



Wraparound Support Programming:

**A Pilot Program's Effect on Resilience, Help-Seeking
Behavior, and Campus-Community Integration
Among Low-income, First-Generation College Students**

**2023
Gantry Group**

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, college enrollment has decreased as more high school graduates forgo the expenses of a college degree in favor of entering the workforce.¹ To combat national declines in enrollment and retention, many universities have implemented high-impact programming intended to engage and anchor students in the college experience.² The emergence of such programs demonstrates the increased imperative among universities to attract students and increase persistence levels. Their strategy is to provide additional support for underrepresented and under-resourced students, particularly during their first year of enrollment.³

Brigham Young University recently launched one such pilot. In the school year of 2022-2023, several BYU stakeholders and the nonprofit Gantry Group collaborated to bring about the Scholar Year (SY) program—an effort to promote access to higher education for marginalized students. The pilot's design emerged from growing research and best practices from other universities. The following question was used to guide measurement and evaluation of the 2022-2023 Scholar Year program:

Provided tutoring, specific class placements, mentoring opportunities, and collaborative extracurricular activities, what experiences of academic achievement, adjustment, integration, and community-building occur in environments of higher education for the SY cohort?

At the end of the 2022-2023 school year, the stakeholders involved in the first iteration of the SY program deemed it a success. In response, a second iteration of the SY program is now underway and may determine whether the

successful results of the 2022-2023 SY can be repeated, scaled, and supported long-term. This white paper intends to provide evaluative content through qualitative evidence from the first student cohort to support this decision to continue the program. The analysis section of this paper will discuss how particular elements of the SY Program—specifically, wraparound support and cohort building—facilitated student resilience, academic success, and integration into the BYU community.

BACKGROUND

Setting: Brigham Young University

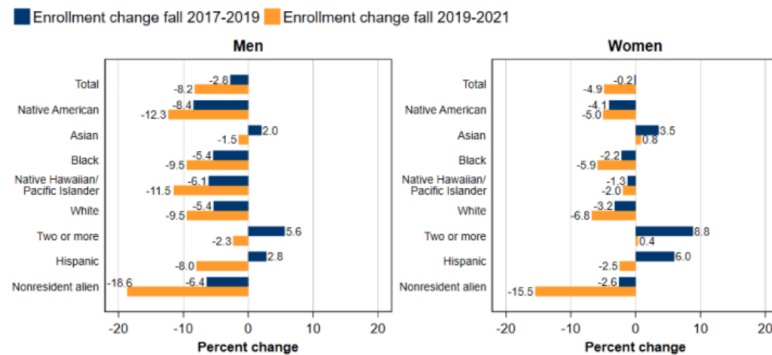
Brigham Young University is a demographically homogeneous campus in several regards. First, BYU is a religious university—98% of BYU students are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Racial demographics at the university reflect the racial diversity of LDS Church members in North America. Approximately 81% of campus is white, 7% Latino/Hispanic, 4% Mixed Race, 2% Asian, 1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, less than 1% Black, and less than 1% Native or Indigenous. With more than 60% of students coming from the top economic quintile, BYU also ranks among the lowest in the nation for socioeconomic diversity on campus. Approximately 11% are first-generation students, a demographic that statistically belongs to additional minority groups—likely to be immigrants, poor, and older.⁴

Declining Enrollment in Higher Education

Specific demographics are not enrolling in college at higher rates than others. Among those declining to enroll, men make up a significant majority; in 2021, only 55% of males enrolled in college immediately after high school, compared to 70% of women.⁵ Minority students also are

FIGURE 2

Undergraduate enrollment trends by race, ethnicity, and resident status among men and women



Note: Reports the percent change in undergraduate enrollment between 2017 and 2019 and percent change in enrollment between 2019 and 2021 for each group. Includes all undergraduate students in IPEDS as of institution's official fall reporting date or October 15. IPEDS defines Hispanic or Latino as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. IPEDS defines nonresident alien as a person who is not a citizen or national of the United States and who is in this country on a visa or temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely, and this category is mutually exclusive from race and ethnicity categories. Source: Author's calculations using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) fall 2017, fall 2019, and fall 2021 fall enrollment files.

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overrepresented in the pool of those choosing against higher education and entering the workforce without a college degree.⁶ The high cost of college, student debt, rising rent and food costs, and financial need in their home economy—these are powerful motivators for students to set aside or forgo a college degree.⁷ Underserved populations, particularly those with higher financial vulnerability, historically suffer from low degree-completion rates.⁸ As enrollment continues to fall, more universities are affected by the increasing number of students choosing not to attend college or deciding to “stop out,” by leaving college without completing their degree.⁹

Scholar Year Students

The twelve students enrolled in this SY program at BYU were identified and recruited by a non-profit based in New York City that works with students who are mired in under-education, poverty, opportunity gaps, absent networks, and missing champions. The SY students fit this profile. A background survey conducted by the nonprofit revealed an average ACE (adverse childhood

experience) score of 5 across the group. Each Scholar student came from low-income, immigrant families and grew up navigating the constraints characteristic of urban poverty. Eleven out of twelve came from single-parent homes. Several had high school GPAs less than 2.0, most attended highly segregated, failing high schools and arrived at college severely undereducated, and a few were **stopout** students. SY offered participants a year of higher education with no debt, bolstered by customized

interventions designed to help them develop skills and experiences they would need to meet the challenges to retention and engagement that their demographic frequently encounters.

Across fall and winter, SY students took BYU classes as a cohort under BYU's Flex-GE program, which allows non-matriculated students to enroll in BYU's evening classes. During the day, SY students met together with the Student Success team in the Continuing Education building on BYU campus to work with mentors and tutors specifically trained to offer high-impact advising to the SY students. SY students also were required to attend workshops sponsored by the nonprofit throughout both semesters where they worked on career competencies and met with first-gen graduates who are successfully navigating their professions.

Program Structure

Social scientist Donella Meadows states in her research on systems change that, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.”¹⁰

Institutions of higher education—BYU included—have systems to address the needs of the student population that historically was most likely to attend college—white and upper-middle class. However, national enrollment statistics, future labor force trends, and research demonstrating the value added by FGLI and minority students to campuses have prompted colleges to think more strategically about how to serve a broader student cohort. Georgia State, which eliminated racial gaps in graduation rates in only 6 years,¹¹ illustrates how data-driven research and comprehensive program analysis can expose campus systems that hinder student success and rework them. By placing students' needs at the forefront of process design, GSU has changed seemingly intransigent outcomes.

Fortunately, BYU already has several structures in place to mitigate barriers to degree completion for FGLI students. This demographic points to financial restraints as the most significant impediment to student enrollment and degree completion.¹² A unique feature of BYU is its subsidized tuition: BYU's tuition cost is lower than many community colleges. It also boasts one of the highest retention rates of any university in the nation.¹³ But, students of color and first-generation students at BYU have consistently lower graduation rates than their white, middle/upper-middle class peers.¹⁴ BYU's current structures work best for the campus majority. As such, FGLI students on campus require intentionally designed programming that acknowledges and addresses their lack of pre-college opportunities and training. If designed and carried out well, these structures will allow them to achieve the same level of preparedness, engagement, and success as their peers.

Program Design

FGLI students face many barriers to educational success simultaneously, not consecutively. In addition to the stresses of being a full-time student, FGLI students often face various tension points that threaten their **academic momentum**—or the rate that a student progresses through their degree.¹⁵ Recent research demonstrates that the most effective efforts that reduce rising attrition rates among minority demographics are those designed to address multiple barriers to education at once by offering **wraparound support**.¹⁶ CUNY's ASAP program is an example of one such initiative.

The City University of New York (CUNY) launched the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in 2007 to increase timely completion rates of community college students and later the Accelerate, Complete, Engage (ACE) program for its four-year colleges. ASAP/ACE provides comprehensive support to students, including personalized advising, and expanded financial aid to include attendance costs not typically absorbed by colleges. CUNY's evaluation of ASAP shows an average cross-cohort three-year graduation rate of 53.4% compared to 24.6% for a similar comparison group. External evaluations have also validated the program's impact and cost-effectiveness in the CUNY systems and in other states where it has been replicated.¹⁷ ASAP's core components are based on the belief in academic momentum, integrating students into college life, and providing timely and relevant support.¹⁸

The BYU SY program was modeled after CUNY's ASAP program, but customized for BYU's setting and resources. SY students are not matriculated students and their participation in the program does not guarantee admission into BYU at the termination of the program. Second, ASAP/ACE

are oriented to participation across the duration of a student's degree completion, while SY was designed to last two semesters and focused on building strong foundational academic and success skills. Third, the ASAP/ACE program separately hires specialized career and academic advisors.

Like the ASAP program, the SY program prioritized wraparound services for students as a means to encourage academic resilience and teach ongoing help-seeking behavior. Unlike ASAP/ACE, the SY program emphasized proximate and group support to encourage cohort development as an academic strategy: students attended classes and study halls together, and together received high-dosage mentoring and tutoring through BYU's College Success program. They also received remote advising, expanded financial aid, and other services from the nonprofit partner. By design, SY put into practice growing research about the importance of belonging, network-building, administrators and faculty interactions with students, and high-impact experiences.

METHODS

This section describes the methodology used to analyze qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with SY students (n=7). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The data analysis process followed the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke,¹⁹ which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Interviews were translated using AI transcription software and corrected for errors.

To analyze the gathered qualitative data, we developed a coding framework that analyzed initial codes reflected in patterns across multiple SY students' thoughts, experiences, and emotions. After applying these codes to relevant text segments, and organizing the data for subsequent analysis, we conducted line-by-line coding to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and topics across interviews. We critically reviewed and refined the identified themes through a constant comparative process. The final analysis resulted in a comprehensive report outlining the key themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews. In the following analysis, we include direct quotes to support and illustrate the identified themes perceived across the interview transcripts.

ANALYSIS

At the conclusion of the pilot SY program, the average GPA of the 12 students was 3.1. Five students completed the program with higher than a 3.7. Six students have been fully matriculated into BYU and two of those will be on study abroad in Fall of 2023. The six students *not* admitted to BYU are planning to attend four-year colleges and four have clear, actionable plans for doing so. With regard to the academic metrics of the program, SY was a success.

The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the conclusions drawn from the qualitative discourse analysis of 7 interviews from students. Emergent themes from the analysis suggest that even with the wraparound support of the SY program, the transition into college life was difficult for the SY students, as it is for many other FGLI students. However, the SY design fostered an environment conducive to learning essential attributes that, research indicates, will increase their likelihood of degree attainment and

persistence; in particular, the students spoke about **help-seeking behavior**,²⁰ **resilience**,²¹ the SY cohort as a mechanism for **campus-community integration**.²²

Challenges and Resilience

Transitioning to College

SY students struggled with the transition into college. The problems they identified in their interviews align with the barriers to education recorded in data trends among those of their demographic. Frequently identified in interviews were adjusting to an unfamiliar culture and college life, managing time and stress, and overcoming the challenges of undereducation. The most prominent obstacle identified by interviewees, however, was familial obligations at home.

Student Highlight: Julio

After graduating from high school, Julio started working a janitorial job cleaning carpets and floors in New York. After taking an introductory coding class through an online program, Julio began teaching himself the basics of coding after work. Julio met the founder of the Gantry Group through a church teacher. When Gantry Group offered him a spot in the SY program, he was surprised. He said, “my GPA wasn’t very good [in high school].” He continued, “I was surprised that, I don’t know, that you [Gantry Group] had some confidence that maybe I could do well in college.”

Even after Julio decided to accept his spot in the SY program, he still felt trepidation. Not only was he uncertain that he had the skills necessary to succeed in a college setting, he worried about leaving his family behind. When he was working full time in janitorial, a portion of his paycheck went to his family—paying bills and buying groceries. He said, “When I came to BYU, that was

always on my mind, like, ‘Where are they going to get that extra cash to pay for this or that?’” Despite the financial sacrifice required of his family when he moved away, his mother was supportive of his decision to attend college. When he moved away from NY, his younger brother took his place working to support the family.

Julio wishes to set an example of education for his family, particularly his younger sister. He sees college as an opportunity to lift his family out of poverty. But he is still ambivalent about the costs of being away. He stated, “I want to be around [my sister] to help her out.”

Student Highlight: Dylan

Dylan is a low-income, first generation student from New York City. After returning from an LDS mission in the Winter of 2022, Dylan met Gantry Group. He expressed interest in attending college as soon as possible, but seemed unaware that he had to apply and be accepted to college before attending. Dylan knew that being part of the Scholar Year program would be an “important stepping stone for his family.” Neither of his parents graduated from high school and both have unstable employment at low-skilled jobs. As the oldest of three siblings, Dylan believed that college would not only help him “be able to be independent, be able to support myself,” but also to support his family.

Despite Dylan’s overwhelming sense of responsibility to eventually be the main income earner for his parents and siblings, “the hardest part” of the program “was having to separate [himself] from [his] family.” When asked what Dylan perceived as his parent’s reaction to him leaving, he stated, “at first they were supportive, but they were sad to hear that I would be moving away.” He admitted,

"Going through high school, I remember thinking if I wanted to go to college, I wanted to be able to stay in New York, to be able to help my younger brothers also succeed throughout school. So it's, I guess, it's kind of been a bit hard for me being away from them."

Dylan's worries about leaving his family, particularly his siblings behind, was common among other SY students. In a survey, 60% of the cohort felt worried about the safety and food security of their siblings at home. 50% worried about their parent's well-being without them. Several mentioned pressure from their relatives to return home and attend college in NYC where tuition is higher but they are closer to family. For Dylan and other SY students, attending college was an opportunity to improve their and their families' futures that came with significant sacrifices.

Like the matriculated FGLI students, SY students struggled in their classes, felt uncertainty navigating unfamiliar campus processes, experienced exclusion from the campus majority, and often questioned the cost of college. The promises and benefits of Scholar Year did not erase the particular difficulties of being a very poor minority student on college campus. But wraparound services softened some of the sharp edges of their college experiences by providing a community that promoted belonging and resilience *despite* the difficulties they faced.

Benefits of Program

The growth of a cohesive cohort comprising individuals with shared experiences proved instrumental in fostering a strong sense of community and comfort. Of the twelve scholar students, all were BIPOC, low-income, and eleven

were first-generation students. Shared backgrounds created bonds that mitigated feelings of exclusion from an otherwise wealthy, white-majority campus. One Scholar student stated,

"Going to BYU, it is a most dominantly white school, where most of the students that you see are usually all white, most of them already come from a background where they have parents, grandparents, that went to BYU or went to some sort of college. And so I think... especially for a first-gen student, you can feel very left out. Maybe feel confused, out of place, but I think this cohort group just helps us know that we belong here."

For several Scholar students, sharing a similar background was an essential aspect of the program's value. "I think being able to share the same background has been really helpful," said one student. Another remarked, "We had a lot in common...So I think that helped me a lot to feel like I belong." For Louis, the friends he made in his classes were different from the relationships he had with other members of the cohort. "Meeting people outside the class was totally different for me," he said. "I feel like I'm just going to school. And then when I meet [up with the cohort], I meet my family." A sense of connection fostered an environment of belonging for the Scholar students, despite being on a campus with few other students like them. Another SY commented,

"When I first got to BYU, I definitely noticed how most people here were white. So there would be times where I'd walk to campus or to class on my own and I'd feel uncomfortable because I'm like, the only brown person walking around. But sometimes, after our study hall sessions, we walk as a group, or I walk with someone [from the group]. And so that anxiety of being different fades away, you know, because

they're around...It makes it easier for me to feel like I'm fitting in, and I like that."

Research indicates that a sense of belonging is essential for resilience and retention (cite). The small cohort model provided an enclave for Scholar students in which they could feel safe.

Wraparound Support and Help-Seeking

Going through classes, tutoring, and mentoring with a cohort provided additional benefits including academic growth. For instance, the interpersonal relationships that grew between members of the cohort fostered an environment of supportive accountability. Students remarked that the cohort architecture made them feel, "more comfortable." When asked what it would feel like to start college without a cohort, one student said, "I would be kind of lost." Others echoed this sentiment, remarking that the cohort is a source of help and motivation. "We are kind of like a family, we support each other," said one student. Another concurred, "because we have the same classes, I'm always trying to be better." For all interviewed Scholars, the cohort allowed them to transition into the college experience, learn essential skills with trusted peers, and feel like a valuable member of a BYU community.

Help-seeking behavior is a key component of resilience and college success among college students.²³ Among demographic groups, FGLI students are less likely to use help-seeking behaviors at college.²⁴ However, accountability for one another, across time, encouraged Scholar students to reach beyond their group—to mentors, tutors, teaching assistants (TAs), and even professors. Before the SY program, Riley felt that asking for help was a sign that he was "weak or not good enough." Likewise, Leilani stated "When we first started the pilot program, I was so shy at

seeking help. I felt like that made me feel like I was not prepared for college." As outliers among the majority, FGLI students are less likely to engage in college opportunities—fearing exclusion or embarrassment.²⁵ SY required students to interact with support structures such as their professors, TAs, advisors, and the mentors and tutors who came to mandatory study halls several times per week. This comprehensive and proximate support in a safe setting encouraged help seeking behavior among the cohort.

Student Highlight: Tony

Tony is a low-income, first-generation Hispanic student from the Bronx. Tony comes from an immigrant family. Growing up in NYC, he often acted as a translator for his parents, whose English was poor. "In my family, I was always the helper. You know, my mom needs help translating something, I was there. My dad needs something to be paid? I called the insurance," said Tony. Growing up in this environment made him fiercely private and independent, a trait that served him in NYC, but not at college.

At the beginning of the Scholar program, Tony admitted that his mindset was one of "I gotta figure this out. I'm always figuring stuff out by myself. I can't ask nobody." However, working with the cohort changed his perspective. When his peers asked him for help on homework problems, or he saw them ask the tutors and mentors for help, he felt more open to doing so himself. Tony's understanding of getting help changed by the end of the year: "Now I'm more like, 'It's okay to ask for help.' ...I think [the program] definitely opened me up to just being able to talk to people and be vulnerable—it's a complete change from where I was." Being part of a cohort helped Tony see help-seeking

behavior as an essential habit for academic success.

Other interviewees relayed similar stories of learning the importance of academic help-seeking behavior from their cohort and wraparound support. Several students conveyed that having mentors and tutors come to their learning space increased trust and comfort. “I feel because they’re close, I think that helped us a lot to connect with them and have a really good friendship and trust them and be humble and ask them for help,” said Leilani. She went on to say, “Some people- because they don’t know us, they don’t care a lot if we ask for help or not. But for example, Susan [a peer mentor], I think she’s always worried about us. Like, in a good way.” In his interview, Louis conveyed that the first time he asked a professor for help, it seemed like a “huge step.” Over time, however, “I was able to build my confidence and just simply talk to the professor or TAs [about things] like, ‘What can I do to improve my class or my work?’ ” Having proximate support—mentors and tutors on hand and in their space—allowed the Scholar students to practice behaviors in a low-threat environment that have made it more likely that they will utilize

available resources across the university to promote their academic achievement in the future.

CONCLUSION

Brigham Young, BYU’s namesake, described education as “power”—power to amplify oneself and be an active participant in the world. BYU has empowered students for decades by equipping them with the tools necessary to increase their socioeconomic status. In recent decades, BYU ranks among the lowest in elite schools for socioeconomic mobility.²⁶ This is due to decreasing diversity within the student body; more than ever, BYU students come from wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds and from families where parents have a postgraduate degree.

The Scholar Year program models a path forward. BYU has the potential—the resources, the personnel, the structures—necessary to expand the population it is empowering. With sufficient support, FGLI students can succeed on BYU campus. Their enrollment will not only change their outcomes and the outcomes of future generations, it will enrich BYU’s campus with new perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds.

GLOSSARY

Academic Momentum: Academic momentum in higher education refers to the concept of a student gaining positive traction as they navigate through their educational journey, achieving milestones that lead to increased motivation, engagement, and achievement over time.

Campus- Community Integration: Campus-community integration refers to the extent to which students feel a sense of connection, acceptance, and identification to their campus community.

FGLI: First-Generation, Low-Income

Help-Seeking Behavior: Help-seeking behavior on college campuses refers to the actions and efforts that students take to seek assistance, support, or guidance for various challenges they may encounter during their academic journey and personal development.

Resilience: the capacity to effectively navigate and conquer substantial stress and adversity during undergraduate studies.

Proximate Support: Support programming that is both in-person and brought to the student, as opposed to the student having to seek it out.

Stopout Student: A matriculated student who withdraws their enrollment.

Wraparound Support: Wraparound support refers to a coordinated and integrated approach to providing a comprehensive range of services and resources that support students' academic success, personal well-being, and overall development. This approach recognizes that students' needs are multifaceted and interconnected, and it aims to address these needs by offering a seamless network of support services that are tailored to individual students.

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