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Just finishing its fifth year, the Florida Opportunity Scholars Program continues to thrive with the support of University of Florida alumni, donors to the program and the UF administration.

We’ve celebrated our first graduating class from the program, with our students successfully going on to graduate school, professional schools (six went to UF’s medical school) or straight into jobs.

Our students come from diverse backgrounds and are focused on many different fields of study, but there is a common thread between them. They all want to give back after graduation to UF and the community that has supported their dreams. The Opportunity Scholars are truly inspiring students, and I hope you get to learn more about their experience through this annual report.

Go Gators!

Leslie Pendleton
The Florida Opportunity Scholars Program supports low-income students who are first in their families to attend college. The University of Florida is committed to financially supporting academically talented students who might not otherwise attend UF because of financial barriers. The scholarship guarantees students’ full needs will be met. In other words, the scholarship covers tuition and books, as well as living expenses. The goal is for students to earn a bachelor’s degree and graduate without the assistance of student loans.

National studies have shown that students from low socio-economic backgrounds can be deterred from enrolling in a four-year college or university because of fear of debt and concern that working while in school could hinder the chances for academic success.

Many of these students choose instead to enroll in community colleges or choose not to attend college at all. UF recognizes this problem in the state of Florida and is taking a stand in supporting students from low-income backgrounds.

The Florida Opportunity Scholars Program continues to receive support from President Bernard Machen, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs Dave Kratzer, as well as campus administrators, faculty, alumni and students. Financially, the program is supported by the University, the state of Florida and our many generous donors.

To date, the Florida Opportunity Scholars Program has supported approximately 1,950 students in the five years since the program’s inception.
Path of a Scholar

After students apply and receive an acceptance letter to UF, then they are identified as Opportunity Scholars.

Receive Scholarship -- The average award per student is $5,358.

Orientation -- Attend UF’s Preview and a separate Florida Opportunity Scholar Program orientation.

Peer Mentor Match Up -- First-year students get paired with one of 56 mentors.

Gator Pride -- Attend a women’s basketball game and learn about hard work and school pride from the coaches.

Financial Literacy Workshop -- Complete a series of two workshops to learn how to budget money and build credit.

First Year Florida -- Enroll in a section of First Year Florida, a one-credit-hour course which helps students transition to college life.

Start School -- Scholars are required to take at least 12 credit hours per semester.

Career Planning Workshop -- Complete a series of two workshops to learn about resume writing and goal setting for internships.

Join Student Organizations -- Whether it’s research, service or leadership, there are more than 950 options for involvement.

Become a Peer Mentor -- 90 percent of peer mentors are Opportunity Scholars.

Advising -- Schedule a one-on-one with the scholarship program director.

Graduation -- 576 Opportunity Scholars have graduated.

Advising -- Schedule an appointment with the Scholarship Program Director to discuss post-grad plans.

Intern -- Students are encouraged to complete at least one internship before graduation.

Join FOSAL -- The Florida Opportunity Scholars Academy of Leadership accepts 50 applicants annually.

Global Experience -- More than 340 Opportunity Scholars have studied abroad.
To help ensure collegiate success for the Opportunity Scholars, tracking the students and their academic performance is essential.

1,408 Scholars supported in 2011

7 in 10 students are female

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64.8% vs. 36%

Four-year graduation rate of Opportunity Scholars, compared to the national average of students from similar backgrounds.

3.157

Average Florida Opportunity Scholar GPA for 2011. The average UF cumulative GPA is 3.10.

Average Family Income

Opportunity Scholar

$18,759

UF Student

$105,000

National Center for Education Statistics
Florida Opportunity Scholars represent almost every county in the state of Florida. Last year, 42 counties were accounted for, and this year the number is up to 55 different counties.

Others: Volusia 28, Lee 26, Osceola 22, Pasco 19, Seminole 17, Brevard 15, Collier 15, Lake 15, Putnam 15, Sarasota 15, St. Lucie 15, Martin 9, Clay 8, Flagler 8, Manatee 8, Bay 7, Nassau 7, Escambia 6, Hernando 6, Leon 6, St. Johns 6, Charlotte 5, Highlands 5, Levy 5, Columbia 4, Indian River 4, Okaloosa 4, Citrus 3, Hendry 3, Santa Rosa 3, Sumter 3, Gadsden 2, Gilchrist 2, Union 2, Washington 2, Baker 1, Gulf 1, Lafayette 1, Monroe 1, Okeechobee 1, Suwannee 1, Wakulla 1, Walton 1, Non-FL 2*

*These students are considered Florida residents for tuition purposes because one parent lives in Florida. However, the students’ permanent address is with the parent who does not reside in Florida.
Peers are often the greatest influence. Peers can encourage students to succeed and can be the support system for students to rely on, especially when they are away from family and a familiar environment.

The Florida Opportunity Scholars’ Peer Mentor system continues to grow in popularity and strength. This year, we selected 32 new mentors and had 24 returning mentors for a total of 56 peer mentors. Of those mentors, 90 percent are Opportunity Scholars who chose to be a mentor in order to give back to the program.

Each mentor is trained on how to advise their mentees and attends monthly “check ups” where they discuss the progress with their mentees. The peer mentors interact with the new scholars in a variety of ways to ensure each student’s transition to UF is a positive experience.

Over the course of the year, peer mentors recorded the number of interactions they had with their scholars. Interactions range from text messages to face-to-face conversations. Most interactions included conversations or questions about academics, involvement or financial aid. Mentors recorded a total of 5,199 interactions.
I used to take care of my little brother and little sister because my mom, she worked the whole day. She would leave the house at 4 a.m., and she’d come back at midnight. And my stepdad would leave around the same time, coming back at like 9 p.m.” — Juan

Everyone has an unique story, but few 18-year-olds have been forced to take on the degree of responsibility at home like our Opportunity Scholars. By the time they come to UF, many of our scholars have contributed to their families’ incomes or raised younger siblings, all while attending school and excelling academically.

In partnership with the University of Florida’s Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, we began recording the incredible stories of our first-generation college students. Students in the Oral History Program worked one-on-one with the Opportunity Scholars, recording stories from their childhood and their journeys to UF. Six students were interviewed during 2011, and more interviews are planned for the future.

The Opportunity Scholars’ passionate and poignant stories not only capture the history of the Florida Opportunity Scholars Program, but also attest to the importance of a program of this magnitude in higher education. These stories are not uncommon in Florida and capturing this portion of the state’s history is essential.
Academy of Leadership

“I had a job interview over dinner with two executives from a marketing company in Orlando. I am happy to say that the FOS Etiquette Dinner helped me land my very first job after college.” — Jennifer

Earning a diploma is no longer enough to guarantee a job after graduation. Today’s graduates also must be engaged outside of the classroom, honing their professional and personal skill set to be marketable employees and leaders.

The Florida Opportunity Scholars Academy of Leadership prepares 50 third- and fourth-year Opportunity Scholars for careers and roles after college through a year-long experience. The program begins with a day-and-a-half leadership retreat where they learn about their strengths, networking and professionalism.

Over the course of the year, students participate in an etiquette dinner, service project and a leadership retreat.

Students are required to craft an intentional summer experience connected to leadership. Many studied abroad; others completed internships and/or service projects while some took a leadership course at UF. Upon returning from the summer, students shared their experiences with one another in a formal presentation, helping improve their public speaking skills.

At the etiquette dinner, students prep for future mixers and meals, learning about appropriate conversation, table manners, formal place settings and how to politely negotiate salaries.
Through the Florida Opportunity Scholars Program, I’ve discovered my love for applying science to help people. The support I’ve found has made my dreams possible, and I will be attending UF medical school. I’ve been able to achieve so much in the last four years; I can’t wait to see what can happen in eight years at UF.” — Erik

If you watch closely as students walk across the stage at graduation, you can see UF President Bernard Machen give some students an extra big smile and, in some cases, a hug. The students receiving the extra attention are wearing FOS Alum lapel pins on their gowns.

As the tradition of celebrating our graduates continues with each graduating class, recording where life takes them post graduation is a priority. Some are going to graduate and professional schools, and many are going straight into the workforce. The majority of our students are staying in Florida.

As the primary goal of the Florida Opportunity Scholars Program, graduation is a time for celebration and recognition of the achievement not only for the student, but the student’s family and all of the donors who made it possible.

Every May, President Machen hosts the spring graduates at his home. In 2011, approximately 210 graduating seniors and more than 40 campus administrators and mentors attended the celebration. Students were presented their FOS Alum lapel pins and encouraged to wear them on graduation day. “I’ll be looking for you,” President Machen said.