



**Kessler Scholars Collaborative**  
Annual Report  
2020-2021

# Building a National Network of First-Generation Student Support

## Our Mission: First-Generation Student Success

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative was founded in 2020 and includes six diverse colleges and universities that provide cohort-based support for first-generation, limited-income college students. Together, our aim is to promote access *and* success for students who are the first in their family to attend college. The Kessler Scholars Collaborative's vision is to develop a powerful network of first-generation college students whose success during their undergraduate college career provides a powerful foundation for them to positively shape the world for generations to come.

The six campus-based programs that comprise the Kessler Scholars Collaborative are committed to guiding students' personal, professional, and academic development through comprehensive cohort-based programming, individualized proactive support, and financial resources. These programs empower students to become leaders on their campus and in their communities and provide them with the tools and support they need to thrive in college and beyond.



**Cornell University**

**Johns Hopkins University**

**Queens College**

**St. Francis College**

**Syracuse University**

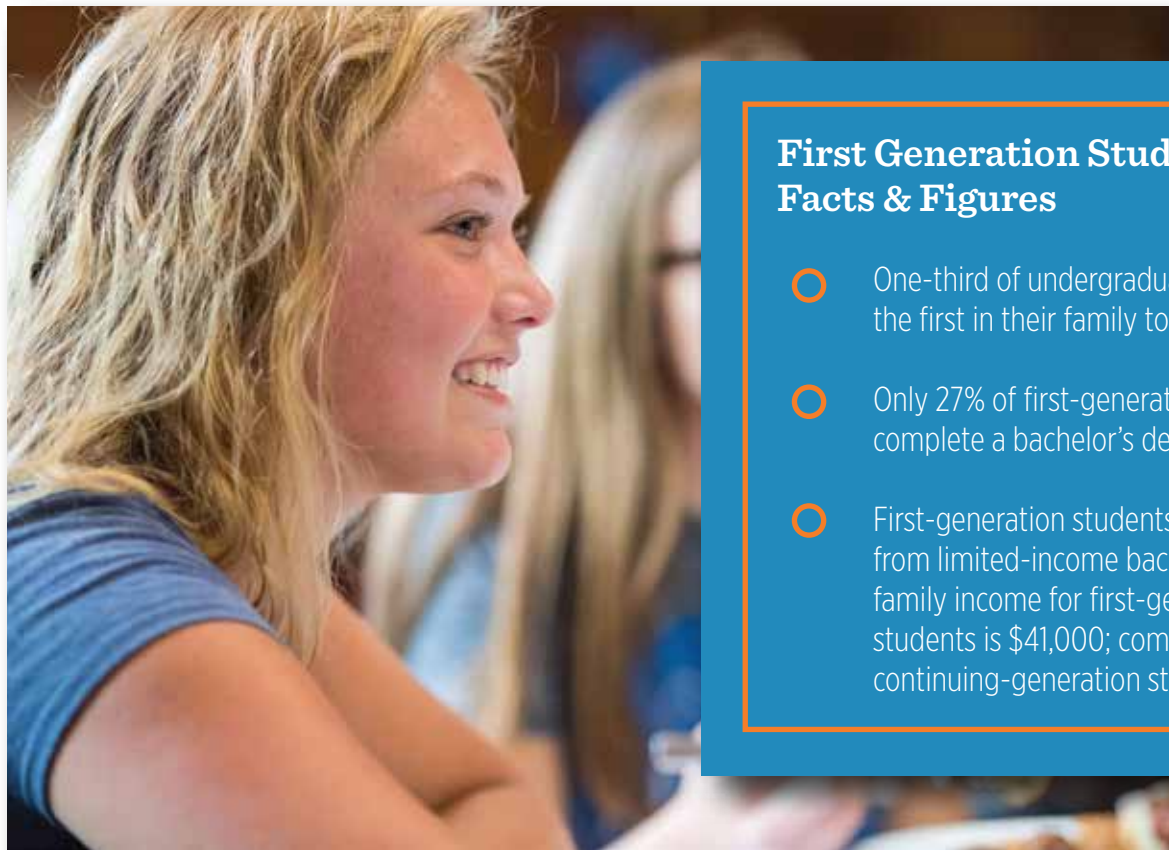
**University of Michigan**

# Building a National Network of First-Generation Student Support

## Why First-Gen?

Being the **FIRST** person in your family to pursue a four-year college degree is a point of pride. First-generation students bring unique strengths and talents with them to college based on their lived experiences. They are resourceful, goal-oriented, and academically-resilient.<sup>1,2</sup> By the time they reach college, these students have already proven they can overcome obstacles and blaze their own trail.

And yet, once enrolled in college, having a sense of belonging is something first-generation students often feel is missing from their college experience—often with serious consequences. Many say they feel isolated and out of place; that there are unwritten rules on campus that everyone else knows but them.<sup>3</sup> Relative to their continuing-generation peers, first-generation students are also less likely to persist and graduate from college.<sup>4,5</sup>



### First Generation Student Facts & Figures

- One-third of undergraduate students today are the first in their family to attend college.<sup>6</sup>
- Only 27% of first-generation college students complete a bachelor's degree in four years.<sup>7</sup>
- First-generation students are more likely to come from limited-income backgrounds: the median family income for first-generation college students is \$41,000; compared to \$90,000 for continuing-generation students.<sup>8</sup>

**First-generation students, in particular, stand to benefit from a national network of first-generation support.** Of course, many students struggle with their transition to college. But unlike their continuing-generation peers, students who are first in their family often arrive at college without a clear understanding of how institutions work and what is expected of them, and many are left to figure out how to navigate the collegiate environment on their own.

**The Kessler Scholars Collaborative is building a national model that provides resources and support to first-generation students as they navigate the collegiate environment.** The six campus-based programs that are part of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative foster a sense of community among scholars and expand their knowledge and networks through community building opportunities, leadership activities, peer mentorship, service projects, and more. Beyond the boundaries of their respective campuses, Kessler Scholars also can connect with each other through a network of support across the six partner campuses.



# Building a National Network of First-Generation Student Support

## Why Collaborate?

When individuals and organizations commit to working together and contribute resources and expertise to achieve a common goal, amazing things can happen. All too often, colleges and universities work in silos, developing student programs and services within their own institutional boundaries and contexts. These silos are pervasive, much to the detriment of students. They prevent institutions from working together, learning from one another, and creating innovative, evidenced-based practices to support student success.

But as entrenched as these silos may seem, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is seeking a different way forward. Leaders from each institution are committed to working together to build a network of first-generation student support programs. The six institutions committed to this innovative project are creating a system of support that is bigger and more powerful than what a single college or university can provide on its own.

These partner institutions work together with the aim of sharing resources and expertise, building upon existing strengths, and leveraging connections to support student success. With generous support from the Judy and Fred Wilpon Family Foundation and central coordination provided by the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA), there are four cornerstones that guide our work together:

### Cornerstones of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative

#### Support first-generation student success:

*Assist students in their transition to college and persistence to graduation through a four year comprehensive academic and social support system*

#### Build campus-based program capacity:

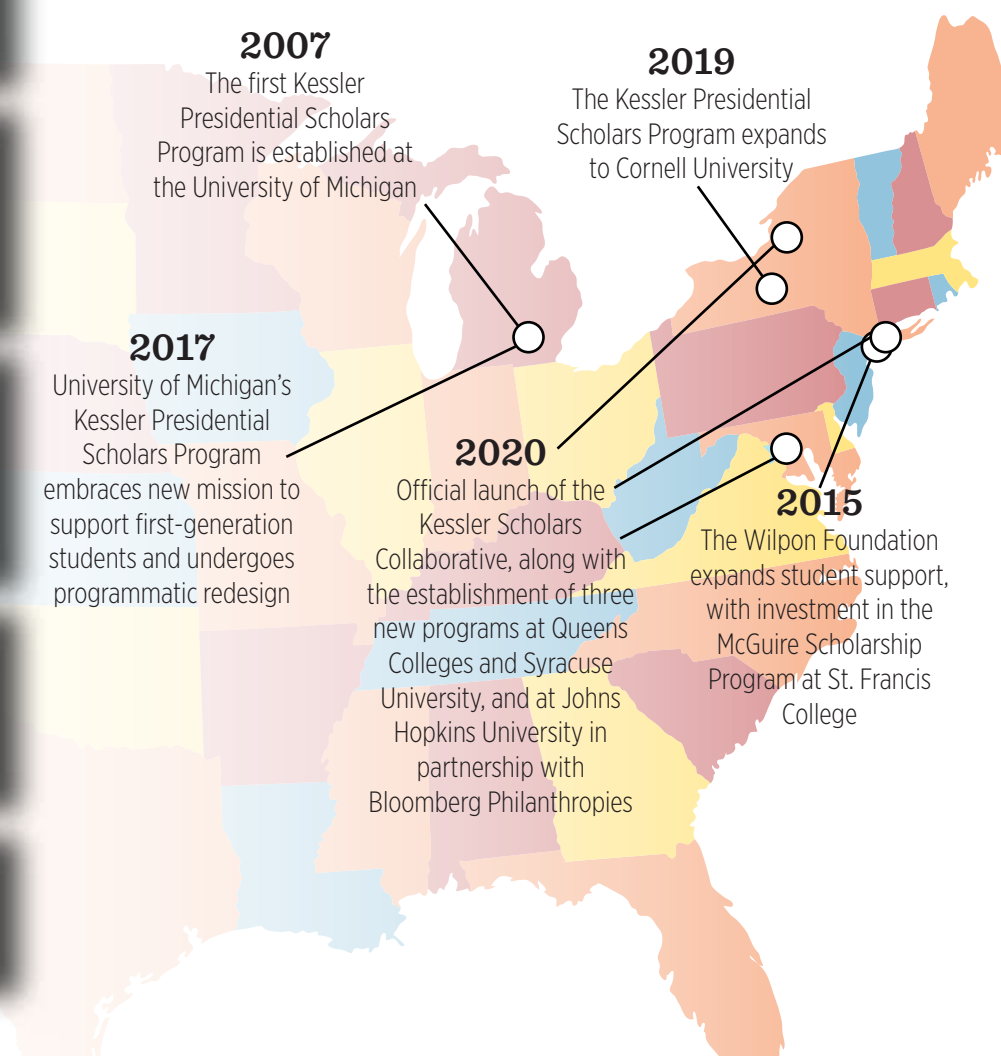
*Connect higher education staff and leadership across diverse institutions to strengthen individual and collective capacity to effectively support first-generation students*

#### Share best practices:

*Integrate scholarly research, evaluation, and evidence-informed practices to advance student success*

#### Facilitate authentic engagement

*Foster meaningful connections among Kessler Scholars, alumni, and program staff*



# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: A Year in Review

## Building a Strong Foundation

The Kessler Scholars Collaborative, formally established in early 2020, began its efforts in earnest amidst unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, as postsecondary institutions rapidly shifted to remote learning and redesigned courses and co-curricular programs to provide ongoing support for students disrupted by the unfolding public health crisis, key stakeholders from all six partner institutions came together for the first time to discuss the broad goals for the Collaborative expansion project. Since this initial convening, important groundwork has been laid to support the successful development and implementation of Kessler Scholars Programs across the six sites.

By the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, along with established programs at U-M, Cornell University, and St. Francis College, three new programs—Syracuse University, Queens College, and Johns Hopkins University—enrolled their first class of Kessler Scholars. **Combined, more than 300 students were supported by Kessler Scholars programs during the past year across the six partner institutions.**

The 2020-2021 academic year was like no other in our history. Many colleges and universities were forced to move instruction fully online while others adopted a hybrid approach, with some students participating in-person and others remaining online. In a year of extraordinary challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative responded to the rapidly changing environment by offering cohort-based programming and support in new and innovative ways. In their early work together and despite COVID-related challenges, leaders from all six partner institutions consistently met to build a network of support for first-generation students, focusing their efforts in three key areas:

- 1 Marketing and communications
- 2 Program development and support
- 3 Evaluation and assessment.

Three distinct working groups were formed to address these focus areas. Guided by the Kessler Scholars Program at Michigan, in concert with LSA Marketing and Communications and the U-M School of Education Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER), these working groups met regularly throughout the year to move the work of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative forward.



# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: A Year in Review

## Marketing and Communications

Creating a unified communications plan and brand identity for the Kessler Scholars Program was a key priority for the Kessler Scholars Collaborative in its first year. As the Kessler Scholars model expanded to partner institutions, the marketing team in the College of LSA developed an innovative strategy to flex the Kessler Scholars brand to other campus contexts. To that end, LSA Marketing and Communications produced two critical products in 2020-2021—a Kessler Scholars Brand Guide and Expansion Tool Kit—to help guide institutions adopt the Kessler Scholars brand.

At each of the partner campuses, efforts are currently underway to build the Kessler Scholars brand and bring awareness to the program. For example, Cornell University welcomed its second cohort of students with a scarf embroidered with the Kessler Scholars name, and Johns Hopkins University held a t-shirt design contest among its new Kessler Scholars class. And at Syracuse University, the inaugural cohort of Kessler Scholars received their Kessler Scholars Challenge Coin at a socially distanced but celebratory welcome ceremony in the fall.

As the Kessler Scholars Collaborative embarks on its second year, marketing leads will reconvene to assess the overall brand development for cross-campus activities and develop a strategy for building an online presence for this collective project via website development and social media engagement.





# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: A Year in Review

## Campus-Based Program Development and Support

Key to the success of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is the design and implementation of evidence-informed student support programming for first-generation, limited-income students across the six member campuses. Programs are addressing challenges common to many first-generation students by teaching the hidden curriculum of college and providing a community of support to ensure students feel a sense of belonging and empower them to stay in college and graduate.

To support program development at partner sites, and in order to share best practices among program staff, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative formed a Program Working Group in June 2020. Through regular meetings, leaders from each institution are working together to create programs with consistent features, while remaining flexible and responsive to the individual needs and unique contexts of each campus. Over the course of the year, the Program Working Group has explored resources and discussed evidence-based practices related to student recruitment and orientation, online learning, peer mentorship, student advisory board development, and more.

Kessler Scholars Programs across the six campus sites are in different stages of development based on when they were established, but all are striving toward the same goal: to support Kessler Scholars and connect them with the resources needed to thrive in college and beyond. Drawing on the Kessler Scholars model developed at the University of Michigan, and informed by scholarly research on first-generation students, the Program Working Group has identified six pillars of student support that will guide partner sites as they establish and refine their respective campus-based programs:

- 1 Financial support
- 2 Personalized and proactive support
- 3 Cohort-based programming and experiences
- 4 Mentorship from faculty, peers, and/or alumni
- 5 Community service
- 6 Leadership development



# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: A Year in Review

## Cross-Site Programming and Connection

In addition to refining campus-based programming for Kessler Scholars at individual campuses, a core aim of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is bringing students together in meaningful ways to connect and build community across institutions. In its first year, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative offered three virtual shared programming offerings for students: 'Talking Across Difference,' (U-M), 'Building a LinkedIn Presence' (Cornell), and a student-led Wes Moore book discussion (Syracuse University). The academic year culminated with the Program Working Group coming together to plan and execute the **inaugural Kessler Scholars Collaborative Kick-off Event, featuring renowned author and activist Wes Moore.**

Moore, a bestselling author and the former CEO of RobinHood, one of the nation's largest anti-poverty organizations, spoke to Kessler Scholars, invited family members, and institutional leaders about his personal life and the transformative power of education. Moore shared his perspective on the disparities in the college experience for students who come from limited-income families and who are navigating college without the guidance of a parent who has done the same. In an otherwise difficult year, Wes Moore's message inspired more than 300 Kessler Scholars and key stakeholders who were in attendance at the February event. It was truly a moment to commemorate a historic year for the Kessler Scholars Collaborative and celebrate all that Kessler Scholars have accomplished in 2020-2021.

Further, this kick-off event exemplified the collaborative spirit that member institutions have embraced and that is so critical to the overall success of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative. Spearheaded by members of the Program Working Group, coordinated by events staff at Syracuse University, and hosted by Queens College President Frank H. Wu, this virtual event featured institutional leaders from each campus and incorporated Scholar voices from all six sites. Building on the affordances of emerging virtual technologies and the spirit of collective engagement, this launch event highlights some of the unique opportunities ahead for the Kessler Scholars Collaborative and the students it supports.





# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: A Year in Review

## Evaluation and Assessment

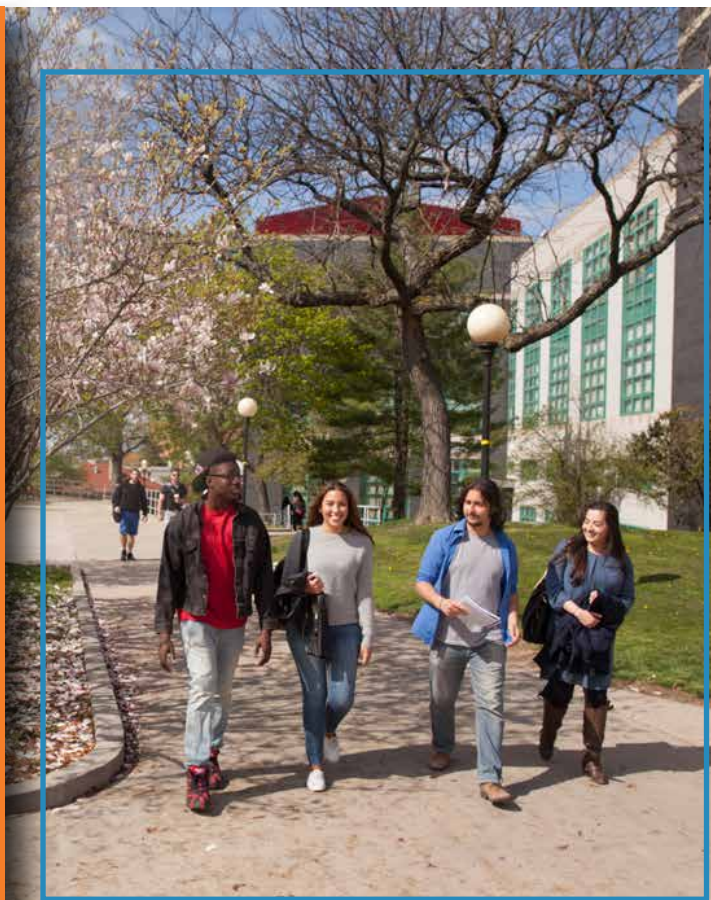
Students who are selected to participate in the Kessler Scholars Program show enormous promise, and the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is dedicated to tracking their progress to help assure their success and to understand how cohort-based student programming can support institutional goals to help more first-generation, limited-income students persist and graduate. To reach that goal, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is committed to ensuring that the campus-based programs under development at each of the six campuses are grounded in evidence-based practice and use systematic evaluation to inform implementation and measure effectiveness.

**Evaluation provides a window into whether, why, and how programs achieve their goals.** During initial development, evaluation can provide insight into how to optimally design a program to best meet its goals. Once implemented, evaluation efforts can help program staff and key stakeholders understand how the program is taking shape, where there is early progress and how to maximize the ongoing success of the project, with the ultimate aim of assessing program effectiveness.

The Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER), based in the U-M School of Education, is engaged in a multi-site evaluation of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative and has prepared the six program profiles outlined in this report. These program summaries provide an overview of each campus partner and describe the demographics of students served during the 2020-2021 academic year. These profiles also highlight the programming and activities offered in each respective program.

## A Note About Student Demographic Data

In reporting on students' racial and ethnic identities, we endeavor to be inclusive, accurate, and respectful. Unfortunately, many institutions still use aggregate race/ethnicity groups when collecting this information from students, which disguises important differences in racial and ethnic identities. In this report, we recognize the meaning and importance of students' identities by using self-reported racial identity as captured in surveys collected during fall 2020. Therefore, the racial/ethnic demographic data reported in these reports may not align with institutional data, and there is some missingness, as survey response rates vary by institution.



## Evaluation Overview

To support the Kessler Scholars Collaborative in providing evidence-backed, cohort-based support for limited-income, first-generation college students, CEDER has developed a **longitudinal, multiple method evaluation**.

The evaluation has three main goals that will be met by answering **developmental, formative, and summative evaluation questions**. The evaluation will also include three levels of analysis: the **student-level, program-level, and collaborative-level**.

Evaluation data collection methods will include student academic data, survey data, staff and student interviews, and observations of programming.

The evaluation team will employ both **quantitative** and **qualitative** analytical techniques. This **multiple method** approach will provide stronger results through the triangulation of findings.



**Goal 1: Understand how the program is developing in diverse contexts.**

**Document program development and strengths and opportunities for growth of the emerging Collaborative.**



**Goal 2: Enhance learning and inform directions for the Collaborative.**

**Document how key program elements influence student outcome and inform program planning.**



**Goal 3: Build support by documenting program and student success.**

**Demonstrate collective progress and success, which will support and enhance future funding opportunities.**

## Evaluation Areas

### Developmental Evaluation

Document development of the program at each of the six sites and of the Collaborative as a whole.

### Formative Evaluation

Inform the Collaborative on what is working within the program and where there are opportunities for growth.

### Summative Evaluation

Explore, document, and assess whether participation in the program translates into greater student success.

## 2020-2021 Evaluation Overview

In order to accommodate the changing needs of the sites as programming went online, the evaluation team held monthly meetings and gathered materials on how to best support students virtually. Additionally, the evaluation team achieved the following accomplishments:

- Completed a baseline and post-survey that measure growth around key outcome areas, including sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and leadership.
- Developed a shared measurement system to track student programming and attendance that has been implemented at all six sites.
- Documented early findings around student background and program development at each site.





## Program Profile

The **Kessler Presidential Scholars Program** began at Cornell University in 2019. The Kessler Scholars Program is housed within Student and Campus Life. The Cornell team includes:

- Shakima Clency, Peggy J. Koenig '78 Associate Dean of Students for Student Empowerment
- Patricia Gonzalez, Assistant Director for Multicultural Student Leadership and Empowerment

## Institution At-A-Glance

Cornell is a private, not-for-profit university located in Ithaca, New York. Cornell is classified as a most selective doctoral research university. In response to the pandemic, the university adopted a hybrid instructional format for the 2020-2021 academic year.

### Quick Facts

- Total undergraduate population: 14,743<sup>14</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population for the incoming 2020 class 24%<sup>14</sup>
- Class of 2024 first-generation population: 16%<sup>15</sup>
- Undergraduate six-year graduation rate for the 2011 cohort: 94%<sup>14</sup>

“ Prior to being a Kessler Presidential Scholar, I hadn't explored my identity as a first-generation student. Having a support group where we all have this in common has been truly enriching to my experience as a college student, as I'm a lot more in touch with my own identity, and I understand the power of my identity. ”

- Alejandra Gonzalez,  
Kessler Scholar

### Students Served by Cohort

40

Students Served in the 2020-2021  
Academic Year by Cohort

20

2019

20

2020





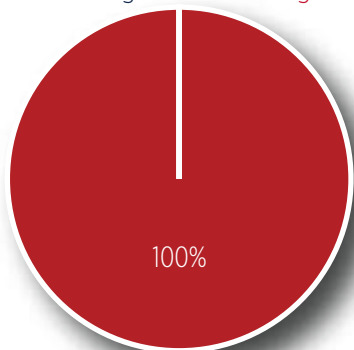


## Kessler Scholar Profile

Source: Self-reported data from Fall 2020 survey (n=37) unless otherwise noted

### Pell Status

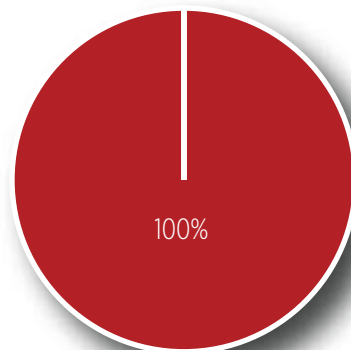
Source: Institutional data (n=40)  
Not Pell Eligible Pell Eligible



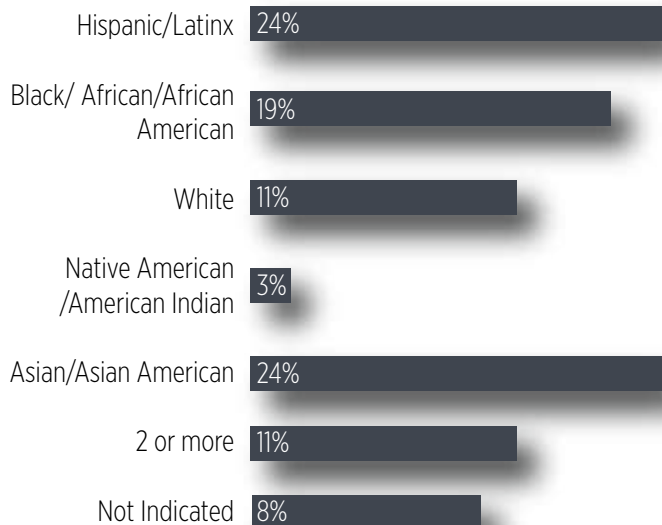
Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

### First Generation Status

Not First Generation First Generation

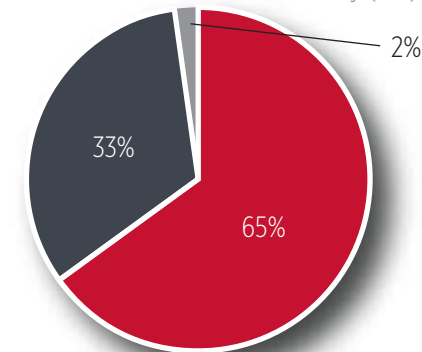


### Race & Ethnicity



### Sex

Source: Institutional data (n=40)  
Male Female Non-Binary (n=1)



“

I love working with the Kessler Scholars. This amazing program has the potential to change the lives of our Kessler Scholars and their families for future generations.

- Shakima Clency, Program Director

”





Cornell expanded their Kessler Scholars mentoring program. Additionally, staff established an Advisory Board and a role for an academic resource guide. Staff also collaborated with community-based organizations to facilitate 15 panels for the Kessler scholars to talk about their admissions process.



## Program Activities

### 1 Cohort-based programming

Cohort-based programming builds and fosters community and develops students' academic, social, and professional skills. Components included:

- Welcoming the 2020 Cohort to campus in the fall through continuous programming that included introducing students to campus resources and social and skill building events, including the coin challenge.
- Providing social and leadership opportunities to the cohort that entered in fall 2019, now sophomores, that focused on identity and career exploration and personal wellness.

### 2 One-on-one meetings

Staff met with scholars one-on-one throughout the academic year to address students' individual needs. Interactions included:

- Creating a set agenda to get updates on academic, career, social and emotional well-being.
- Follow-up check-ins to connect students with campus personnel and resources.

### 3 Peer mentoring

Cornell has a robust peer mentoring program where first-year scholars are mentored by second-year Kessler Scholars. Mentors primarily support scholars with cultural and social development and connecting scholars to campus resources. Attributes include:

- Through the hiring process, 10 mentors are selected and participate in training sessions to learn impactful practices.
- Mentors are assigned two mentees and engage in conversations about academic interests, professional goals and their lived experiences.
- Mentors connect with their mentees individually or in a group settings and commit 5-7 hours per month.
- For the 2020 academic year, two additional senior mentor roles were added to provide additional support to the mentors and to assist with community building activities.

### 4 Community Service

The program connected with 15 community-based organizations across the country and supported 220 high school students in navigating the admissions process through virtual panels. Topics included:

- Strategies and advice to demystify the admissions process.
- Personal stories, challenges and accomplishments as first-generation college students.
- Inspiration and encouragement to students from similar backgrounds to apply to highly selective institutions.



## Program Profile

The **Kessler Scholars Program** began at Johns Hopkins University in 2020. At Johns Hopkins, all scholars have declared or anticipate to declare a social science or humanities program. The inaugural class included 11 first-year students and five sophomores. The program is housed within the Center for Student Success within the Student Affairs department. The team includes:

- Stephon J. Hamell, Director of Scholars & Fellows Programs
- Kathleen M. Barry, Assistant Director for Scholars & Fellows Programs
- Brent Fujioka, Assistant Director for Scholars & Fellows Programs
- Thera Naiman, Program Coordinator for Scholars & Fellows Programs

## Institution At-A-Glance

Johns Hopkins is a private, not-for-profit university located in Baltimore, Maryland. The university is classified as a most selective research doctoral university. In response to the pandemic, Johns Hopkins operated fully virtually during the 2020-2021 academic year.

### Quick Facts

- Total undergraduate population (2020): 6,294<sup>16</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population (2019): 23%<sup>17</sup>
- Undergraduate first-generation population (2019): 24%<sup>18</sup>
- Undergraduate eight-year graduation rate for the 2014 cohort: 94%<sup>17</sup>

“

Kessler has been a wonderful community, and I've enjoyed getting to know other students in my cohort. As a student, the pandemic meant I couldn't be on campus, so it was great to have a small group of people I could hang out with virtually and learn from.

”

- Kylin McHugh, Kessler Scholar

### Scholars Served

16

Total Students Served in the  
2020-2021 Academic Year





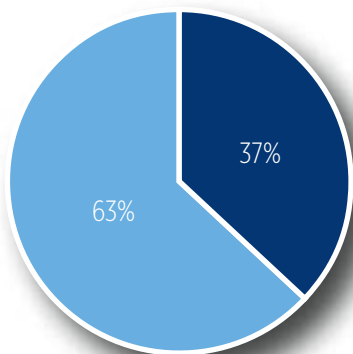


## Kessler Scholar Profile

Source: Institutional data (n=16)

### Pell Status

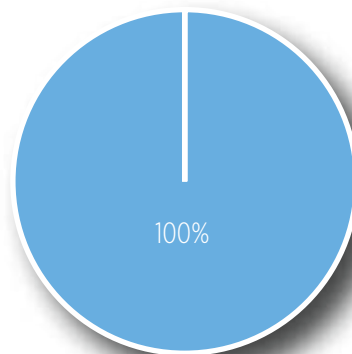
Not Pell Eligible Pell Eligible



Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

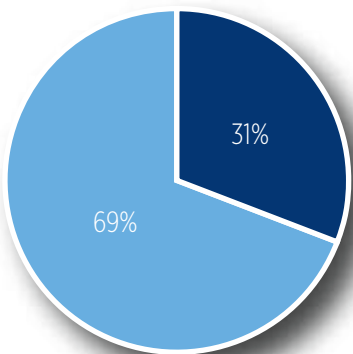
### First Generation Status

Not First Generation First Generation



### Underrepresented Minority (URM) Student Status

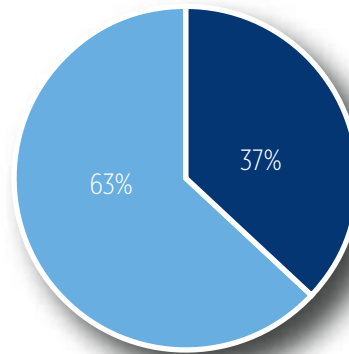
Non-URM Student URM Student



URM status is defined at JHU as a student who identifies as African American or Black, Hispanic or Latino/a/x, or Pacific Islander.

### Sex

Male Female



“

These students are so great because they're unafraid to go into a world that's undefined. Ambiguity is where they live and where they can make their talents and strengths grow.

”

- Stephon Hamell, Program Director





In response to the pandemic, all Kessler Scholars programming took place in virtual environments. Highlights from the 2020-2021 academic year included a 90% attendance at program events, including advising meetings, the scholars leading a merchandise design contest, and scholars pledging to center the service of others in academic and professional pursuits.

## 1 Program Activities

### Cohort-based programming

Cohort-based programming builds and fosters community and develops scholars' academic, social, and professional skills. Cohort-based programming included:

- Two **Kessler Kickoff** events.
- **A Finals Study Break, Spring Retreat, and Faculty Dinner**
- Workshops on how Kessler Scholars can **Establish Meaningful Relationships** and make the **most of research, service, and internship opportunities**.
- Continued **leadership development** series started during orientation and continued throughout the year to build community through social justice learning led by the Center for Social Concern, the community engagement center on campus. The curriculum focused on **civic engagement and ethical leadership**.

## 2 One-on-one meetings

Staff met with scholars one-on-one throughout the academic year to meet scholars' individual needs. Interactions included:

- Kessler Scholars have two forms of dedicated advising: one through the new Director of Scholars & Fellows, and one through the Success Coaching and Academic Advising (SCAA) program that is jointly administered by student affairs and the schools of Arts & Science and Engineering.
- Through SCAA, scholars meet bi-weekly with an advisor who support them through proactive academic planning, creative problem solving, and connection to academic resources.
- Program staff meeting one-to-one with **scholars** at least **four times throughout the academic year for a total of 108 contacts**.
- Scholars talking with staff about a variety of topics, including overall wellness with a focus on socio-emotional wellbeing, and scholar development, including establishing a researcher identity, engaging in academic conferences and applying to national awards and scholarships.
- Program staff provide sessions on using scholar development framework, an approach which gives students the mindset, framework, and tools to unleash the life-long learner within. Staff encourage scholars to try new things and find their own True North (where values, views and passions, and pursuits are in alignment).

## 3 Peer mentoring

While the 2020-2021 academic year was Johns Hopkins' first year of programming, the staff still worked to create opportunities to engage in near-peer support. Examples include:

- **A Finals Study Break.**
- **A Spring Retreat**, where scholars from multiple cohort-based programs at Johns Hopkins got to know each other, shared their Hopkins experiences, and participated in leadership development. This year's theme was around engaged scholarship.
- Workshops related to interpersonal relationships and professional development.

## 4 Student-led activities

Scholars hosted several events sponsored by the program. Scholars achieved the following:

- Led a merchandise design contest
- Led both the finals study break and spring retreat event as well as other workshops

## Program Profile

The **Kessler Presidential Scholars Program** began at Queens College in 2020. The Kessler Program is housed within the Honors Programs. The Queens College team includes:

- Barbara Simerka, Director, Kessler Scholars Program
- Selma Škrijelj, Program Coordinator, Kessler Scholars Program
- Elizabeth Hendrey, Provost and VP of Academic Affairs

## Institution At-A-Glance

Queens College is a public university located in Queens, New York. Queens College is classified as a Master's College with a predominantly undergraduate enrollment. Kessler Scholars are mostly commuter students.

### Quick Facts

- Total undergraduate population (2019): 16,866<sup>19</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population (2019): 39%<sup>19</sup>
- Undergraduate first-generation population (2014): 34%<sup>20</sup>
- Undergraduate eight-year graduation rate for the 2011 cohort: 58%<sup>19</sup>

“ This program really made QC feel like home for me. The pandemic made the freshman year extremely difficult for me to stay on task. However, the Kessler program helps scholars combat struggles. I am proud of being a Kessler Scholar. My time with Kessler will always be the most treasurable thing that happened to me during college. ”

- Luca Xia, Kessler Scholar

19

Total Students Served in the  
2020-2021 Academic Year

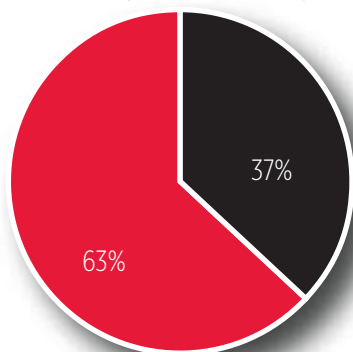


## Kessler Scholar Profile

Source: Institutional Data (n=19) unless otherwise noted

### Pell Status

Not Pell Eligible Pell Eligible



Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

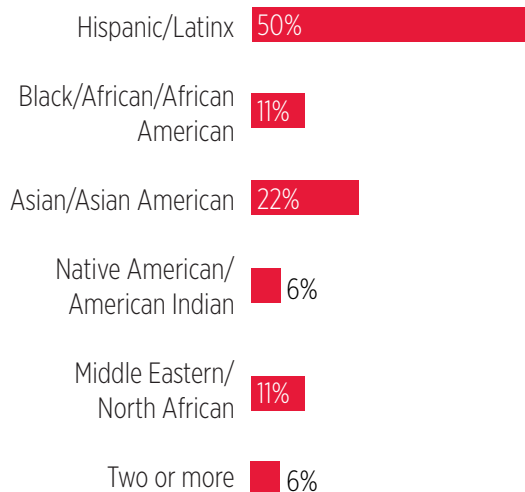
### First Generation Status

Not First Generation First Generation



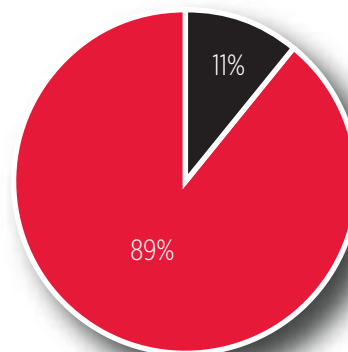
### Race & Ethnicity

Source: self-report survey data (n=18)



### Sex

Male Female



“

In its inaugural year, the program has allowed Queens College to help students form a community of mutual support and giving back. Even as the rising sophomores have benefited from the bonds developed in the cohort class and through peer mentoring, they have become peer mentors to the new freshman class.

- Barbara Simerka, Program Director

”



One of the program's biggest accomplishments for the 2020-2021 academic year was implementing a first-year seminar. Additionally, the current freshman cohort volunteered to help with the interview process for the new students and for the summer orientation program for the new students. Several of them have volunteered to take charge of an activity for next year.

## Program Activities

### 1 Cohort-based programming

Cohort-based programming builds and fosters community and develops students' academic, personal, and professional skills. Cohort-based programming included:

- Students attended a first-year seminar in the fall semester. The readings and discussions focused on enabling students to understand the connections between academic studies of identity across disciplines and the lived experiences of first-generation and minoritized student groups. Research presentations by upper-level students in the Mellon Mays Fellowship Program provided role models of minority student scholars. The students pursued independent research projects that allowed them to apply these concepts to their own areas of career interest.
- The Teaching Assistant provided weekend workshops on time management, study skills, and research project development.
- The seminar featured guest speakers from support offices across campus to provide information on student support offerings including academic assistance, health and wellness, social and cultural engagement, and career development opportunities.
- In spring, the students attended monthly cohort mentor events featuring additional QC guest speakers.

### 2 One-on-one meetings

Staff met with scholars one-on-one throughout the academic year to meet scholars' individual needs. Interactions included:

- The Honors office providing advising sessions to support students in choosing courses to fulfill general education electives.
- The Program Director providing advising sessions and email assistance to support students in the selection of majors, minors, and specialized honors opportunities, study abroad options, as well as personal concerns. All students met with the Program Director twice in the summer or in the fall semester and twice in the spring; many students also made follow-up appointments.
- The Program Research Assistant providing advising sessions and email assistance to support academic, financial, and personal concerns. All students met with the Program Assistant twice, in the summer and the fall semester.

### 3 Peer mentoring

While the 2020-2021 academic year was Queen's College's first year of programming, the staff still worked to create opportunities to engage in near-peer support. Examples include:

- In the fall semester, Honors students in two other programs met with Kessler Scholars freshmen to provide advice on majors and classes. In spring, QC funded training for eight peer mentors, assigned based on current student majors.
- In the spring semester, peer mentors met with Kessler students on a monthly basis; both provided meeting reports. The Program Director and assistant use the reports to provide follow up information or advising as needed.
- Offering a comprehensive First Year Experience, in which trained peer mentors provide workshops on academic success. Kessler students attended at least five of these over the academic year.

### 4 Student-led activities

Scholars had several opportunities as first-year students to lead events sponsored by the program, including:

- Students organized a cohort movie night.
- Kessler Scholars helped with the interviews and developed programming for the second cohort.
- Four students presented their fall research project on diversity and inclusion in a CUNY-wide conference on the topic.



## Program Profile

The **McGuire Scholars Program** began at St. Francis College in 2015 as an extension of the Wilpon Foundation's student support work first undertaken at the University of Michigan. The program is a part of the Endowed Scholarship Program and resides within the Center for Student Success. The St. Francis team includes:

- Thomas Flood, Vice President for Advancement
- Kathleen Gray, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Anthony Desiderio, Divisional Advisement Coordinator—Social Sciences
- Kelsey Ketelsen, Senior Admissions Counselor
- Robert Oliva, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management

## Institution At-A-Glance

St. Francis College is a private, not-for profit institution located in Brooklyn Heights, NY. St. Francis College is a primarily non-residential, small, baccalaureate college<sup>10</sup>. In response to the pandemic, St. Francis College adopted a hybrid learning format for both the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters. In the fall semester, the college created learning communities in which new freshman could come onto campus up to two days a week for in-person classes.

### Quick Facts

- Total undergraduate population (2019): 2,507<sup>10</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population (2019): 50%<sup>10</sup>
- Undergraduate first-generation population (2020): 46%<sup>11</sup>
- Undergraduate eight-year graduation rate for the 2011 cohort: 51%<sup>10</sup>

### Scholars Served

111

Total Students Served Since 2015

“My McGuire Scholarship allowed me to achieve four years at a private school that I never thought I'd achieve in the first place. What makes me most proud is becoming the first college graduate in my family”

- Ebony Johnson, McGuire Scholar

### Scholars Served by Cohort

76

Total Students Served in 2020-2021 Academic Year

#### Students Served in 2020 Academic Year by Cohort





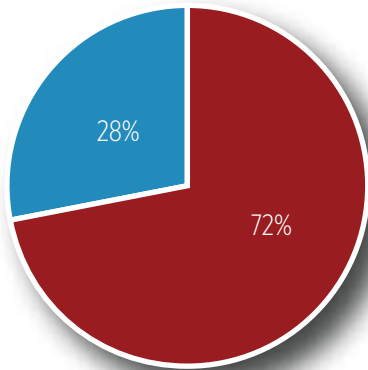
## McGuire Scholar Profile

Source: Self-reported data from Fall 2020 survey (n=78) unless otherwise noted

### Pell Status

Source: institutional data (n=76)

Not Pell Eligible      Eligible

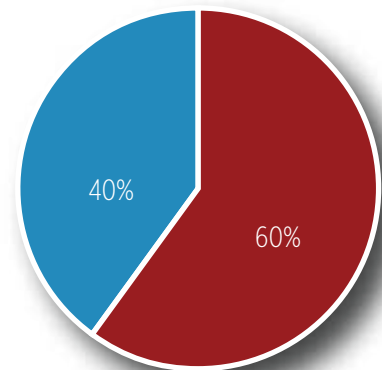


Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

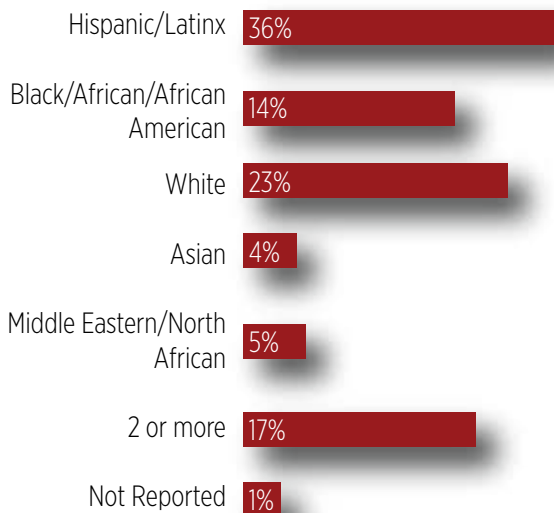
### First Generation Status

Not First Generation

First Generation



### Race & Ethnicity

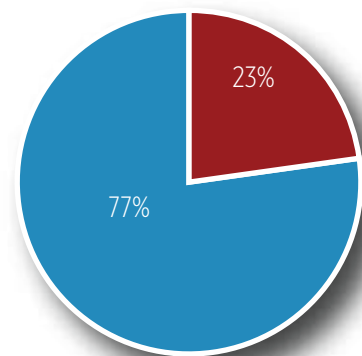


### Sex

Source: institutional data (n=78)

Male

Female



“

I am privileged to be part of this wonderful effort to provide scholarship assistance to deserving students. There is no more powerful combination than a great educational institution, a wonderful group of donors led by Fred and Judy Wilpon and an outstanding group of young scholars for whom the future is bright.  
- Robert J. McGuire, Benefactor and Namesake of the Robert J. McGuire Scholarship

”



St. Francis College brought in its largest cohort of McGuire Scholars in fall 2020. Program staff also formed small mentoring groups within the program. Staff created virtual events for McGuire Scholars to keep them engaged during the pandemic. The program looks forward to continued cross-site collaboration focused on the needs of scholars.

## Program Activities

1

### Cohort-based programming

This programming builds and fosters community and develops students' academic, personal, and professional skills.

- New events included **McGuire Mondays**, which facilitate intentional small group conversations about their experiences in the McGuire Program, getting to know each other, and how to improve the program. Sessions included fundraising ideas, community building, and discussions with staff and scholars.
- Other events included **McGuire Meditations, Bingo/Game Night** in order to create a better sense of belonging, especially during the pandemic where Zoom was the primary tool for interaction.
- Scholars collaboratively raised \$10,000 in March 2021 through **Miles for McGuires** where scholars participate in safe exercise and built awareness about the scholarship program.

2

### One-on-one meetings

Staff met with scholars one-on-one throughout the academic year to meet scholars' individual needs. Individual guidance included:

- Staff meeting with **76 scholars a total of 461 times**.
- Scholars interacting with staff during **initial, mid-, and end-of-semester meetings**. Scholars also interact with staff on an as-needed basis.
- Scholars talking with staff about a wide range of topics including **academics, professional interests, and networking**.

3

### Peer mentoring

The program provides opportunities for group mentoring in which 18 upper-class scholars are paired with three or four incoming scholars. Peer mentors guide incoming freshman throughout their first academic year to support their transition. Mentors and mentees are matched based on common interests and residential plans. To support the incoming scholars' transition, peer mentors meet with scholars to discuss topics, such as increasing their sense of belonging, career interests, and extracurricular opportunities. Peer mentors met with scholars through virtual calls and groups chats during the pandemic. Additionally, a current McGuire Scholar is the peer leader for the cohort's first-year seminar. Scholars had several other opportunities to engage in peer-mentorship, including:

- **Meditation and self-advocacy events**
- **Open Dialogue Sessions via Zoom**

4

### Student-led activities

To incorporate scholars' voices into the program, SFC:

- Led multiple **Open Dialogue Sessions via Zoom** as well as a **welcome orientation** at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year.
- Organized a community day and scholarship day event.



## Program Profile

The **Kessler Presidential Scholars Program** began at Syracuse University in 2020. The Kessler Scholars Program is housed within the Office of Multicultural Affairs within the Division of Enrollment and the Student Experience. The team includes:

- Huey Hsiao, Associate Director of Multicultural Affairs and the Kessler Scholars Program
- Brandi Efiom, Academic Consultant, Kessler Scholars Program
- Meredith E. Davis, Associate Vice President for Student Engagement



## Institution At-A-Glance

Syracuse is a private, not-for-profit university located in Syracuse, New York. Syracuse is classified as a more selective doctoral university with very high levels of research activity. Syracuse was fully in-person for the 2020-2021 academic year; however, due to the pandemic, students had the option to attend remotely from home and many programs and classes were virtual.

### Quick facts

- Total undergraduate population: 14,479<sup>12</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population (2020): 28%<sup>12</sup>
- Undergraduate first-generation population (2020): 19%<sup>13</sup>
- Undergraduate six-year graduation rate for the 2014 cohort: 83%<sup>12</sup>

“Being a first-generation student is not a disadvantage; if anything, it makes us stronger because we use what we learn here and take it back home to impact our own families and communities. It’s only the first semester, so what if you didn’t find your friend group, so what if you didn’t go out as much, you have a friend group in all of us and we will continue our journey for the next four years!”

- Kevin Boakye, Kessler Scholar

### Scholars Served by Cohort

18

Total Students Served in  
2020-2021 Academic Year





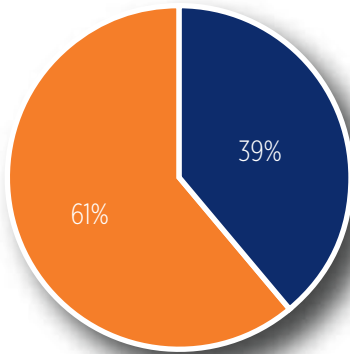


## Kessler Scholar Profile

Source: Institutional data (n=18) unless otherwise noted

### Pell Status

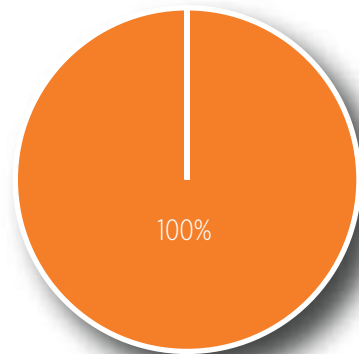
Not Pell Eligible Pell Eligible



Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

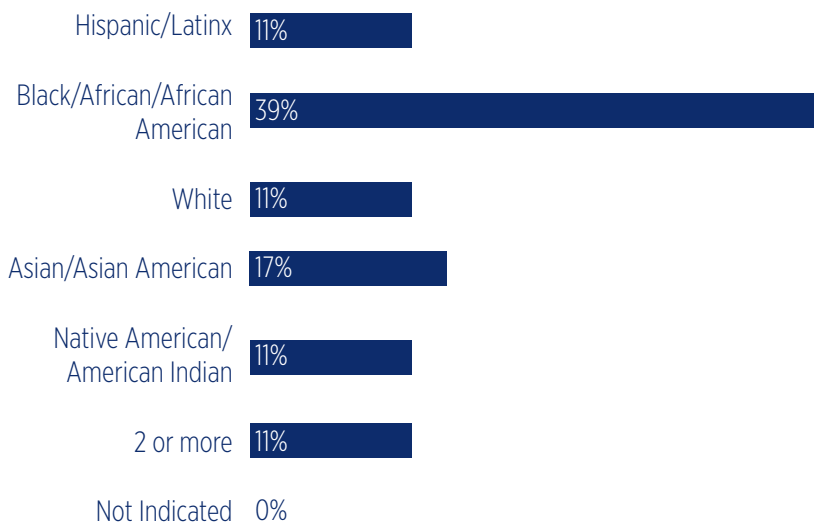
### First Generation Status

Not First Generation First Generation



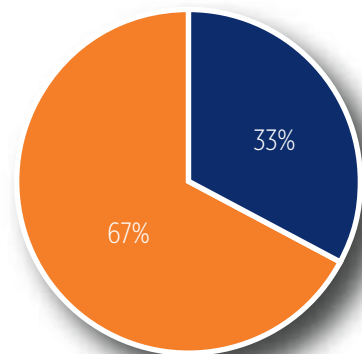
### Race & Ethnicity

Source: self-report survey data (n=18)



### Sex

Male Female



“

Joining the Kessler Program has been one of the **best decisions** I've made during my first year. The program has helped me immensely by showing me all the possible opportunities that I could take advantage of at Syracuse.

”

- Dianelis Zapata Perez, Kessler Scholar





Some of the program's accomplishments for the 2020-2021 academic year were implementing the Kessler Scholars Motivational Challenge Coin Ceremony, having an 85% participation rate for their weekly seminars, and meeting program staff's goal of three one-on-one meetings per Kessler Scholar during both the Fall and Spring semesters.

## Program Activities

### 1 Cohort-based programming

Weekly cohort-based programming builds and fosters community and develops scholars' academic, personal, and professional skills. Cohort-based programming includes:

- A **Summer Meet and Greet, a Kessler Motivational Event, a Spring Welcome Back Event.**
- Scholars building community through the **Review Expectations, Team Building, Full Value Commitment** event.
- Staff providing space for scholars to collaboratively reflect on and celebrate their first year of college.

### 2 One-on-one meetings

In order to meet scholars' individual needs, staff met with scholars one-on-one throughout the academic year. Interactions include:

- Staff met with **18 scholars a total of 137 times.**
- Staff worked to meet with each scholar at **least three times** each semester.
- Scholars talked with staff about a variety of topics, including **academics, personal questions, and questions about campus engagement.**

### 3 Peer mentoring

While the 2020-2021 academic year was Syracuse's first year of programming, peer mentors still worked to create opportunities to support the incoming Kessler Scholar cohort. Examples include:

- A session on sharing first-generation student experiences and building pride and finding strength in being first-generation.
- Meeting 1:1 with Kessler Scholars to provide advice, offer encouragement, and support their campus engagement.
- A reflection event at the end of the academic year.

### 4 Student-led activities

Scholars had several opportunities as first-year scholars to lead events sponsored by the program. Activities include:

- **Leading a book discussion** after the Wes Moore Collaborative event
- Holding a First-Generation Alumni panel for scholars

## Program Profile

The **Kessler Presidential Scholars Program** began at the University of Michigan in 2008 as a traditional need-based scholarship. In 2017, the program transitioned to provide comprehensive support focused on first-generation, limited-income students. The program resides in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, Division of Undergraduate Education. The team includes:

- Gail Gibson, Director, Kessler Scholars Program
- Anna Maria Flores, Associate Director, Kessler Scholars Program
- Kayla Anderson, Student Support Coordinator, Kessler Scholars Program

## Institution At-A-Glance

The University of Michigan is a public research university located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Michigan is a large, extremely selective institution.<sup>9</sup> In response to the pandemic, Michigan adopted a hybrid learning model for the fall 2020 semester and was fully remote for the 2021 winter semester.

### Quick Facts

- Total undergraduate population: 31,329<sup>9</sup>
- Undergraduate minoritized population of the incoming 2020 class: 12%<sup>9</sup>
- Undergraduate first-generation population of the incoming 2020 class: 12%<sup>9</sup>
- Undergraduate six-year graduation rate for the 2011 cohort: 92%<sup>9</sup>

### Students Served

**393**

Total Students Served Since 2008

“Being a first-generation student has taught me a lot and the Kessler Scholars Program has had a huge impact on my experience in college! The program worked to **keep me on the right track for success at Michigan** and allowed me to accomplish something that once seemed out of reach.”  
- **Deshawn Wafer, Kessler Scholar**

### Students Served by Cohort

**151**

Total Students Served in the 2020-2021 Academic Year

#### STUDENTS SERVED IN THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR BY COHORT



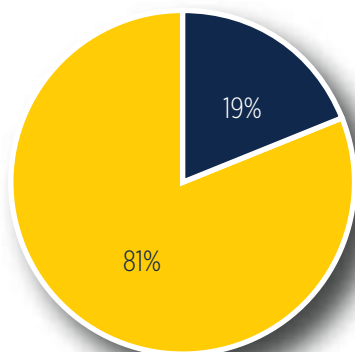


## Kessler Scholar Profile

Source: Institutional data (n=151) unless otherwise noted

### Pell Status

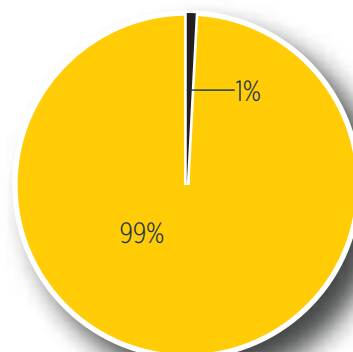
Not Pell Eligible Pell Eligible



Pell eligibility is determined by a student's expected family contribution, cost of attendance, and full-time status.

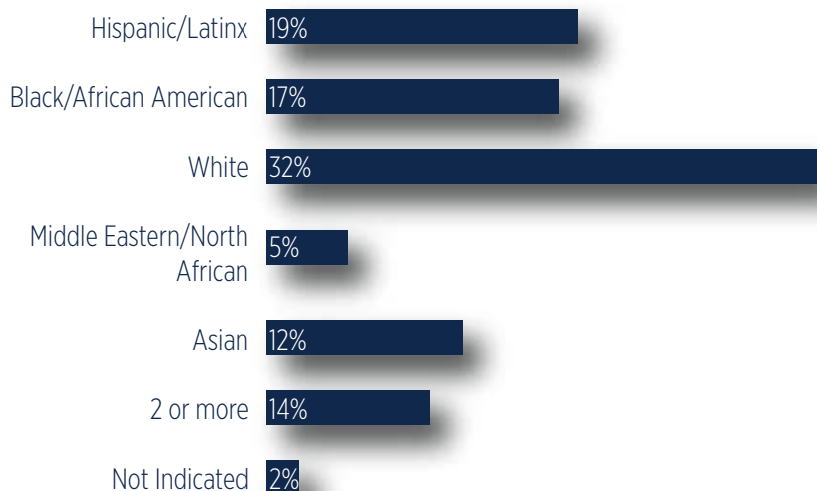
### First-Generation Status

Not First-Generation First Generation



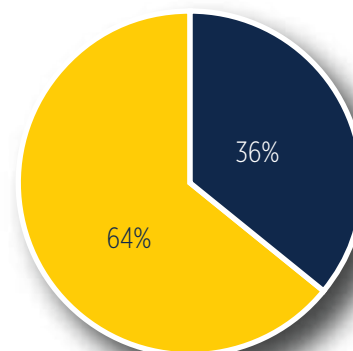
### Race & Ethnicity

Source: Self-reported survey data (n=126)



### Sex

Male Female



“

**Money** to access the institution **isn't enough**. The Kessler Scholars Program provides resources, supports, dedicated staff, and programming to assure that students not only get in the door but that **they thrive when they are here**.

”

- Gail Gibson, Program Director



Staff adapted programming to meet the changing student needs during the pandemic. The team launched a Kessler Scholars Ambassador Program to support incoming students ahead of fall classes. Drawing on virtual tools, the program held a series of alumni connection panels, and the Michigan Kessler Scholars Advisory Board met with the Cornell student advisory board.

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

1

### Cohort-based programming

Cohort-based programming builds and fosters community and develops students' academic, personal, and professional skills. Attributes include:

- **A college success seminar** for the first-year cohort focused on exploring the hidden curriculum of higher education and encouraging exploration of campus resources and academic and career goals.
- **Monthly workshops series** exclusively for scholars focused on well-being and promoting connection through activities that included a virtual meditation session, a lesson in origami folding, and a conversation with leading political commentators ahead of the 2020 election.
- **Drop-by social activities** that sought to celebrate the year's key moments, including a Back-to-School Polaroid Pop-in and an opportunity for seniors to pick up their Kessler Scholars graduation stoles.

2

### One-on-one meetings

In order to meet students' individual needs, students are asked to meet individually with Kessler Scholars staff at least once per semester. Individual guidance included:

- Staff meeting with **135 students a total of 274 times**.
- Students meeting with staff during **Walk-In Wednesdays** as well as on an **as-needed basis**.
- Students talked with the staff about a range of academic and personal matters. During the pandemic, conversations focused on **family concerns, academics, and their mental health**.

3

### Peer mentorship

Supporting the first-year transition is a core component of the program. Each year, older students in the program are paired with incoming students to provide near-peer mentor guidance. Attributes include:

- Students being matched based on **geographic background, academic or career interests, and extracurricular activities**.
- Mentors receiving structured discussion guides and training to support bi-weekly meetings through the fall semester and monthly engagement during the winter semester.

4

### Student-led activities

Student voice and leadership are a central part of the Kessler Scholars Program. To that end, the 16-person Student Advisory Board meets weekly during the academic year and provides the following:

- **Feedback** on program activities and structure.
- Execution of an **annual student recognition project** for the program's funders.
- Social and community service activities, which included a **virtual trivia night** and **Zoom costume party** on Halloween.



# Kessler Scholars Collaborative: Looking Ahead

## Next Steps Toward a Shared Vision

In launching the Kessler Scholars Collaborative, no one could have anticipated the drastic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the 2020-21 academic year. But the global crisis, unexpectedly, also opened new virtual spaces and opportunities to enhance our work with students and our cross-institutional efforts. Program leaders who are a part of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative quickly adapted cohort-based programming and activities to new modes of digital communication, allowing them to stay in frequent contact with students through video platforms, texting, and interactive online workshops. These same technologies also allowed program leads across sites to work together in virtual spaces, nimbly building a strong foundation for this new national initiative.

This flexibility and innovative spirit has allowed the Kessler Scholars Collaborative to emerge from a first year shadowed by the COVID-19 crisis well positioned to build on the strengths of both the individual programs taking shape on each campus and the broader power of the collective. After a year of formation, testing, and exploration, the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is poised to refine its impact for students and participating institutions in these core areas:

- **Cross-site student engagement.** First-generation college students do not navigate higher education, or the world beyond, with the same deep networks and rich opportunities as many of their campus peers. The Kessler Scholars Collaborative is uniquely situated to connect students across institutional boundaries to broaden their understanding of their own experience and opportunities beyond their single institutional setting.
- **Alignment in programming and student outcome goals.** A distinguishing feature of the Kessler Scholars Collaborative is its emphasis on local context and the flexibility for partner institutions to design programming that reflects the student experiences at each site. Together, though, we want to assure that student identification as a Kessler Scholar reflects a shared understanding of leadership, service, growth, and college success.
- **Support for current and future partners.** The Kessler Scholars Collaborative is committed not only to robust support for students but also for the staff and institutions who are working together to build this collective network. Central support for the Collaborative is focused on building connections, establishing strong guiding structures, and creating spaces for higher education professionals to share best practices and refine programmatic offerings.



Working together, partners in the Kessler Scholars Collaborative are reimagining student development and success for first-generation, limited-income students. Our growth in these areas in the year ahead will mean supporting more students in ever more meaningful ways ahead.



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The Kessler Scholars Collaborative is led from the University of Michigan by Gail Gibson, Program Director, and Kristen Glasener, Project Manager. This report has been prepared from the University of Michigan with support from each of the participating sites.

For further information on the Kessler Scholars Collaborative, contact:

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