connection” that they would not have had without the program.

**Additional Findings**

Across interviews and focus groups, many students expressed that receiving the Achievers scholarship greatly alleviated their stress over financing their education and provided greater opportunity and flexibility. Concerning the alleviation of financial stress, Liliya said that not having to “worry about” finances allowed her to “use my talents in developing new ones,” to “focus on my studies,” and “participate in extracurricular activities” on campus “without having to struggle financially;” and Missy expressed that not having to take out loans because of the scholarship was a “huge blessing” to her, and when she graduates she will have “a clean start.”

Concerning the flexibility having the scholarship allowed, Seth said that the scholarship gave him “the opportunity to pick and choose where you want to go rather than being limited, like I was, financially;” Oscar said made the most of his 5-year college experience by pursuing a second degree in business in addition to his degree in computer engineering; and a focus group student said that scholarship “allowed me to work at my own pace because it’s a 5-year scholarship. If it was only a 4-year, I probably would have pushed myself to hurry up and get here in 4 years. I may not have done as well as I am doing right now.”
Disadvantages of Receiving the Achievers Scholarship

Life History Interviews
When asked about the biggest negative, students said there were no negative aspects of being an Achieve Scholar.

Focus Groups
As in the interviews, the majority of focus group participants reported that they “don’t really see any negatives” with regard to being an Achievers Scholar. One student did mention, however, that one weakness of the Program is “not knowing the full potential of having [an Achievers College Mentor Coordinator] there” to act as a resource for students.

Achievers Scholars’ Advice to the Program

Life History Interviews
The primary advice interview students offered the program was the need to better ensure that all students are paired with a mentor, because of the great value mentors played in their lives. Other suggestions included more structured networking opportunities among students, better communication regarding the timing of funding, and the need for affordable health insurance for students while in college.

Focus Groups
Findings in the focus group paralleled those in the interviews. Although some students had no explicit recommendations to make to the program, the advice that other students did offer fell into two general camps: more guidance from mentors and more interaction with other Achievers Scholars. With regard to “the mentor program,” as one student stated, there needs “to be more follow through in that area.” Because “the mentor part there is the lacking part,” as another student commented: “you have to almost look for moral support yourself.” One student mentioned that mentors needn’t be constantly doing “checkup stuff” with students, but “something more genuine, like, just coming and figuring the routes out or talk about something” would have been beneficial. It was unclear to a few students as to what kinds of supports their mentors and Achievers College Mentor Coordinators were supposed to provide to them. As stated by one student: “I see the line blurs where the school takes over and the administration of the Gates Foundation leaves off, so I don’t really know who is in control of what.” Students were unsure of
the role the mentorship program was supposed to play in the academic and personal lives.

In terms of meeting other Achievers Scholars, some students wanted to “meet the people that are around here [the university] that are part of [the] Achievers scholarship.” Again, the interaction need not be formal or constant. One student commented: “If they were, like, [to] do these kinds of meetings [referring to the focus group] more often, I think it would be nicer.” Additional advice mentioned by one or two students included the desire for health insurance and scholarships for graduate school.
**Study Design**

This study examined the personal experience of students from the first cohort of the Washington State Achievers Program to provide greater understanding of recipients’ academic, personal, and professional lives, and to reveal what differences the program made in students’ lives. Focus groups were conducted with scholarship recipients at seven undergraduate institutions in Washington: Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, University of Washington, Western Washington University, Washington State University and clusters of colleges and universities in the Tacoma and Yakima areas. The sites were selected because they had sufficient numbers of Achievers Scholars to fill out a focus group. In addition, in-depth life history interviews were conducted with scholars who had participated in the original press release of the Achievers Program in its inaugural year.

**Participants**

Life history interview participants were 8\(^3\) of the 15 scholars who had represented the program in its inaugural year. Of these students, 11 had either graduated or were still enrolled in their 5th year of the program. Participant samples for the focus groups were drawn from the first cohort of the Achievers Program. Of that cohort, 88 had graduated and 224 were still active and enrolled in school. Of the 88 graduates, updated contact information was available for 40; of the 224 active scholars, contact information (phone number, address, e-mail) was available but was not necessarily current. Samples for the focus groups were drawn from each of the major gender and ethnic groups in the cohort to approximate their proportions in the demographic data available on Achievers Scholars. Given an initial goal of 48 focus group participants with an ethnic makeup as presented in the right-most column of Table 1, a reasonable representation of the entire sample was obtained, 43 students in all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
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<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\) One additional student participated in a life history interview, though due to the later date of that interview, the data were not included in this analysis. A summary, however, is provided in the Life History Interview Report provided to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation March 31, 2006. Also, an interview summary with one student who dropped from the program prior to graduating, who chose to remain anonymous, is included below in this appendix.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>74%</td>
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</table>

**Protocol Development**

The semistructured protocols used for the focus groups and life history interviews were adapted from instruments used by the foundation in a study of the Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) program. Items were drawn from the GMS protocols and then aligned with the four overarching questions of this study. The protocols were revised in collaboration with staff from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Washington Education Foundation. Both protocols are included in this appendix.

**Data Collection**

Life history interviews began in early December 2005 and continued through March 2006. A total of ten interviews were conducted, eight of which were included in this analysis. Focus groups were conducted in January and February 2006 at the seven institutions named above. A total of 11 focus groups were conducted: two at each of three institutions to accommodate students' schedules, and one at each of the other four. Ten focus groups were included in this analysis. An additional focus group interview was conducted with 2 students who dropped from the program; a summary is provided below in this Appendix. Interviews and focus groups were from 30 to 90 minutes long; typically lasting 45 to 65 minutes. All students received $25 Amazon gift certificates for their participation, though one student declined the certificate.

Focus group participants were contacted initially by phone or e-mail, after which they received follow-up e-mails. The Achievers College Mentor Coordinator from each site were instrumental in obtaining student participation. They sent e-mail letters to selected scholars to encourage participation or contacted students directly by phone or in person. The coordinators also arranged the conference rooms in which the focus groups were held.
**Data Analysis**

A constant comparative data analytic approach, which involves constant comparisons of data to develop understandings of the relationships between them (Stake, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Thorne, 2000) was employed in this study. Focus groups and life history interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and summaries of the life history interviews were written, using a standard set of sections based on protocol questions. Initial data codes, definitions, and procedures were developed to address key topics covered in the interviews, including Achievers Scholars’ perceptions of (a) affordances and barriers to achievement and success, (b) the influence of participating in the program on their lives, (c) the influence of the program on their professional aspirations, and (d) factors that facilitate their participation, volunteerism, or leadership roles in schools and communities.

The project team conducted data analysis iteratively. The team drafted an initial coding structure that was based on topics covered in the focus groups and interviews, and designed to identify the topics and themes discussed in each interview or focus group transcript paragraph. To obtain sufficient interrater reliability, three raters coded one focus group transcript and one interview transcript, after which ratings were compared and resolved, as well as clarifications made to the codebook. A test sample of 34 data paragraphs was then prepared. The three raters coded these 34 paragraphs independently and then compared their ratings. Each rater achieved 84% or greater agreement with reconciled ratings, which was considered to be a sufficient level of agreement to continue independent coding. One rater then coded the remaining seven interviews, and another coded the remaining 9 focus groups; each was then coded by a second rater. In addition to coding all interview and focus group responses according to the coding structure, raters also tagged the paragraphs for the question to which they were related, to enable the generation of individual topic summaries. The transcripts were then loaded into an ATLAS.ti database, along with their corresponding codes and question tags. Analysts then queried the ATLAS.ti database to review data by code or question tag, and select data for each topic summary.
References


Life History Interview Protocol and Question Tags

**IA Early Academic Achievement: Background and Academic Trajectory**

1. **Going to College, Early Thoughts:** Looking back at your early childhood, when did you start thinking you were going to college? Who or what were the significant facilitators in this mindset? If not discussed, you may probe for the following:
   - **Going to College, Parental Influence:** What role did parents or other relatives play?
   - **Going to College, Mentor/Teacher Influence:** Mentors or teachers?
   - **Going to College, Friends’ Influence:** Friends?
   - **Going to College, Extracurricular Influence (In School):** Extracurricular activities in school?
   - **Going to College, Extracurricular Influence (Out of School):** Out-of-school activities (church, community, other)?

**IB High School Academic Achievement**

2. **High School, Experience:** Could you briefly describe your high school experience? Probe for the following:
   - **High School, Classes:** Classes you enjoyed and did best in (why?)
   - **High School, Effort:** Level of effort?
   - **High School, Fit:** How you ‘fit’ in?
   - **High School, Teachers:** Teachers?
   - **High School, Counselors:** Counselors?
   - **High School, Social Network:** Friendship networks?
   - **High School, Knowledge of College:** Knowledge of college?
   - **High School, Extracurricular (In School):** Extracurricular activities, such as clubs or groups, to which you belonged or had leadership roles?

3. **High School, Influence on Academic Achievement:** What had the greatest influence on your academic achievement?

4. **High School, Encouragement:** Did you have any significant experiences or people in high school that inspired or encouraged you?

5. **High School, Biggest Success:** What were your biggest successes or greatest accomplishments in high school?

6. **High School, Role of Background/Ethnicity:** Did your ethnic or cultural background play any role in your high school academic achievement?

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*Bolded text represents the question tags.*
7. **High School, Personal Inspirations:** Who were the one or two individuals in particular who most inspired you to excel academically and to attend college?

8. **High School, Support System:** How would you describe your ‘support system’ while in high school?

9. **High School, College Outreach Programs:** Did you participate in any college outreach programs?

10. **Going to College, Influence:** Did you know you were going to college? (Probe for why, how, motivation, indicators, and most influential people.)

11. **College, Selection:** How and why did you select which college you’d attend?

12. **College, Level of Preparation:** Looking back on these early school experiences, how well prepared were you for college?

**IC Academic Barriers**

13. **Barriers, Pre-College:** Prior to going to college, what barriers or difficulties, if any, did you face in achieving your aspirations or educational goals?

14. **Barriers, College:** Did you face any barriers or difficulties while in college? If so, what were they? (Probe for financial, social, academic, family, peer, language, immigration, health, or cultural discontinuity)

15. **Barriers, College (Overcoming):** What have you done, personally to address these challenges while in college? What helped you most to address these challenges?

16. **Barriers, College (Overcoming with Scholars Program):** Has the Achievers Program assisted you in overcoming any of these challenges? If so, can you describe how?

17. **College, Work:** Did you work during college? If so, what type of work? How many hours a week typically?

18. **College, Work (Help/Hinder Studies):** Did it help or hinder your studies in any way?

19. **College, Loans:** Did you need to borrow money for college?

20. **College, Work/Loans (Use of Money):** Do you use the money to support other family members, to pay for travel home, to save, pay for your car, or pay rent?

**II College Experiences**
21. **College, Impression**: What was your first impression of your campus? Include what were your living arrangements. (Probe for roommates and living arrangements on or off campus.)

22. **Transition to College**: Please describe your ‘transition’ from high school to college? Probe for the following:
   - **Transition to College, Difficulties**: Difficulties/Problems? (Probe for preparation, work load, fears, or doubts.)
   - **Transition to College, Supports**: Facilitators/Supports? (Probe for teachers, friends, or family)
   - **Transition to College, Family Interactions**: Interactions with home or family?

23. **Transition to College, Support Programs**: Were there any special programs or groups that helped in this transition? Describe.

24. **Transition to College, Supportive Staff**: Were there any faculty or staff members that helped you negotiate day-to-day life as a college student? Describe.

25. **College, Comfort on Campus**: When did you feel ‘comfortable’ (or have a sense of belonging) on your campus? (If you ever did? Define comfortable.)

26. **College, Social Network**: How would you describe your personal student networks on campus?

27. **College, Role of Background/Ethnicity**: What, if any, impact does being an ethnic minority have on your college experience?

28. **College, Diversity on Campus**: How would you describe or evaluate diversity on your campus?

29. **Post-College, Scholarship (Aid in Preparation)**: By receiving the scholarship, did you feel more prepared or privileged for graduate school or entrance into the work market?

30. **Scholarship, Impact on College Experience**: Did receiving the scholarship enhance your college experience? How?

31. **College, Mentors**: Do you feel you have any mentors or role models on campus? Describe.

32. **College, Mentoring Others**: Do you feel you are a mentor or role model? Describe.

33. **College, Met Expectations**: Is college life what you expected? Describe.

34. **College, Desired Changes**: If you had a ‘magic wand’ and could have changed your college experience in any way, what would you change?

### III Future Aspirations
35. **Immediate Goals**: What are your immediate goals? Degree gained or desired?

36. **Graduate School**: Graduate school aspirations?

37. **Post-College, Plan (5 years)**: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
   - **Post-College, Plan (10 Years)**: Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

38. **Post-College, Ideal Job**: What is your ideal job?

39. **Post-College, Ideal Job (Leadership Opportunities)**: In this role, do you see yourself as a leader in your community?

40. **Life Priorities**: List your top three life priorities. Describe how/why they made the top three list.

41. **College, Influence on Future Plans**: Could you describe how your college experience helped shape your future plans and aspirations?

42. **Goals, Different from Peers**: Do your goals or aspirations differ from those of your college peers? Describe how and why.

43. **Advice to Other Students**: Looking back, what advice would you give other students like yourself?

**IV Community Involvement, Volunteerism, and Leadership**

44. **College, Volunteer**: What volunteer work have you engaged in on campus or in your home or school community since you became an Achievers Scholar?

45. **College, Volunteer (Eased by Scholarship)**: Does receiving the Achievers scholarship make it easier to get involved in campus or civic activities in the community?

46. **College, Leadership**: What leadership or teaching roles have you assumed on campus or in the community since you became an Achievers Scholar?

**V Program Factors and Issues**

47. **Scholarship, Meaning**: What has it meant to be an Achievers Scholar?
   - **Scholarship, Changed Life**: Do you feel it has changed your life in any significant way? How?
   - **Scholarship, Winning**: How did it make you feel to win the Achievers Scholar award?

48. **Scholarship, Response from Peers**: How did your fellow students respond when they learned you were an Achievers Scholar?

49. **Scholarship, Biggest Positive**: What was the biggest positive of being an Achievers Scholar?
50. **Scholarship, Biggest Negative**: What was the biggest negative of being an Achievers Scholar?

51. **Advice to Program**: What advice or suggestions would you offer to the Achievers Program to help them be even more effective?

52. **Self-Description**: Reflecting on all of these life experiences, how would you now describe yourself? Who are you?
Focus Group Protocol and Question Tags

I Barriers to Academic Achievement

1. Transition to College: Please describe your ‘transition’ from high school to college. Probe for the following:
   - Transition to College, Difficulties: Difficulties/Problems? (Probe for preparation, work load, fears, and doubts.)
   - Transition to College, Supports: Facilitators/Supports? (Probe for teachers, friends, family, and in or out of school activities.)
   - Transition to College, Family Interactions: Interaction or responsibilities with home/family?
   - Transition to College, Support Programs: Any special programs/groups that helped in this transition? Describe.
   - Transition to College, Supportive Staff: Any faculty, staff members, or others that helped you negotiate day-to-day life as a college student? Describe.

2. Barriers, Pre-College: Prior to going to college, what barriers or difficulties, if any, did you face in achieving your aspirations/educational goals?
   - Scholarship, Influence in Attending College: Do you think you would have gone to college had you not received the scholarship?
   - College without Scholarship: If so, how do you think it would have been different without the scholarship?
   - Post-High School without Scholarship: If not, what do you think you would have done after high school?

3. Barriers, College: What barriers or difficulties, if any, have you faced while in college? Probe for financial, social, academic, family, peer, language, immigration, health, or cultural discontinuity.

4. Barriers, College (Overcoming): What have you done, personally to address these challenges while in college?

5. Barriers, College (Overcoming with Scholars Program): Has the Achievers Program assisted you in overcoming these challenges? How?

IIA Achievers Program Impact on Personal Life: Financial

6. Scholarship, Ease Financial Burdens: Has receiving the Achievers scholarship reduced your financial burdens? How?
   - College, Work: Do you still have to work?
   - College, Loans: Do you have to take out student loans to meet your financial obligations?

7. College, Work/Loans (Use of Money): If you still have to work or take out student loans after receiving the Achievers scholarship,
for what purposes do you use the additional income earned from work or through loans? Do you use the money to support other family members, to pay for travel home, to save, pay for your car, or pay rent?

8. **College, Financial Support from Family:** Has your family supported you financially during college?
   - If yes, in what ways?
   - If no, why not?

IIB Achievers Program Impact on Personal Life: Campus Climate

9. **Scholarship, Perceived Differently by Others:** Do you believe you’re treated or perceived differently from other students on campus, including other minority students, because you are an Achievers Scholar? If so, why?
   - **Scholarship, Self-Perceived Special Dis/Advantages:** Do you perceive yourself as having any special advantages? Disadvantages? If so, what were they? (Probe for on campus [academic] and/or in the community [personal] advantages or disadvantages.)

10. **Scholarship, Opened Doors:** Do you believe that being an Achievers Scholar has opened doors that otherwise would have been closed to you on campus? What are some examples?

11. **College, Campus Climate:** What is your perception of the campus climate overall?
   - **College, Campus Climate:** How would you describe the climate?
   - **College, Racial/Ethnic Interactions:** Do people from different racial and ethnic groups get along? Do different racial/ethnic groups interact outside of class?

12. **College, Changed Others’ Perceptions:** How have your interactions with fellow students, faculty, and others at your college or university changed their attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors toward people from diverse cultural groups?
   - **College, Role of Background/Ethnicity:** Can you share any positive or negative experiences on campus that you believe are because of your ethnic/racial background?

III Achievers Program Impact on Scholar Aspirations

13. **Post-College, Immediate Plans:** If you have not yet graduated, what are your plans immediately after college?
   - **Post-College, Immediate Plans (Graduate School):** Will you attend graduate or professional school? Full-time or part-time?
   - **Post-College, Immediate Plans (Work):** Will you pursue employment? Full-time or part-time? Where?
• Post-College, Scholarship (Aid in Preparation): By receiving the scholarship, did you feel more prepared or privileged for graduate school or entrance into the labor market?

14. Scholarship, Influence on Future Plans: How did being an Achievers Scholar influence your decision about your future plans and goals?
  • Scholars Network, Influence on Future Plans: Did opportunities to network with other scholars impact your decision? If so, in what way?
  • Specific College, Influence on Future Plans: Did the opportunity to attend a certain college/university impact your decision? If so, in what way?

15. Future Plans, Role of Ethnicity: How did your ethnic background or cultural identity shape your plans for the future?
  • Family/Community Expectations: Does your family, community, or tribe have certain expectations of you? If so, what are they?
  • Decisions, Role of Family/Community Expectations: Have cultural norms and expectations guided your decisions? If so, how?

16. Future Plans, Role of Gender: How does being male or female affect your family, community, or tribe’s expectations of you, your educational goals, or your future plans?

IV Achievers Program Impact on Community Involvement, Volunteerism, and Leadership

17. College, Volunteer (Eased by Scholarship): Does receiving the Achievers scholarship make it easier to get involved in campus or civic activities in the community?

18. College, Volunteer: What volunteer work have you engaged in on campus or in your home or school community since you became an Achievers Scholar?
  • College, Role/Value of Volunteering: How do you see the role and value of volunteer work?

19. College, Leadership: What leadership roles have you assumed on campus or in the community since you became an Achievers Scholar?
  • College, Leadership Positions: What office/position do you hold within campus or community organizations (president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary)?
  • College, Created New Organization: Have you initiated the creation or development of a new organization, foundation, service on campus or in the community?
  • College, Mentoring Others: Have you served as a mentor or role model for others? If so, how do you know? Is it structured or informal?

V Achievers Program
20. **Scholarship, Meaning**: What has it meant to be an Achievers Scholar?
   - **Scholarship, Changed Life**: Do you feel it has changed your life in any significant way? How?
   - **Scholarship, Winning**: How did it make you feel to win the Achievers Scholar award?

21. **Scholarship, Biggest Positive**: What was the biggest positive of being an Achievers Scholar?

22. **Scholarship, Biggest Negative**: What was the biggest negative of being an Achievers Scholar?

23. **Advice to Program**: What advice or suggestions would you offer to the Achievers Program to help them be even more effective?

24. **Additional Comments**
### Coding Structure Used in Analysis

1. **Personal Experience**

   **A. Pre-College Experience**
   
   1A1. **School**
   Experiences (academic and social) prior to attending college. Also includes preparation for college. Does not include college orientation activities.

   1A2. **Family/Home/Community**
   Pre-college experiences related to the Scholar’s family, home, or community, but not community activities, such as sports or church.

   1A3. **Personal Attributes**
   Personal attributes in the pre-college years, such as language, gender, or abilities. Also includes personal preferences, mindsets, or proclivities. Does not include personal attributes related to future aspirations.

   1A4. **College Aspirations**
   College aspirations prior to attending college.

   1A5. **Activities**
   Pre-college non-academic or out-of-school activities, such as clubs, church, or sports.

   1A6. **Other**
   Other pre-college experiences.

**B. College Experience**

1B1. **School**
College academic and social experiences, including orientation activities prior to start of school year.

1B2. **Family/Home/Community**
College experience related to the Scholar’s family, home, or community.
1B3. Personal Attributes
Personal attributes in reference to college experience, such as language, gender, or abilities. Also includes references to how a Scholar feels about him/herself.

1B4. Transitions
Transitions between high school/junior college/college, including college selection, preparation for college, and whether college met expectations.

1B5. Influence of Achievers Program on College Matriculation
Influence of the Achievers Program on college matriculation.

1B6. Work/loans
Work and loans during college.

1B7. Climate
Campus climate, including issues of diversity (language, race, ethnicity, class, gender).

1B8. Other
Other experiences.

2. Future Aspirations

2A. Work
Work goals and aspirations.

2B. Graduate School
Graduate school goals and aspirations.

2C. Leadership
Aspirations to take on leadership roles.

2D. Priorities/Other
Aspirations or goals, but not work, graduate school, or leadership priorities.

2E. Preparation
Preparation for future goals and aspirations.

2F. Influences on Future Aspirations
Influences on the Scholar’s future aspirations.

2G. Self-Descriptions
Self-descriptions.

3. Community Involvement

3A. Activities
Activities in which the Scholar engaged, including volunteer, religious, sports,
Activities in which the Scholar took on formal (e.g., teacher, founder, secretary) or informal leadership roles.

Activities in which the Scholar served formally or informally as a mentor.

References to not being involved in extracurricular, leadership, or mentorship activities.

Other community involvement activities.

Advice or recommendations to the Achievers Program.

Activities and experiences of participating in the Achievers Program, including advice to future students or Scholars, what Scholars would have done differently, what they learned, and any negative experiences, such as not having a mentor.

Advantages and disadvantages of the Achievers Program.

Statements of feelings about getting the Achievers scholarship.

Barriers across all categories, including statements about not having support or not knowing of available supports.

Supports across all categories.

Successes across all categories.

Actions that represent overcoming barriers, including seeking support or help.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5E. Quotes</th>
<th>Compelling or noteworthy quotes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5F. Influence of Achievers Program</td>
<td>Influence of the Achievers Program on Scholar’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5G. Supportive Relationships</td>
<td>Caring or trusting relationships outside the Achievers Program, including supportive peers or peer networks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students Who Dropped from the Program: Life History Interview and Focus Group Summaries

The following life history and focus group interview summaries were conducted with students who had not graduated and were no longer enrolled in an undergraduate program. These data were not included as part of the analysis for this study due to the difficulty in obtaining participants and consequently the later timing of the interviews.

Life History Interview, Anonymous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in College:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondent agreed to be interviewed on the condition that any identifying details be removed from the interview summary.

Early Academic Achievement

The respondent’s parents always told her and her older brother that they wanted them to go to college. She said: “It was embedded in me and my brother’s minds for a long time.” She and her brother were the first ones to go to college. Her mother did not complete elementary school and her father did not finish high school. She explained: “It was a dream of theirs for us to go to college.”

Both she and her brother received encouragement to pursue higher education from teachers beginning in elementary school. “There was one teacher in particular, my fifth grade teacher, who really encouraged me and my brother, because we both had her for fifth grade, to really apply ourselves and go to college. Basically, she just took us under her wing.”

High School Academic Achievement

Overall, the respondent felt she had a good experience in high school. She was surprised during her freshman year in high school when she was placed in all honors classes. “For me, it was a big transition to go from always having straight A’s in eighth grade to going and jumping into the honors classes where everything is more up-pace. If I found it too difficult or if I found that I wasn’t grasping the concepts even with the teachers’ extra help
then I’d go down to my counselor and see what else I can do or to see if I should drop that class and go into a mainstream class.”

She found that she always put considerable effort into her classes, but “it was not as hard as most people say it will be, but you have to apply yourself.” The respondent said she always wanted to do well so she could get into a good college.

She felt like she fit in well in her high school but acknowledged that there was some estrangement from some of the students in her honors classes. She explained: “With some of my classes, especially my honors classes, it felt like, since most of the kids in those went to school together for a really long time and really knew each other; having me and a couple of the other kids who went to school together, there was kind of a division in that sense. But there wasn’t any outright, ‘we don’t like her’ type of thing. There was respect there...but it wasn’t the, ‘oh, let’s go out to lunch or hang out on the weekend.’”

A shy student, the respondent did not really participate in many extracurricular activities in high school. Other than playing sports during her freshman year and some community service, she was not very social and did not go out much. Neither she nor her brother worked because their parents did not want them to have jobs. She said: “They just wanted us to focus on school. And that went into college as well. ‘For the first two years, I want you to not work and focus on your studies.’”

The greatest influence on the respondent’s academic achievement was the encouragement and support of her family. As she grew older, she felt a greater distance from her teachers, but her parents’ commitment remained consistent. She said: “It’s always been my parents pushing us. Always. Once you get to high school, it seems that teachers distance themselves.” She found that she had to take more personal initiative to get help in high school.

Graduating from high school was her biggest success. She also identified doing well on her International Baccalaureate Spanish test and a history presentation her teacher asked her to give because she was the only native Spanish-speaker and the class. The teacher needed someone to translate passages and perform them. She had only a couple of days to prepare but she succeeded. She said: “It’s one thing I’ll never forget.”

The respondent did not participate in any college outreach programs. Her older brother, a student at [University], paved the way for her application process. Because of his earlier experience she knew how to write essays, complete applications,
research schools and “see what’s really important”—not just the social aspect, but the academic component as well.

**Academic Barriers**

The respondent did not mention having any significant academic barriers.

**College Experiences**

She thought about attending one university, but decided against it because her brother was there and she did not want him watching over her. She wanted to stay in state but move away from home. The respondent liked her chosen campus because of what it had to offer, so she enrolled there.

Despite taking many advanced college prep classes in high school, the respondent did not feel very prepared, academically, when she got to college. She said: “I felt that high school could have taught me how to take notes better. Definitely. If I thought middle school to high school was a big transition for me, high school to college was a bigger transition. It was a lot harder. Way harder. In the sense that you don’t have your parents there saying ‘you’ve got to get up, you’ve got to go to class, study…’ For me it was difficult. I wish I knew how to take notes better. I wish they could’ve taught me better ways to study for exams.”

She said that high school had not taught her effective ways to study. “The notes we took were the ones your teacher put up on the board. It’s not where they’re lecturing and you have to take out the important parts.” She felt that having that instructional approach in high school hurt her in college.

Once the respondent saw that she was struggling, she sought help from friends and tutors on campus. A key source of support came from her roommate who was in a sorority. The women in the sorority had access to an academic advisor and they brought the respondent along with them when they went for help. She said that the Achievers Program did not help her in that way.

The respondent finally felt comfortable in college by the end of her freshman year. She found that she was not as shy and was comfortable approaching professors and feeling that she could ask questions “without having them think I’m stupid.”

A kidney infection and a bout of homesickness (“That was kind of huge”) also hurt her academically. One professor did not let her make up the work, explaining that it was too late in the year for her to do anything. She said: “That screwed me over.”
During her senior year, she had an episode of depression and decided to not go back for the spring semester. She plans to resume and hopes to graduate soon.

During her freshman year, against her mother’s wishes, she worked 20 hours per week for extra spending money and to pay off credit card debt. She had to wake up at 3:00 a.m. to get to work on time and worked until 7:00 a.m. When she told her supervisor around finals time that she wanted to take time off to study for finals, the supervisor became upset and put her on work probation that did not allow her to work again for a year.

The respondent took out loans during her freshman year, but then realized that grants plus her scholarship were sufficient to cover her expenses. She took out a loan once again during her junior year because her financial aid did not arrive in time.

The respondent said that she looks phenotypically white so she was not subject to stereotypical remarks about Mexicans. Only when she was with her “ethnic” looking friends, did she experience such discrimination. She said that when people find out that she is Mexican, however, their attitude changes. She said: “They started looking at me differently, but they still showed me respect. There was no disrespect in there.”

Getting the scholarship was “a big relief” for her and her parents. She said: “I didn’t have to worry about money, about how my parents were going to be paying for this.” Her brother, on the other hand, took out a lot of loans. The scholarship “took weight off their shoulders.” Other than that, she did not identify any other advantages to having the scholarship.

The respondent had one mentor, a psychology graduate student, who influenced her choice of major and introduced her to the profession she hopes to pursue: sex therapy. Generally, she experienced a great deal of support from faculty members in the psychology department.

Overall, college lived up to the respondent’s expectations, even if she was disappointed by some aspects. She said: “I expected it to be this life-changing experience and it was. In the same way, I thought I would’ve had a greater variety of friends. Since the campus where I went, [University], is majority white, my friends ethnically were not [as] mixed as I would’ve liked them to be...For me I didn’t really know what to expect, but it ended up being what I expected and a little bit more.”
**Future Aspirations**

Her immediate plans are to return to school and graduate. She plans to get her teaching certificate, pay off her loans and apply to graduate school. In five years, she plans to be teaching. In ten years, she plans to be in graduate school and working toward completing her degree, either a M.A. or Ph.D. in counseling psychology. Her life priorities are to become a sex therapist, to be able to support herself, to have a family of her own, and to enjoy life. “Once I have the profession that I want, hopefully I’ll be able to teach sex education to kids. Give them some idea of how to handle those decisions.”

**Community Involvement, Volunteerism, and Leadership**

The respondent does not describe herself as a leader in the traditional sense, such as leading rallies or organizations, but she considers herself a classroom leader for helping fellow students with their studies. She said: “For me, that shows leadership.” She also expressed that her younger cousins and the middle school students she works with as a bilingual paraprofessional (her job while she is on leave from college) look up to her because she is a college student, often peppering her with questions about her college experience.

The respondent joined a sorority that required that she do a lot of volunteer work, including community service, fundraisers, canned food drives, and working at an assisted living center. She felt the scholarship helped her pursue these activities because it freed time that she may have had to have put toward work.

**Program Factors and Issues**

Regarding the program’s impact on her college experience, the respondent said: “Opportunity. If I didn’t have the scholarship, I don’t know if I would’ve gone off to college right after high school. Would’ve worked and planned on going to college but not being sure if she would’ve been able to.”

The respondent said that for her the program’s biggest positive is: “Opportunity. [It] opened up a lot of doors for me.”

The respondent did not identify any negative aspects of the program, though she suggested that the program might usefully offer a study skills course for matriculating freshmen.
Self-Description

“Caring. Open to any sort of idea...Not taking everything so seriously. Not being so uptight. Have fun, but get your stuff done.”
Focus Group Summary

Number of Participants: 2
Sex/Gender: Female (2), Male (0)
Race/Ethnicity: White/Caucasian (1), Unknown (0)
Major: Not applicable

Barriers to Academic Achievement

The first respondent won the scholarship in 2001 and went to college for about two and a half years. In that time she attended three different colleges. She described her transition from high school to college as "fun;" she did not report any difficulties or problems. When asked if she had any special facilitators or supports during her transition, she said that she hadn’t, though she noted that her high school counselors were really helpful about letting she and other students know about the different scholarships available to them.

The second respondent did not attend college after receiving the scholarship. She said that she received support from her high school English teacher with her college applications. She said that she had always thought that she would attend college, but both of her parents fell ill and she had to take care of them after she graduated from high school. During that time, she also supported herself financially. Her work schedule made attending college difficult. She hopes to register for college this summer.

Both respondents did not have any major barriers or problems academically in high school. They also reported that they would have gone to college even if they had not received the scholarship. The first respondent noted that she did not face any barriers or difficulties while in college, but that "it was harder than high school" and that in college you “actually have to study.”

Achiever Scholars Program Impact on Personal Life: Financial

When asked if receiving the Achievers scholarship reduced her financial burdens, the first respondent responded: “absolutely.” She had fewer bills to pay and she did not have to take out student loans. In addition, her family gave her a little bit of money every month for laundry and miscellaneous expenses.

Achiever Scholars Program Impact on Personal Life: Campus Climate

The first respondent did not believe that she was perceived differently by others on campus or perceived as having any special advantages or disadvantages because she was an Achievers Scholar. When asked if receiving the scholarship opened doors,
she expressed that she is “a firm believer that anybody you come in contact with [will] have the ability to change your life in some capacity and there’s definitely some contacts that [I] made along the way in school that have been important whether personally, career-wise, or financially and so, definitely the scholarship getting me to school, and meeting those contacts that are important, absolutely changes your life.”

The first respondent, who attended three different colleges, she said that the private school was much different than the public schools, but that she did not have any bad experiences at any of the campuses. The only difference between the schools was that two of them were Christian schools.

**Achievers Program Impact on Scholar Aspirations**

The first respondent is currently working for her father’s company and has no plans to return to college. When asked for the reasons, she responded that she gets physically ill when she is under stress. During her time in college, she “got a pretty good case of ADD” and experienced anxiety attacks. By the third year of school, she decided that she could not handle the stress and took a leave of absence from the scholarship. She then got married and had to start working. She does not feel that she can work and go to school while married because of her anxiety issues, so she decided not to go back to school. Her immediate plan is to go into the world of stand-up comedy. She plans on beginning a tour soon.

The second respondent said that her immediate plan is to find a job that pays well. She said that her family has expectations of her because she is the only one out of her nine siblings to have graduated from high school. She has had the responsibility of taking care of her family since her parents fell ill. Most of her siblings have married and moved away from her parent’s home.

The first respondent expressed that her parents’ are “really confident” that she will not “throw [her] life away.” They are highly supportive of whatever direction she decides to go in her life.

**Achiever Scholars Impact on Community Involvement, Volunteerism, or Leadership**

The first respondent said that she volunteers at her church in the youth department where she helps with marketing.
Achiever Scholars Program

The second respondent said that receiving the scholarship has changed her life. She said: “[It’s] truly nice to be part of the Achievers.”

The first respondent said that the scholarship changed her life in that she does not have any student loans. She also said that she is very proud to be an Achievers Scholar. She acknowledged that only a handful of people have such a great opportunity for having their education paid for, but she regrettably had to give it up. She said that there may be unforeseen circumstances in a person’s life that may keep them from going back to school, not because they do not want to continue, but because a situation in that person’s life makes it impossible to continue. She also said that this kind of scholarship opportunity will never happen to her again, so it would be nice to be able to retain the scholarship once “that chaos [in your life] has stopped.” She felt that might increase the number of students who are able to graduate from college.”