

KESSLER
SCHOLARS

Program Manual

Prepared by the Kessler Scholars Collaborative
Updated: July 2023





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Overview

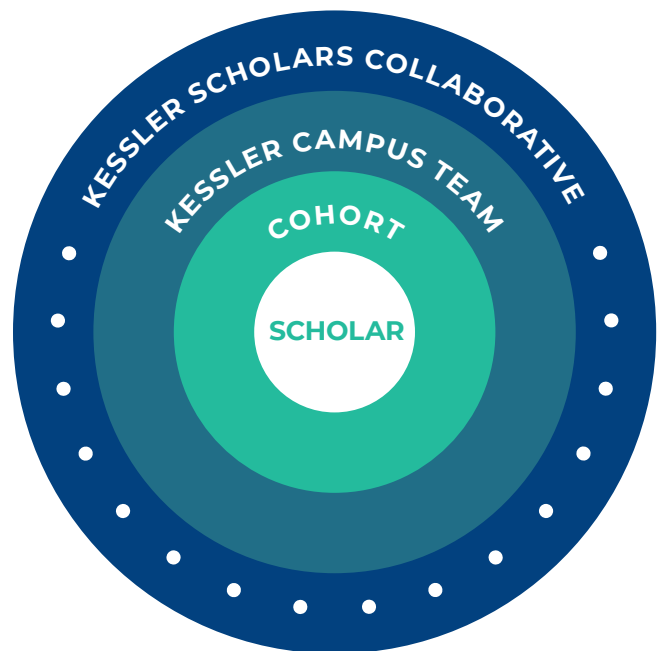
The Kessler Scholars Program is designed to provide holistic support for students from lower-income households who are the first in their family to pursue a four-year college degree. By combining financial resources with cohort-based engagement and individualized guidance, the Kessler Scholars Program provides first-generation students with the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed and to thrive. This manual identifies the core programmatic components that distinguish this work, including dedicated staffing models, evidence-based student support practices, and an emphasis on shared objectives, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

The students and staff who are part of Kessler Scholars Programs also are embedded in and supported by a nationwide network, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative. The Collaborative network allows program leaders to meet regularly to share resources and best practices and provides students with opportunities to connect with other first-generation scholars across the country. Our shared work aims to close equity gaps and provide transformative support to first-generation students across the undergraduate journey and beyond.

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative launched in 2020 with six inaugural partner institutions: Cornell University; Johns Hopkins University; Queens College; St. Francis College; Syracuse University; and the University of Michigan, which led development of the first Kessler Scholars Program. In 2022, ten additional institutions joined the Kessler Scholars Collaborative as a partner project of the American Talent Initiative (ATI), a coalition of leading public and private institutions committed to expanding opportunity for low- and moderate-income college students.

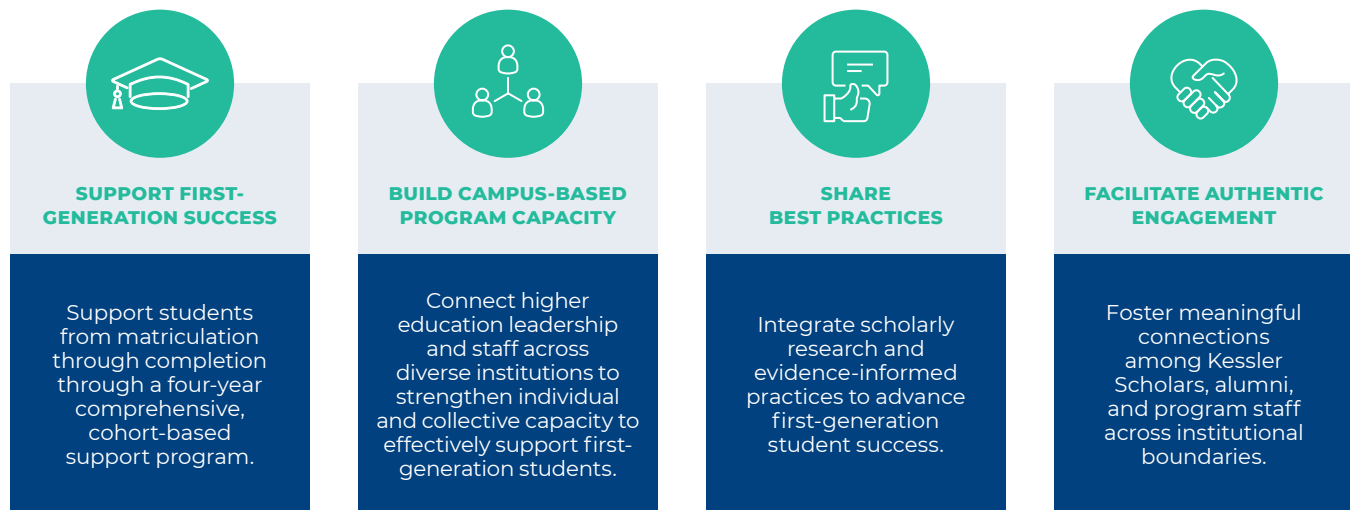
With generous support from the Judy and Fred Wilpon Family Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies, these are the ten new partner institutions: Bates College; Brown University; Centre College; Saint Mary's College (IN); The Ohio State University; University of California, Riverside; University of Dayton; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; University of Pittsburgh; and Washington University in St. Louis.

Each campus partner brings new ideas and adaptations to this work. Our aim in supporting expansion of the Kessler Scholars Program model is not direct replication. Instead, we encourage innovation and responsiveness to the local context and support campus partners to share and learn from each other. Campus partners who are a part of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative work together with the aim of sharing resources and expertise, building upon existing strengths, and leveraging connections to support student success. Collectively, we work together to achieve improved outcomes for first-generation students across the nation.



Collaborative Cornerstones

There are four cornerstones that guide the work of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative:



Collaborative Community of Practice

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative was established by the Wilpon Family Foundation, and its staff is responsible for guiding the implementation and ongoing work of campus-based Kessler Scholars Programs. The Collaborative operates to support a generative community of practice among campus partners to encourage shared learning and capacity building. This community of practice is designed for Kessler Scholars staff to engage in relationship-building, peer-to-peer learning, and professional development. The Collaborative hosts regular meetings and community conversations to support collective learning and information sharing. Collaborative staff also coordinate annual reporting and oversee assessment of campus-based programs in partnership with an external evaluation team at Ithaca S+R, which co-manages the American Talent

Initiative in concert with the Aspen Institute. Institutions that are part of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative agree to engage in the following activities:

- **Implement** a comprehensive, four-year cohort-based program in accordance with the Kessler Scholars Program model
- **Participate** in the Kessler Scholars Collaborative Annual Convening
- **Attend** monthly virtual meetings of core Kessler Scholars Program staff
- **Complete** evaluation and assessment activities, including student- and program-level data collection
- **Support** the planning and execution of Collaborative-wide student and alumni activities
- **Complete** annual Kessler Scholars Program reporting

Kessler Scholars Program Model

Program Pillars

The Kessler Scholars Program is designed to provide holistic support for first-generation, limited-income students across the four-year college experience. At each partner campus, Kessler Scholars are supported by a cohort of fellow first-generation students and by professional staff who provide individualized academic, personal, and social support. These features define the program:



HIGH-TOUCH

Frequent interactions with dedicated Kessler Scholars staff and first-generation peers provide students with the support they need to thrive on campus.



COHORT-BASED

Students enter college with a built-in community of support, with a cohort that attends workshops, events, and meetings together to develop a sense of belonging and shared identity.



ASSET-FOCUSED

Programs leverage first-generation students' assets and strengths to achieve their academic, professional, and personal goals and elevate their voices and experiences within the broader campus community.

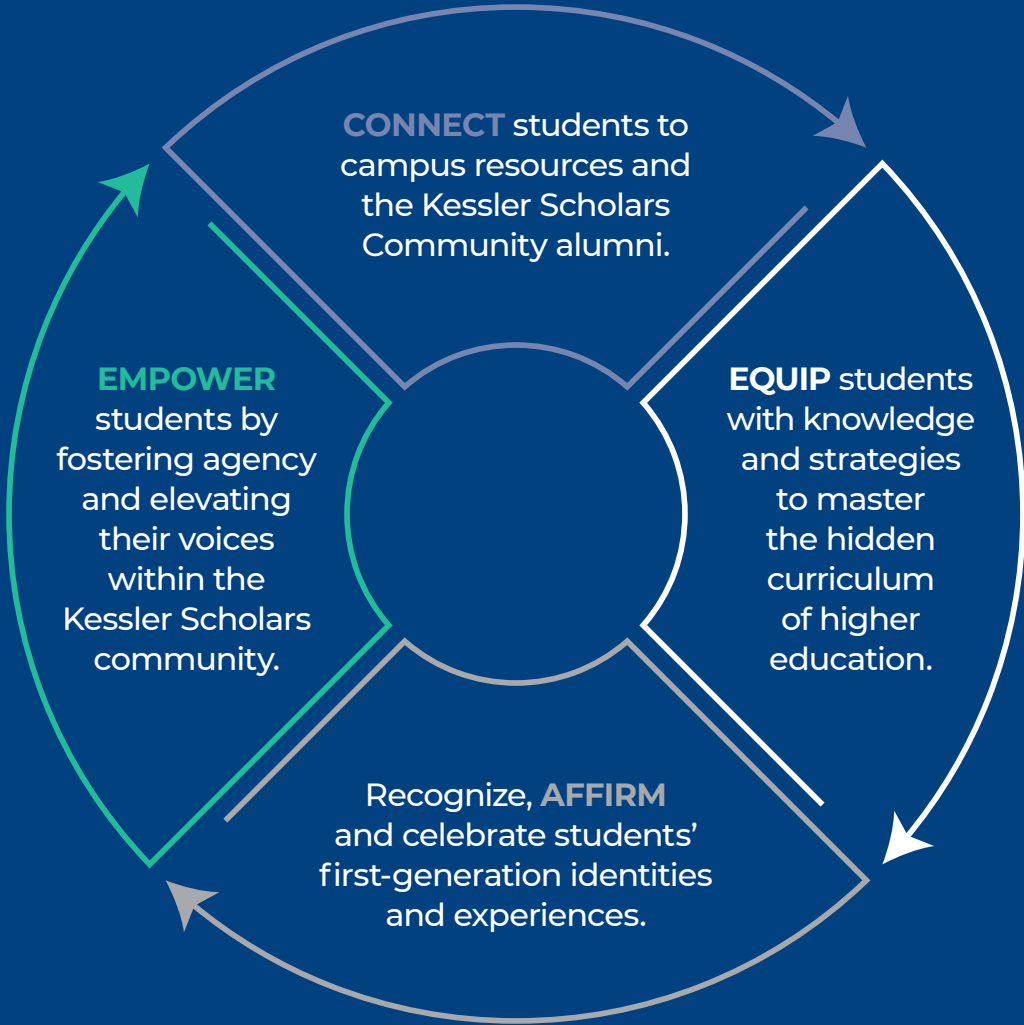
The Kessler Scholars Program model creates a validating environment for first-generation students to seek support and guidance, foster academic, personal, and professional development, and develop their own voice and leadership capabilities. The program provides students with a safe and supportive space to navigate various contexts within and outside the collegiate environment (e.g., academic classrooms, work, and extracurricular spaces). Through program workshops and activities, the Kessler Scholars Program supports first-generation students as they navigate and make sense of the hidden curriculum of higher education—the unwritten campus rules and unofficial norms or expected social practices—without the guidance of a parent or guardian who has earned a bachelor's degree before them.^{1,2,3}

1. Charlie Tyson. "Hidden Curriculum". *Inside Higher Education*, August 4, 2014.

2. Marcia Chatelain. "We Must Help First-Generation Students Master Academe's 'Hidden Curriculum'". *Chronicle of Higher Education*. October 21, 2018.

3. Gable, R. (2021). *The hidden curriculum: First generation students at legacy universities*. Princeton University Press.

The Kessler Scholars Program is built around these core goals:



Evidence- and Asset-Based Practices

The Kessler Scholars Program is committed to adopting practices drawn from empirical research and shown to be effective at supporting first-generation student success. Further, the program model is based on an asset-based approach and academic validation. In the simplest terms, an asset-based approach focuses on strengths. It views diversity in experience, thought, and culture as a positive asset. At the Kessler Scholars Collaborative, we view students' first-generation identity as an asset—we recognize and honor students' cultural knowledge and capabilities and celebrate the diverse pathways that have led them to college and the Kessler Scholars Program. We encourage campus-based programs to draw on students' strengths and capabilities, adopt asset-oriented approaches to programming, and build supportive relationships with students to enhance their success.¹

Program Objectives

The Kessler Scholars Program is designed to enrich the college experience for first-generation scholars and ensure student success. Three central objectives inform this work across campus sites:

- 1 CLOSE EQUITY GAPS AND SUPPORT FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS.** We aim for Kessler Scholars at partner campuses to achieve high academic success, with the dual goals of outperforming national retention and graduation rates for first-generation students and closing existing equity gaps between first-generation students and their continuing-generation peers.
 - 2 ENSURE THE KESSLER SCHOLARS EXPERIENCE IS TRANSFORMATIVE AND MEANINGFUL.** Every student who participates in the Kessler Scholars Program should feel like they are part of a community that celebrates who they are and what they bring to the campus environment. We aim for all students in the program to feel like they belong and matter to the Kessler Scholars and broader campus communities. We support Kessler Scholars to pursue high-impact practices (e.g. study abroad, internship, undergraduate research) that will enhance their college experience and contribute to their postsecondary success.²
 - 3 CREATE A VIBRANT AND ENGAGED COMMUNITY OF KESSLER SCHOLARS AND ALUMNI ACROSS CAMPUS PARTNERS.** Students selected to be Kessler Scholars join a powerful community of first-generation scholars nationwide. We want students to have the opportunity to leverage this network to learn and grow, both personally and professionally. We aim to facilitate authentic engagement among Kessler Scholars and alumni through signature events, networking opportunities, and mentoring and leadership experiences.
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1. Rendón, L. I. (1994). *Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development*. *Innovative Higher Education*, 19, 33-50.
2. High-impact practices are defined by Kuh (2008) as "teaching and learning practices that have significant educational benefits for students who participate in them." *The experience facilitates achievement of deep learning, significant engagement gains, and positive differential impact on historically underserved student populations. For more on high-impact practices, see Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.*

Program Staffing and Scholar Selection

Dedicated Staffing Model

Each campus-based program is guided by full-time professional staff members, commonly led by a Kessler Scholars Program Director. Kessler Scholars staff are employed by their respective college or university, and their work is supported by both their institution and the Kessler Scholars Collaborative. Kessler Scholars Programs are encouraged to designate at least 1.0 FTE professional staff for every 50-60 students enrolled in the Kessler Scholars Program. Programs with 60 or more Kessler Scholars should have at least one more half-time equivalent staff member supporting the program.

Campus-based programs may use a variety of staffing models but are encouraged to have at least one dedicated staff member responsible for coordinating Kessler Scholars programming, activities and engagement with the Collaborative. Some programs may utilize part-time staff or graduate student interns for additional support. Other programs may opt to include upper-level Kessler Scholars to support programming or serve in a leadership capacity.

Kessler Scholars staff are encouraged to develop personal relationships with students, serving as a main point of contact as well as a connector to other key supports and resources at the institution and beyond. Given the wide range of issues that first-generation students encounter, program staff should have experience in and knowledge of student development theory and student affairs and an understanding of emerging issues in higher education related to student belonging, equity, and inclusion. Prior professional experience supporting limited-income and first-generation students is strongly encouraged.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Kessler Scholars staff, with support from key campus partners, are responsible for coordinating all aspects of the program, including these central activities:

- **Recruit and select** students for the Kessler Scholars Program in concert with admissions and financial aid offices
- **Develop and implement** cohort-based programming and activities
- **Teach, advise, coach, and mentor** students through one-on-one meetings, including creating internal systems and processes for documenting student academic progress, accomplishments, or challenges that may hinder student retention or graduation
- **Monitor** students' academic progress, review grades, and develop early intervention strategies for students with academic or personal challenges
- **Facilitate** peer mentoring and leadership development opportunities for students
- **Manage** program budgets, assessment and evaluation activities, and produce annual reports
- **Participate** in Kessler Scholars Collaborative onboarding, offboarding, monthly meetings, and annual convening

Student Funding

A key aim of the Kessler Scholars Program is to invest in affordability for student success. Participating campuses must commit to serving first-generation students, defined as those students whose parents or guardians do not hold a bachelor's degree. Additionally, at least 60% of students selected as Kessler Scholars must be Pell Eligible, and the majority of participating students should come from families with lower-income backgrounds.

Working with campus financial aid offices, participating institutions are strongly encouraged to provide each Kessler Scholar with a financial aid package that meets their full demonstrated need for the total cost of attendance, including both direct costs (e.g., tuition, room, and board), and indirect costs (e.g., academic supplies, health insurance), less the student's expected family contribution (EFC), as determined by the FAFSA. Students selected to be part of the Kessler Scholars Program should have their financial need met by some combination of need-based scholarships/grants, non-need-based scholarships/grants, need-based self-help aid (e.g., federal work-study), and, to a limited extent, federal subsidized or unsubsidized loans. Partner campuses are strongly encouraged to minimize or eliminate loans in students' financial aid packages, especially PLUS loans (unless used by parents to meet their estimated family contribution) and private alternative loans.

Funds from the Kessler Scholars grant can be used to support students' financial needs or for other education-related expenses (e.g., academic supplies like books or laptops, emergency funds, financial support for experiential learning or participation in high-impact practices).

Student Recruitment and Selection

Individual campus partners have discretion over how to select students for the Kessler Scholars Program. Student recruitment and selection processes vary across the Collaborative network. Some campuses invite eligible students to apply to the Kessler Scholars Program during the admission cycle and admit students to both the institution and program simultaneously. Other campuses identify students for the Kessler Scholars Program after they have been admitted to the institution, leveraging the program as a yield tool. We encourage campus partners to reduce barriers to participation in the program and streamline the application process as much as possible.

Campus partners are encouraged to select first-generation students who are most likely to benefit from comprehensive support and who may otherwise be considered at-risk of leaving the institution without these additional supports. Participating institutions should also account for students' home community and high school contexts as well as their academic preparation, prior leadership experience, and demonstrated commitment to community service.

The Kessler Scholars Program is not intended to be a merit-based scholarship program. Therefore, we discourage the use of traditional academic performance markers such as SAT/ACT scores as part of the selection criteria for Kessler Scholars. Specific recruitment and selection procedures are defined by individual campuses, so long as they adhere to the principles of the program (e.g., not merit-based, aims to identify students who will benefit from financial, academic, and social support).

Cohort Diversity

We encourage programs to maintain a gender balance within cohorts while also recruiting a diversity of students in terms of race and ethnicity. We suggest campuses strive to have a higher representation of underrepresented students of color in the Kessler Scholars Program compared to the institution as a whole.

Student Eligibility

To be considered for the Kessler Scholars Program, students must:

- **Identify** as a first-generation college student (neither parent/guardian has earned a four-year bachelor's degree)
- **Demonstrate** financial need
- **Exhibit** a commitment to giving back to their community and promising capability to contribute to and benefit from the diverse Kessler Scholars community

Expectations of Selected Kessler Scholars

Campus partners should adopt program expectations of students in alignment with the Kessler Scholars Program model and institutional goals. At a minimum, we expect that students who are a part of the Kessler Scholars Program will:

- **Meet** individually with Kessler Scholars professional staff members each term (e.g., 1-2 times per semester)
- **Attend** Kessler Scholars workshops, events, and social activities each term (e.g., at least three per semester)
- **Participate** in a first-year peer mentoring program
- **Engage** in community service, leadership opportunities, and high-impact practices (e.g., undergraduate research, study abroad, internships)
- **Maintain** a minimum cumulative grade point average, as determined by campus partners (e.g., a minimum of a 2.8 GPA)

Program staff should create a commitment form using the template provided by the Collaborative that articulates requirements and expectations to be reviewed with students each academic year. Program staff should regularly communicate and work with students who do not meet program expectations and requirements. If a student does not meet requirements for three semesters/quarters in a row, campuses may choose to suspend their membership in the program. However, we encourage Kessler Scholars staff members to work closely with students to provide proactive support especially to those who struggle to meet program expectations or who are at risk of stopping out. We encourage programs to consider how they can continue supporting students who are on academic probation or dismissal and suggest that students have the opportunity to re-engage with the Kessler Scholars community when appropriate.

Kessler Scholars Program Curriculum

Core Program Activities

The Kessler Scholars Program is built around cornerstone activities designed to build a sense of community among Kessler Scholars and lead to desired outcomes including year-to-year persistence and degree completion. Our core program activities draw from research about the role of proactive, holistic student engagement and its link to retention and increased academic achievement.¹ Building from an understanding of proactive advising, the Kessler Scholars Program model seeks to regularly reach out to students, review academic progress, discuss strategies for academic success, and make referrals to additional support services if necessary. This approach to student support intentionally acknowledges students' personal lives and non-academic factors that may influence their college success. Common topics covered in proactive advising include time management, emotional and personal wellness, career exploration, and strategies and resources for achieving success (e.g., speaking to professors, building better study habits, seeking out tutoring services or peer study groups). Staff members are encouraged to assume a posture of authenticity, emotional and interpersonal support, and empowerment when interacting with Kessler Scholars.



1. Kitchen, J.A., Corwin, Z., Rivera, G., Hallett, R., & Cole, D. (2022). *Proactive advising practice guide: How advisors can support at-risk student success with proactive advising strategies*. USC Pullias Center for Higher Education.

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

(Recommended twice per semester for each student)

One-on-one meetings between a Kessler Scholars staff member and individual students should occur at least once per semester. Programs are encouraged to provide more frequent meetings with first-year students. These meetings are not intended to be traditional academic advising appointments or casual check-in conversations; rather, they are intended to serve as a deliberate, structured meeting designed to provide students with proactive support. They should be planned in advance and Kessler Scholars staff should create a framework to guide these conversations. When possible, programs are encouraged to designate a single staff member to serve as a primary point of contact – a go-to person for each student – who proactively reaches out to the student, understands their academic and personal strengths, needs, and goals, and tracks their academic journey and individual progress in the program. In addition to structured one-on-one meetings with individual students, Kessler Scholars staff members are also encouraged to hold office hours to meet informally with students on an as-needed basis.

Typically, one-on-one meetings provide an opportunity to discuss students’ academic, social, and personal development and to reflect on progress toward meeting goals in each of those areas. These meetings also enable staff members to monitor students’ academic progress and address any academic, personal, or financial challenges they may be facing, as suggested in the table below.

	First-Year Students	Upper-Level Students
Focus	Student’s development of self-efficacy and their ability to make sound decisions	Combination of academic and professional advising
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide proactive and personal attention, with structured opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection • Build collaborative and trusting relationships • Normalize academic challenges • Help students build community and gain a sense of belonging • Academic and social integration: awareness of campus resources and opportunities to get involved. • Build social and cultural capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for setting goals and exploring career and post-graduation options • Connect students to opportunities and resources to enrich their college experience (e.g., study abroad, tutoring, service learning) • Provide information about and help students identify fellowship, internships, and graduate school opportunities

COHORT-BASED MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

(Recommended twice per semester for each student)

Cohort meetings provide opportunities for Kessler Scholars who enter the institution during the same academic year to build community and engage in academic, professional, and personal development activities. Generally held twice per semester, these meetings are designed specifically for Kessler Scholars and often take the form of workshops or interactive activities that aim to develop student skills in areas such as academic self-efficacy, leadership, wellness, or civic engagement. These activities may incorporate guest speakers (faculty, alumni, other campus staff). For first-year Kessler Scholars, cohort-based meetings should be more frequent (weekly) during the first semester, particularly if students are enrolled in a credit-bearing first-year seminar course. Kessler Program staff also may choose to combine cohort years for meetings or workshops when appropriate.

ALL-KESSLER SCHOLARS MEETINGS AND EVENTS

(Recommended at least three times per year)

Program-wide meetings and events offer an opportunity to bring students across all cohort years together in an effort to strengthen sense of community and belonging and connect students within a broader network of peer support. Generally held at least once a semester, the all-Kessler Scholars activities offer a forum to build, celebrate, and deepen the Kessler Scholars campus community. These meetings or events often take the form of a fall welcome event, an activity connected to First-Generation College Celebration, field trip, social event, or year-end celebration. The Kessler Scholars Coin Ceremony is one program-wide event that all campus partners hold to welcome students to the Kessler Scholars community. The Collaborative also leads events for Kessler Scholars to connect and build relationships with other scholars across partner institutions.

PEER MENTORSHIP

Peer mentoring has become a prominent tool in higher education as a way of supporting students and enhancing their personal and professional growth. Peer mentoring helps first-year students adapt to their new environment and can lead to positive outcomes such as improvements in academic performance, belonging, and well-being.¹ Peer mentoring programs are also a promising way to promote leadership development in students who serve as mentors. Peer mentors are not meant to replace formal university support services but, rather, to be an additional layer of support for students as they transition and work to navigate college. Campus-based programs should develop Kessler Scholars Peer Mentoring to connect first-year Kessler Scholars with second-through fourth-year scholars as a way to support new students' transition to and navigation of the institution.

Within established programs, Kessler Scholars in their sophomore through senior years are eligible to serve as mentors due to their familiarity with the program and as a way to provide a unique opportunity for upper-level students to give back to the program and develop their leadership skills. In early development of the Kessler Scholars Program, potential peer mentors include upper-level students from related campus programs who identify as first-generation college students and understand the experiences of students from lower-income families.

During the first term of engagement, we recommend mentors interact (in-person, via text, and other methods) with their mentees weekly or bi-weekly. Peer mentors may be paid or can be volunteers. Mentors should receive training before assuming their roles and working with mentees. Training for peer mentors can serve multiple purposes: to help set

1. Lane, S. R. (2020). *Addressing the Stressful First Year in College: Could Peer Mentoring Be a Critical Strategy?* *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 22(3), 481–496.

expectations, provide resources, build community, and support their engagement and leadership development. Training and development activities should occur in-person when possible and include additional development opportunities throughout the academic year as needed, or as part of regular supervision meetings.

Kessler Scholars staff are responsible for tracking mentee/mentor pairs to assure ongoing and productive engagement and creating opportunities for mentors and mentees to come together for community-building and social activities. Through in-person meetings as well as virtual and digital conversations, peer mentors serve a significant role in helping empower and foster a strong sense of community, belonging, and self-efficacy among Kessler Scholars.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative believes that student leadership and voice play a central role in creating, implementing, and improving the program model. We seek to empower students to take an active role in shaping the Kessler Scholars Program and community. As such, Kessler Scholars are encouraged to take on leadership roles within the program as they progress through their college experience. Kessler Scholars Programs should develop and implement a Kessler Scholars Student Advisory Board (KSAB) on their campus to support leadership development for students enrolled in the program. Advisory board members meet regularly to develop student-led events, participate in community dialogue, and inform Kessler Scholars programming. Advisory board members grow their professional skills and practice democratic leadership by taking on additional responsibilities and ownership over Kessler Scholars programming (e.g., serving as peer mentors, student interns, or advisory board members). Campus partners are encouraged to design multiple leadership opportunities for Kessler Scholars within their programs. Kessler Scholars are also encouraged to assume leadership roles within the broader campus community, and campus-based Kessler Scholars Programs often facilitate leadership development and training activities as part of cohort-based programming.

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative also supports student leadership development through the Kessler Scholars Collaborative Student Leadership Board. The vision of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative Student Leadership Board is to bring Kessler Scholars across the Collaborative network together to share insights and work with the Collaborative to promote first-generation student success. In these leadership roles, students will meet regularly to work on projects and student engagement activities with the Collaborative, share resources, serve as liaisons to provide feedback to the Collaborative, represent their respective institutions, and build their professional development skills.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

A core value of the Kessler Scholars Program is cultivating a sense of civic responsibility and giving back to the community. Students selected to participate in the Kessler Scholars Program are encouraged to participate in service activities or community-based learning courses as part of their membership in the program. Kessler Scholars Programs should create structured, cohort-based opportunities for students to engage in community service or promote other service opportunities that may be available on their campus. Some programs also award community service hours to students who serve as peer mentors or participate in Kessler Scholars leadership opportunities like the Student Advisory Board. Programs may elect to adopt a community service hours requirement or an expectation that students participate in at least one community service project each year. Kessler Scholars Program staff are responsible for tracking all program activities, including student participation in community service.

Kessler Scholars Celebrations

Beginning the First-Gen Journey: The Kessler Scholars Coin

We seek to ensure that all Kessler Scholars are warmly welcomed as they start their college journey, and that includes summer outreach by program staff and a welcome letter to all scholars on behalf of the Collaborative. Across all partner campuses, the Kessler Scholars Coin Ceremony. The Kessler Scholars Coin Ceremony is an annual event intended to welcome and introduce new Kessler Scholars to the program and university community. To support early engagement with the Kessler Scholars Program by first-year students, this event typically is held in the fall semester. Students across all years in the Kessler Scholars Program participate in this event as well as campus leadership and, as schedules permit, representatives from the Judy and Fred Wilpon Family Foundation or Collaborative staff to introduce first-year students to the broader Kessler Scholars network that they are joining.

This event is intended to serve as a festive and memorable welcome for new Kessler Scholars and may include a meal, music, student remarks, or a keynote speaker with significance to your program or campus. As a central part of the event, new Kessler Scholars are presented with a Kessler Scholars Coin customized for each partner campus. During this presentation, new students learn that the coin is a small token that reflects their belonging and importance in a community of first-generation scholars that reaches not only across their campus but also connects them with Kessler Scholars at 15 other institutions.

Kessler Scholar coins are customized for each partner campus and symbolize students' shared strength and identity as Kessler Scholars. The Collaborative works with campus partners to design and print campus-specific Kessler Scholars Coins for students selected to join the program.



Marking the Milestone of College Graduation

The Kessler Scholars Program aims to transform lives by helping the students we support reach their goal of being the first in their family to earn a four-year degree. When Kessler Scholars reach graduation, it is a moment to celebrate! The Kessler Scholars Program presents graduating seniors with program stoles to wear as a part of their commencement regalia.

At year-end celebrations, Kessler Scholars Programs also recognize their graduating seniors by asking them to share with fellow students their plans ahead to model goal-setting and post-graduation achievement. Some Kessler Scholars Programs host senior dinners connecting new graduates with program alumni who can share their own stories about the ways that the hidden curriculum of higher education exists in different forms in graduate and professional schools and in the workplace. In recognition of this important milestone, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative also presents each Kessler Scholar with a lapel pin, as well as an invitation to join the Kessler Scholar Alumni Network.

Program Enhancements

To complement the core activities of the Kessler Scholars Program described previously, we encourage campuses to provide students with additional support throughout their college journey. Individual campus partners should tailor the Kessler Scholar student experience for their campus contexts and to be responsive to individual student circumstances and needs. Some additional program enhancements may include:

SUMMER TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR INCOMING STUDENTS

Campus partners support the transition from high school to undergraduate study through summer support programs, such as summer bridge programs, a Kessler-specific orientation, or by pairing a current Kessler Scholars with a new enrolling scholar during the summer months to provide guidance and support (e.g., Kessler Scholars Ambassadors). We encourage campus partners to implement strategies that will support first-year students in their transition to college in the summer before their first year, as well as in subsequent summers as students engage in high-impact opportunities like internships, study abroad, and other enrichment experiences.

FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

First-year seminars are courses that introduce students to college-level coursework and are considered a high-impact educational practice.¹ Research demonstrates that first-year seminar participation has statistically significant and positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year.² First-year seminars that are aimed at providing students with the relevant knowledge and skills required for navigating the collegiate environment can enhance the Kessler Scholars Program experience and improve academic outcomes. We encourage campus-based programs to consider designing credit-bearing courses specifically for Kessler Scholars, tailoring the curriculum to address the unique strengths, talents, and needs of first-generation, limited-income students and to provide a shared learning experience to build connection among students in each entering cohort.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

For many first-generation students, family members may have limited access to the information they need to help them navigate the college environment. Parents often want to provide support for their students on their college journey, but they may not know how to do so.³ The Kessler Scholars Program staff can help bridge this knowledge gap by helping parents and families understand the college environment, including key resources, campus offices, and terminology, to help them better support their students.⁴ Some Kessler Scholars Programs create recruitment materials and communications directed at parents/families, while others invite Kessler Scholar parents to attend events like Family Weekend or commencement activities. In some instances, campuses provide financial support for families to attend these events.

FACULTY OR ALUMNI MENTORSHIP

First-generation students can find the process of navigating academic, social, and professional spaces isolating and intimidating. Facilitating connections to faculty and alumni, especially those who also identify as first-generation students or graduates, can provide Kessler Scholars with valuable support. Informal or formal mentoring programs are one way to broaden students' social networks and identify proven strategies to navigate academic and professional spaces. Kessler Scholars Program staff can also encourage engagement with first-generation faculty and alumni through workshops and panels.

1. Kuh, George D. (2008). "High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter." AAC&U, Washington, D.C. 34 pp.
2. Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research. Volume 2. Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of Wiley. 10475 Crosspoint Blvd, Indianapolis, IN 46256.
3. Martin, Martina (2019, Nov. 8). Engaging families of first-generation college students. <https://firstgen.naspa.org/blog/engaging-families-of-first-generation-college-students>.
4. Harper, C. E., Zhu, H., & Marquez Kiyama, J. (2020). Parents and families of first-generation college students experience their own college transition. The Journal of Higher Education, 91(4), 540-564.

Shared Goals and Continuous Improvement

Kessler Scholars Program Outcomes

In addition to promoting year-to-year persistence and undergraduate degree completion, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative has identified three outcome areas that inform student programming:



Through their participation in the Kessler Scholars Program, we expect that students will have opportunities to grow and develop in each of these areas. In addition to these core outcome areas, campus partners should define goals that are appropriate to their institutional context and that address the unique needs of their students. Tracking and reporting on Kessler Scholars Program goals and outcomes are incorporated into external evaluation and annual reporting activities.

Key Targets and Learning Domains

Outcome Area	Definition	Students will be able to...
College navigation and academic self-efficacy ¹	Programming focused on improving students' ability to navigate collegiate structures and processes, manage academic demands, and develop confidence in their abilities to succeed academically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify campus resources and seek help from appropriate campus offices.• Build positive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers.• Acquire study skills and manage time effectively.• Develop plans to actively pursue and achieve their academic goals.
Sense of belonging and mattering	Programming focused on increasing students' sense of belonging (e.g., students feel connected to a group, accepted by their peers, and that they are an integral part of the Kessler Scholars and broader campus community) and feelings of mattering (e.g., students perceive themselves to be valued and that others care about their personal well-being and success).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build healthy peer relationships within and outside of the Kessler Scholars program.• Connect to the campus and the Kessler Scholars community.• Celebrate their identity as a first-generation student and recognize their unique assets, strengths, and capabilities.
Leadership and professional development	Programming that enables students to cultivate leadership skills and promote professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize their leadership assets and strengths.• Determine career interests and develop professional skills.• Identify post-graduate opportunities to further their academic and professional goals.

1. We define academic self-efficacy as the extent to which a student feels confidence in performing various college-related tasks to succeed academically.

Comprehensive Support Across the Collegiate Journey

As a cohort-based program that works closely with students across all years of the undergraduate experience, we encourage campus partners to develop programming appropriate to students at each stage of the college journey. Here, we suggest core programming and activities by academic year to guide campus partners as they implement the Kessler Scholars four-year program model; additional campus-specific and Collaborative-led activities should be incorporated. We recognize that these steps and activities are not necessarily experienced in a linear manner. Rather, these experiences may span multiple years based on student goals and needs and institutional context.

GOALS AND ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

	Aims for Scholars	Program Activities
YEAR ONE: Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a sense of belonging to the Kessler Scholars Program and campus community • Establish healthy academic habits • Identify campus resources to support student success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient incoming students to campus and the Kessler Scholars Program through a program orientation event. • Connect first-year students with upper-level first-generation students and/or Kessler Scholars serving as peer mentors. • Support participation in summer bridge programs and/or first-year seminar, if applicable. • Welcome incoming students to the Kessler Scholars community through the Kessler Scholars Coin ceremony. • Lead weekly workshops and/or credit-bearing class during the first year to orient Kessler Scholars to the college-level learning and equip them with strategies for navigating the campus environment. • Host monthly workshops and/or social events during the second semester to build a sense of community among the cohort and foster growth in academic and social self-efficacy, social-emotional learning and wellness.
YEAR TWO: Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate a sense of self and purpose • Select a major and begin defining professional goals • Connect socially and academically to the Kessler Scholars and campus community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop opportunities for Kessler Scholars to explore and reflect on values, beliefs, experiences, and social identities and develop a greater understanding of the social forces that shape their college experience. • Identify opportunities for students to contribute to the Kessler Scholars Program such as by serving as a peer mentor or member of the student advisory board member or the Kessler Scholars Collaborative Student Leadership Board. • Conduct monthly workshops and/or social events to strengthen the sense of community among the cohort and foster growth in academic and social self-efficacy, social-emotional learning and wellness. • Collaborate with career services offices to guide student career exploration and help students develop networking skills. • Create activities and resources for Kessler Scholars to expand their social network and on-line presence, including encouraging their participation in the Kessler Scholar and Alumni LinkedIn group.

Aims for Scholars

Program Activities

YEAR THREE Empower

- Develop leadership skills and provide opportunities for student-led engagement in Kessler Scholars programming
- Encourage students to engage in high-impact practices like study abroad, internships, or undergraduate research.

- With key campus partners, support engagement by Kessler Scholars in high-impact experiences including professional internships, undergraduate research opportunities, and study abroad programs.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in enrichment activities relevant to their academic and professional interests.
- Create opportunities for Kessler Scholars to enhance their leadership skills through a range of campus-based organizations and celebrate their engagement and accomplishments.
- Collaborate with development officers to create opportunities for Kessler Scholars to share their stories of strength, resilience, and perseverance.
- Lead post-degree completion goal-setting activities and workshops focused on exploration of career entrepreneurship and graduate school opportunities.
- Host ongoing monthly workshops and/or social events to maintain strong sense of community among the cohort and foster continued growth in academic and social self-efficacy, social-emotional learning, and wellness.

YEAR FOUR Embark

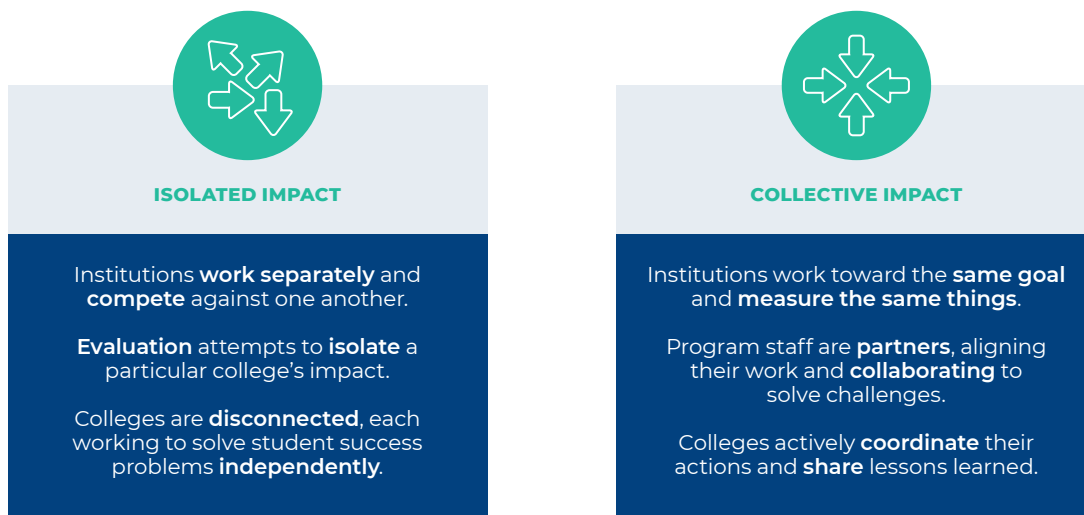
- Empower students with transitional life skills and planning for life after college
- Support progress towards graduation and celebrate student milestones and accomplishments
- Foster meaningful mentoring relationships with Kessler alumni

- Develop programming with alumni affairs and support Collaborative efforts to introduce Kessler Scholars to opportunities to remain engaged and contribute their time, talent, and resources beyond graduation.
 - Offer workshops and resources to assist upper-level Kessler Scholars with navigating the job search process, graduate or professional school admissions process, or other activities to support their post-graduation success.
 - Provide support for setting goals and exploring career and post-graduation options.
 - Host ongoing monthly workshops and/or social events to maintain strong sense of community among the cohort and foster continued growth in academic and social self-efficacy, social-emotional learning, and wellness.
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Collective Impact Approach

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative adopts a collective impact approach to align our work with campus partners and collectively achieve our shared aims to improve outcomes for first-generation students. The collective impact approach is distinct in that it requires a centralized infrastructure, dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, and continuous communication among partners.

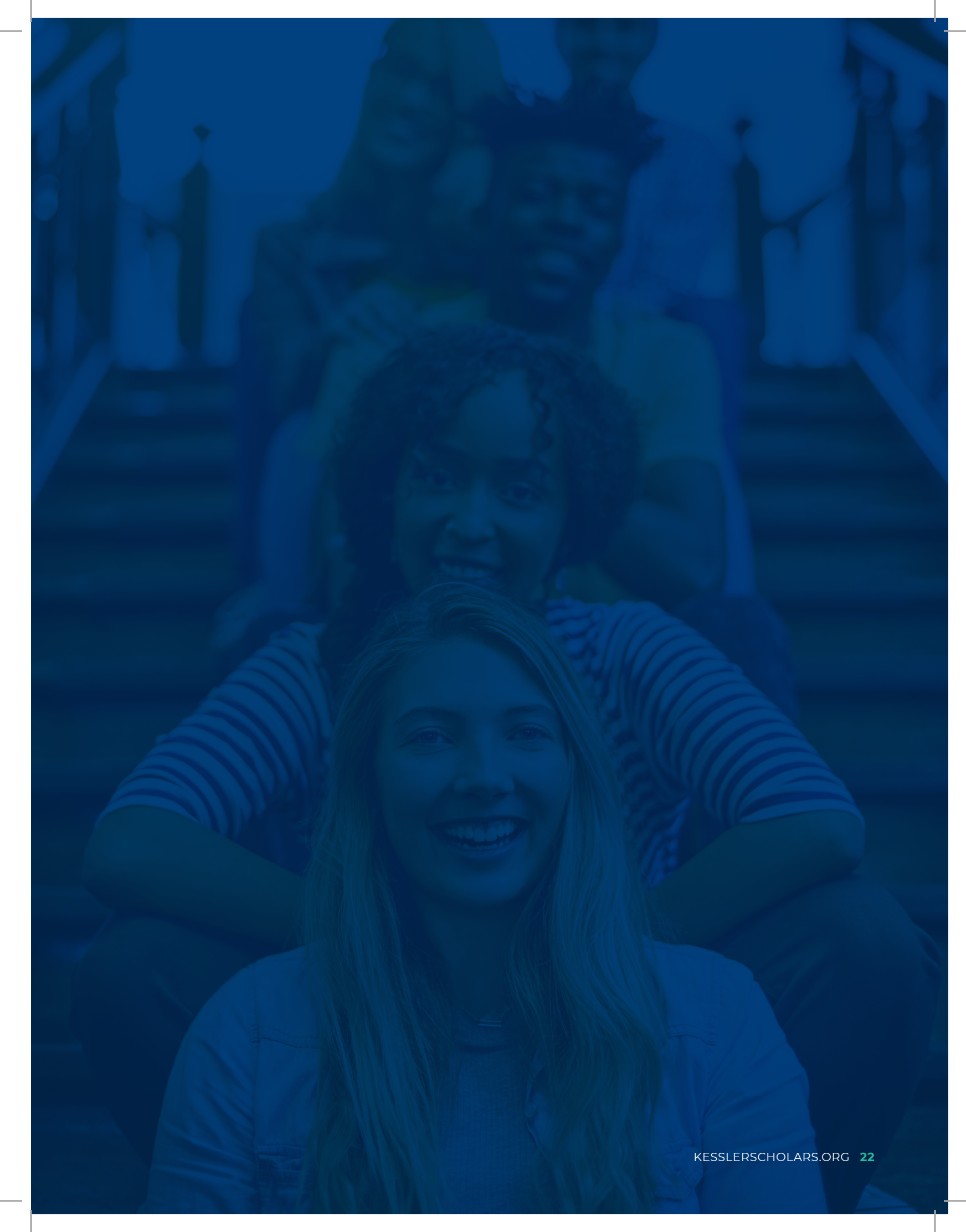
WHY COLLECTIVE IMPACT?



Together, Kessler Scholars campus partners work towards a set of shared goals and objectives, facilitate learning across the network, and collaborate on programming and activities that enhance the Kessler Scholars student experience.

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative, in partnership with our external evaluation team at Ithaca S+R, supports shared evaluation and assessment activities to encourage learning and facilitate program adjustments across Kessler Scholars Programs. Campus partners participate in data sharing and collection activities, such as student and staff surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to inform learning and decision-making.

Campus partners also participate in annual budget and program reporting to provide an overview of students served by the Kessler Scholars Program and capture program goals, activities, and outcomes. Using the information submitted by campus partners as well as insights from evaluation activities, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative produces an annual report capturing the collective work of Kessler Scholars partners.



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