

EXPANDING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

THE IMPACT OF THE GATES MILLENNIUM SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Since 1999, the Gates Millennium Scholars program—an initiative of over \$1 billion sponsored by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—has awarded scholarships to more than 10,000 extraordinarily talented low-income students of color with the goal of eventually funding 20,000 students. The Gates Millennium Scholars program, administered by the United Negro College Fund in partnership with the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, the American Indian Graduate Center Scholars, and the Organization of Chinese Americans, is the largest private scholarship effort in the world. *Expanding Access and Opportunity: The Impact of the Gates Millennium Scholars Program* reviews the preliminary findings of research on the program. The following are excerpts from the report.

Scholars defer loans and work

- ▶ Scholars were much less likely than non-recipients [applicants who did not receive the scholarship] to take out loans. For example, by their third year in college, only a little more than one-half of Scholars who entered as freshmen in 2001 had borrowed any money, compared to more than three-quarters of non-recipients.
- ▶ When Scholars did borrow, the amounts were smaller. For students who borrowed at any time during college, the average total loan debt for Scholars was only \$6,525—48 percent less than that of non-recipients.
- ▶ Scholars were less likely than non-recipients or a national sample of low-income, high-achieving minority students to work for pay or to hold off-campus jobs. Scholars who entered college in 2001 and 2002 also worked fewer hours during their freshman year, 30 percent fewer than the number of hours worked by non-recipients.

Scholars enroll in highly selective colleges

- ▶ Becoming a Gates Millennium Scholar was associated with higher rates of enrollment in four-year, private, out-of-state, and highly selective postsecondary institutions versus institutions with more open admissions policies. For example, only 3 percent of Scholars entering college

in 2000, 2001, and 2002 attended a two-year institution, compared to nearly half of a national sample of low-income, high-achieving minority students.

- ▶ Even after accounting for factors such as exceptional test scores that themselves increase the likelihood of attending selective schools, receiving the scholarship increased by 11 percent the likelihood that students would attend a highly selective college.

Scholars exhibit engagement and leadership in college

- ▶ Overall, Scholars showed higher levels of academic and community engagement. When compared to non-recipients, Scholars entering college as freshmen in 2001 more often discussed ideas with faculty, worked on schoolwork with other students outside of class, and worked on creative projects. Scholars were also considerably more likely than non-recipients to have participated in community service.

Scholars persist in and complete college

- ▶ Scholars were more likely to persist in college than non-recipients. Retention rates at the end of both the freshman and junior years were 13 percent higher for Scholars who entered college in 2001 and 2002 than for non-recipients from the same years, even when accounting for factors that are likely to have an impact on academic success such as income, parental education, test scores, and academic preparation.
- ▶ Graduation rates for the Scholars were higher than those of a national sample of low-income, high-achieving minority students. After five years, 80 percent of Scholars who entered college as freshmen in 2000 had completed a college degree. The five-year completion rate for the comparison sample, on the other hand, was 49 percent.

Scholars enroll in graduate school

- ▶ Undergraduate Scholars who received their award in 2000 or 2001 and had graduated from college by 2004 were more likely than non-recipients to apply for and enroll in graduate school.
- ▶ Scholars have the opportunity for continued funding if they attend graduate school in certain fields in which minorities are underrepresented. As of 2006, 546 Scholars were enrolled in graduate programs in one of these fields.

As more Gates Millennium Scholars are selected and enter college and as the current Scholars complete their degrees and move on to graduate school and the workforce, additional research will be needed to determine the impact of the program on the lives of the Scholars themselves and on the higher education system. In the long term, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation anticipates that this scholarship program can influence increased enrollment and success in college for low-income minority students and improve the representation of minorities in the fields of computer science, education, engineering, library science, mathematics, public health, and science.

For those interested in further details, much of the research summarized in this report will be made available to the public at www.norc.org/gatesscholars/.