

School of Education Bridge to Success Academic Year Scholarships

Program Summary

10/2/2020

Scholarship Purpose

The School of Education established the Bridge to Success Scholarship to provide financial support to graduate and undergraduate students experiencing financial challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Examples of financial hardship include, but are not limited to, student loss of employment, student's parent loss of employment, unexpected increase in expenses (e.g., travel or health) due to COVID-19, and/or student extended time to degree. Scholarships are intended to help students meet their financial needs and maintain progress toward their degree.

Eligibility

The scholarship was open to all graduate and undergraduate students whose primary or secondary academic program was in the School of Education and who met the following requirements:

1. The student is experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 crisis. There are a number of causes of financial hardship that qualify, including, as examples, increased costs you are experiencing or loss of income you counted on to pay for expenses.
2. The student is enrolled in at least one credit during the Fall 2020 term.

Although students must demonstrate that they need financial support, a FAFSA was not required.

Major Program Changes for the Academic Year

Following an evaluation of the summer scholarship program, several changes were made to enhance support for our students and to improve program effectiveness. The following is a summary of some of the more significant changes to the program:

- *Expanding eligibility to students who have a secondary major/program in SoE* – the summer program only included students whose primary major/program was in SoE in the eligibility criteria. This excluded students whose primary major is in a different School or College but who also have a major in SoE. Following advice from our department chairs who expressed a desire to include the secondary majors, we decided to expand our eligibility criteria to include them.
- *Reducing the maximum award to \$2,500* – the maximum award for the summer program was set at \$5,000, however we decided that lowering the maximum award during the academic year would allow us to provide financial assistance to a higher number of students. Assuming that students during the academic year would have access to more

financial aid and graduate student funding, we felt comfortable lowering the maximum award.

- *Streamlining the application* – In order to reduce the administrative burden on students, we decided to make some changes to the application. For example, the application no longer included questions that OSFA could answer with the student's ID (i.e. degree level, domestic or international). Instead, the application included additional questions that tried to determine what is driving the student's financial hardship and the potential risk that the student will not continue in their program.
- *Awarding timeline that aligns with tuition payment schedule* – the timeline established for the academic year program was structured so that students would receive their awards before the first tuition payment deadline on September 11, 2020. During the summer process, awards were made after the tuition deadline which increased some stress for our students. We hope that this new timeline better met our students' needs.
- *Awards will be disbursed in the fall and spring semesters* - awards provided to students will be disbursed over the fall and spring semesters. The award default will be to split the total award to disburse half in fall semester and half in spring semester. However, students will have the option to change the disbursement timing to meet their needs. Students receiving an award in the spring semester, will be reviewed to verify eligibility before disbursement.

Awards Summary

For the 2020-21 academic year, 502 students were awarded \$1,044,688. Table 1 summarizes the breakdown of awards by graduate and undergraduate students. Graduate students represented 52.8% of the total awards with an average award of \$2,078. Undergraduate students represented 47.2% of awards with an average award of \$2,084.

Table 1. SoE Fall Bridge Awards, Count and Award Total by Career

Career	Count of Awards	Dollars Awarded
Graduate	265	\$550,761
Undergraduate	237	\$493,927
Grand Total	502	\$1,044,688

Table 2 provides a breakdown of awards by department and career type. Students in the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) and Kinesiology departments received the majority of awards, however differences were seen in the number of awards provided to students in those departments based on career type. Graduate students in C&I received the highest number of graduate awards (31.32%), while undergraduate students in Kinesiology received the majority

of undergraduate awards (35.44%). Since we opened eligibility to students who had a primary major outside of SoE, we awarded 10 students who were considered additional majors.

Table 2. SoE Fall Awards, Count and Percentage by Career Type and Department

	Grad		Undergrad		Grand Total	
Department	#	%	#	%	#	%
Art	29	10.94%	30	12.66%	59	11.75%
C&I	83	31.32%	45	18.99%	128	25.50%
CP	19	7.17%		0.00%	19	3.78%
Dance		0.00%	13	5.49%	13	2.59%
EDPSYCH	22	8.30%		0.00%	22	4.38%
ELPA	35	13.21%		0.00%	35	6.97%
EPS	26	9.81%	22	9.28%	48	9.56%
KIN	22	8.30%	84	35.44%	106	21.12%
RP&SE	25	9.43%	30	12.66%	55	10.96%
T&D		0.00%	7	2.95%	7	1.39%
Additional Majors	4	1.51%	6	2.53%	10	1.99%
Total	265	100.00%	237	100.00%	502	100.00%

Note: Additional majors are students who have a primary major outside of the SoE.

Two questions were added to the fall application that were not included in the summer application to help SoE understand the level of stress and anxiety our students were experiencing related to the impacts of Covid-19. Students were asked to select the statement that best described their situation. Tables 3 and 4 summarize the results.

Table 3. Student Situation for Fall: Essential Needs

Statement	Count	Percent
I am anxious about covering additional expenses, including some educational expenses, but I feel I can still meet essential needs, such as food, housing, or clothing.	296	59.99%
I am not currently able to cover educational expenses while still meeting essential needs, such as food, housing, or clothing.	142	27.14%
I am not currently concerned about covering any expenses, but I am experiencing financial stress due to an unforeseen circumstance.	60	12.07%
No Answer	4	0.81%
Grand Total	502	100.00%

Table 4. Student Situation for Fall: Academic Expectations

Statement	Count	Percent
I am anxious that my financial emergency may prevent me from finishing the Fall or Spring semester.	187	36.44%
I am not concerned about my ability to finish the Fall or Spring semester, but am experiencing a financial emergency which may impact my ability to be successful.	298	60.45%
I will not be able to finish the current semester due to my financial emergency.	13	2.31%
No Answer	4	0.81%
Grand Total	502	100.00%

In the application, students were also asked to explain how COVID-19 has impacted them and an analysis of their responses provided the following insights into the types of challenges SoE students are experiencing. The codes summarized in Table 5 represent the primary reason for financial hardship identified by award recipients. More than half of respondents indicated personal unemployment experienced during the pandemic as a primary reason for experiencing financial hardship. Approximately one third of respondents named increased expenses as a result of COVID-19. Nearly 10% described family members' experiences with unemployment as a primary reason. Relocation also factored into respondents' primary reason for seeking assistance, with nearly 3% describing an unexpected move due to the pandemic and another 1% reporting being unable to return to the U.S.

Table 5. Fall Bridge Awards: Hardship Summary Category, Count and Percentage

Hardship	Count	Percent
unemployment	265	52.79%
increased expenses	161	32.07%
family unemployment	50	9.96%
unexpected move	14	2.79%
unable to return to U.S.	5	1.00%
no response	7	1.39%
Grand Total	502	100.00%

It was clear from the testimonials provided by students during the application process that this scholarship program was an important step to helping our students manage the impacts of COVID-19 and stay on track in their degree programs. In fact, many students sent letters of appreciation to the Dean's Office to convey how much this funding meant to them. Some letter examples are below:

"I want to thank you so much for funding a \$2,500 scholarship for me! This scholarship money will help significantly in paying for my college education. As a student who comes from a low

income family, this scholarship means a lot to both my family and I. My family and I cannot pay for college out of pocket so every penny means the world, especially in a time like now. It is truly amazing that I have the opportunity to go to the University of Wisconsin - Madison and with donors like you, I can continue to attend my dream college and earn a one of a kind education. Since I will be a future educator, it is extremely important to me that I am receiving the highest quality education possible. I want to be the best teacher that I can be for my future students and all thanks to you, I can do that! I aim to make a positive impact on my students every single day, just like you are making a positive impact on me. In the end, you are not only helping me as a student, but you are also benefiting my future students! Once again, thank you for the scholarship!"

"This scholarship is particularly timely as this past year I was diagnosed with a medical condition that will require expenses not usually included in a student's budget. This money will help me to afford such things without disrupting my studies. I can't thank you enough for aiding in my financial stability which will allow me to focus fully on school and wellness. I am so grateful to not have to choose between my finances, my health, and my grades. I look forward to one day being in a position where I can contribute to another person's wellness as you have for me. I wish I could thank you personally."

"I am writing to thank you for choosing me to receive the Bridge Scholarship for the summer and fall 2020 semesters. Thank you also for further supplementing this funding with a technology grant which will make it easier for me to stay connected with my advising committee. The spread of COVID-19 has devastated many lives and amplified the economic precarious position that many graduate students (as scholars, family heads, adults) inhabit. As a funding block, you promptly stepped in to alleviate some of this burden and for this my family and I are profoundly grateful. The Bridge Scholarship has lightened my financial burden which allows me to focus on my research and schoolwork. Thank you again for your generosity."

Tech Equity

In addition to student scholarship awards, SoE used the Bridge to Success application process to pilot a new tech equity program for our students. In the Bridge to Success application, students were asked to indicate whether they needed assistance with internet connectivity, a laptop, or both. A total of 87 students indicated a need for technology assistance – 64 only for internet connectivity, 34 only for a laptop, and 11 students indicated they needed both.

Staff in SoE's MERIT followed up with students to confirm their need and, as of 9/21/20, 31 Dell laptops and 2 Macs have been ordered with delivery expected over the next month. In addition, MERIT is working with DoIT to finalize a MiFi contract and, once that is complete, they will provide MiFi's to 54 students who have confirmed they would like enhanced internet connectivity.

