

Major Highlights and
Conclusions

- Overall, the students that participate in the 21st Century Scholar program feel that they have gained a support system that has helped them in numerous ways as a college student.
- Students reported that the staff in the 21st Century Scholars office are great resources. Students feel comfortable approaching staff and asking for help.
- Students would benefit from receiving reminders that they can refer back to. These reminders would also help make them more aware of events going on in the 21st Century Scholars office.
- Students noted that not having enough time because of classes, other events, or needing to work are the main factors preventing them from attending events offered by the office.
- Some students mentioned that the visibility of the 21st Century could be improved as potential students may not know where the office is. They also reported that the small space makes it challenging for students to get together in the lounge area.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to understand the benefits students receive from participating in programs and services offered by the 21st Century Scholars office. Specifically, these focus groups assessed the extent to which the 21st Century Scholars office met its program objectives, connected students to appropriate resources at IUPUI, and enhancing students' overall experiences. The information obtained in this focus group will be used to facilitate improvements to programs and services for the coming academic year. A report from this focus group will be shared as part of the special populations program review to determine how IUPUI can better serve students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

METHOD

Trained members of the Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) facilitated the student focus groups. The project was supervised by Steve Graunke.

Recruitment Procedures

Students who received funding from the 21st Century Scholars program were sent an invitation to participate in the focus group from the 21st Century Scholars office two weeks prior to the focus group. Reminder emails were sent one week after the initial invitation and two days before the focus groups were to begin. Students who attended the focus groups were invited to participate in a small reception with lunch provided afterward. Participation in the focus groups was not a condition for participation in the reception. Participants were informed that they were not required to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable and they were free to leave the focus group at any time. The participants were also asked if it was permissible to record the session, and each focus group was recorded before being transcribed. The two focus groups lasted 30-50 minutes each.

Participants

A total of 12 students participated in the focus groups. The participants were separated into two groups to ensure everyone's opinions could be gathered. All were undergraduate students from various cohort years.

Data Analysis

Analytical procedures included an exploratory content analysis of the 21st Century Scholar focus groups' transcriptions. This comprehensive report considers an overall view of the two groups. Therefore, its main goal is to understand and describe notable themes found across both of the focus groups. Because the total number of students was small, some aspects of the data have been considered significant to report and address despite infrequency. The main goal is to understand the experiences of these students as it related to the 21st Century Scholars program, rather than to generalize these results to all program participants.

Content Analysis

The audio recordings were transcribed, and the text of the focus groups was analyzed to find the most significant content themes and meaning that emerged from the data. Patton (2002) describes content analysis as "referring to any qualitative data reduction or sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (p. 453). In respecting content analysis as

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an analytical technique, a set of codes were developed. The process of developing these codes was based on the foundations of grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory posits that the central tenants of experience and phenomenon are held within the lives of the participants being studied, and that a general theory will emerge as a result of examining the lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Coding Process

A coding process was employed as the primary means of examination. Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) work explains, “data using the grounded theory method is frequently referred to as coding to depict the process by which data are collapsed into smaller pieces of data, categorized, considered, and conceptualized in new ways” (p. 348). Specifically, the focus groups’ transcriptions were analyzed carefully by creating codes and code groups that represented the content of the students’ input. Each code was generated directly from the data.

RESULTS

Several notable themes emerged in the focus group data through analysis. These themes are presented and supported by actual examples of students’ statements. Although names have been redacted to help promote confidentiality, this authentic student feedback has not been altered in any other way. It is hoped that this method of results presentation will allow for a trustworthy representation of students’ experiences in the 21st Century Scholars program.

Perceptions of 21st Century Program

Students were given a notecard and instructed to write down 1) words they would have used to describe 21st Century Scholars *before* they came to IUPUI, and 2) words they would use to describe 21st Century Scholars *now*. The written responses to the notecard activity are included below:

Before Starting at IUPUI	After Starting at IUPUI
Program that gave scholarships to students who live in Indiana, that covers 100% of tuition	Mentoring, Assistance, Care, Opportunity, Resources, Knowledge, Education
Scholarship, Money for low-income	Scholarship, for low-income, my mentor, help, guidance, genuine/caring
Free tuition was the #1 thing that came into my mind. Scholarship program that benefits families with low incomes. Great program to be a part of.	Great resource, mentoring, scholarship
Just a scholarship	Scholarship-program, peer mentoring-program, workshops, helpful, resourceful
Helping students with classes they were struggling in, guiding students in the right direction, kind of like a support group for incoming freshmen	Support network, assisting students in their academics to maintain a good G.P.A, providing assistance in financial aid, graduating on time
A 21 st century scholar before the program is a very intelligent person	Now they are very well rounded and diverse
Great opportunity, schooling, learning experience, diversity, helpful	Involvement, learning, workshops, great opportunity, diversity, helpful, family, closeness, friends
Helpful, resource, open-armed, college prep	My biggest resource, Helped me grow as a person, Helped me with the college transition, Mentor
Helpful, paid tuition, GPA, In-state	Very helpful, resourceful, community, friends, networking, connected to campus
A scholarship for low income individuals who applied while they were in middle school. I knew this scholarship only covered tuition and that you had to complete a certain amount of credits per year	A scholarship to provide financial assistance to cover my tuition

COMMENTS

How did you find out about the services of the 21st Century Scholars office?

A majority of the students found out about the 21st Century Scholars office through orientation and/or their high school program. Once they initially learned of the office, they stayed because of the welcoming staff.

Orientation

- “I think when I came for orientation there were tables set up to where you kind of had to go to the tables and sign up for everything, all that. So that’s how I found out about it here. They were kind of directing us along. So they were like, ‘you know, based off looking at your things, you may need to go here to make sure you get everything set up.’”
- “I found out the same way during orientation.”
- “I came for orientation, then at the end there is all of those tables you can go to and I went to the 21st Century Scholar one and they told me about the peer mentor program. And about a week after orientation they mailed me the packet to apply to the mentee thing. That is how I found out about it.

Outside Programs

- “Found out through Upward Bound.”
- “In our high school we had monthly meetings so I already knew what the logo looked like so when I saw it I thought I should go up to that. And that’s when they showed me about the program.”
- “I signed up in 7th grade. But since I went to public school we actually had a class that helped us apply to colleges and scholarships and stuff like that and I was already a 21st Century Scholar so it was all through high school.”

Welcoming Staff

- “For me they were very welcoming, they were always friendly and I knew that if I needed any resources or even if I was having other problems that they would always offer you advice, like, ‘well maybe you could pull other resources from here or there,’ so that ended up making me feel very comfortable with the office.”
- “Ms. Washington called to tell me ‘hey you are supposed to be a part of the program, and this is what we do’ and I was like ‘oh shoot ok.’”
- “Um I think I have sought this out because of my mentor, because I felt a lot more connected to her and a lot more safe – so being comfortable with that person.”

Mandatory

- “As far as the office here, it was mandatory. I’m trying to remember, I think we had like meetings every so often – I don’t know if it was periodically – and we had to have one-on-ones with mentors, and I think there was certain workshop and volunteer requirement. So it was I think mandatory.”

Family Member

- “Mine is kind of a different story because my sister is a 21st Century Scholars too and she’s a junior right now so she kind of transitioned me into it, and she told me about everything, so it was a way easier process.”

What made you decide to take advantage of the services?

The potential for beneficial help and resources was the biggest reason the students took advantage of the services. The students were completely new to college and felt that the services offered by the 21st Century Scholar office would give them a leg up and give them skills to take with them throughout all of their years in college.

Supportive Staff

- “I knew that some of my friends from high school that are 21st century scholars kept talking about meeting with their mentor and going to meetings and I felt I should be doing that. And Ms. Washington contacted me and I said ‘of course I would use this’ because I was a scared and nervous freshman student so to have people to talk to was what really drove me here.”
- “For me they were very welcoming, they were always friendly and I knew that if I needed any resources or even if I was having other problems that they would always offer you advice, like, ‘well maybe you could pull other resources from here or there,’ so that ended up making me feel very comfortable with the office.”
- “Coming to college is really different going to a different city and nobody in my family went away to college they stayed in South Bend. Just coming here I wanted to find somebody and they helped me so much in high school so I am glad I found them.”
- “The welcoming thing. I just started coming just to kind of get to know everyone and I got to meet Denida when she first came and I think that’s awesome to have your own like social worker when you get to talk to somebody else that isn’t really over anything else in the program.”

Information about the Campus

- “Just wanting to find out more about the campus. Coming here as a freshman you feel like a little fish in a big bowl and don’t know what to do. You want to find out more, get more involved and have all of those connections.”

Help with Resources

- “One useful resource that really helped me was – I think I was taking physiology in the summer and I think I needed tutoring help because I was really struggling – and the 21st Century Scholars provided me like 4 or 5 tutoring sessions that I couldn’t afford, so that like really helped me. That made me really appreciate the service. If you just talk to them about your problems they’re probably gonna understand what to do.”
- “Last semester I just did the minimum requirements. It was bare minimum; it’s what I needed to do. This semester, I moved here for college. I have to work, and when you’re doing that and going to school full time, the responsibility of it all can totally tear you up inside, and I noticed everything started to slip, and I was like, ok I need help. And that’s what really pushed me to come here and get help – the actual reality that it’s hard and you need help, so you gotta ask for that.”

How comfortable do you feel going to 21st Century office?

All of the participants felt comfortable going to office and feel it is inviting to them.

- “Really comfortable, very welcoming.”
- “It’s such a chill and relaxed environment, like it’s so inviting.”
- “All of the mentors, anybody who walks in and looks even remotely lost we will ask, “Hi, how are you? Can we help you?””
- “I can go there any time, and will not be like shy or I’ll just go in there and study, or eat, whatever I want. Still feel welcomed.”
- “Once you form those relationships with them, so you know the specialists and coordinators down there, it becomes so that, you know, you want to go down there.”

For students not coming down, how can they make it more welcoming or more comfortable?

The focus group participants felt that the mentors play a big role in making them feel more comfortable. The more the mentors talk about the lounge area, invite the other students to events and social gatherings the more their mentees will feel welcome and want to be involved.

Mentor Outreach

- “I would say mentors tell them, like, ‘you guys really need to come visit and come down here, socialize, make connections, because that’s the most important thing that college is, like you can make more connections and it’ll help you in the future.’ So I think mentors need to drive that more, because I don’t think that mentors talk about it that much, and like the mentees don’t know about it. I know about it because of my sister, and she told me to go down there and study and make more connections.”
- “And explain to them that it’s not just about meeting certain requirements; but that it’s really good and it’ll be beneficial for them to come in and to build some type of community within the office.”
- “Since we’re having one on one meetings and everything, like they talk to you, they might mention it in there too, like, ‘come down here and chill with us. We have food down here, you can study down here.’”
- “And even with the mentor volunteering, they could do those where they put those into groups of mentees and you’re assigned to go out and do certain things with a certain group, and that’ll help build comradery and community.”

Mentee Social Events

- “I think it would be interesting to see if we could build some comradery among the mentees. Maybe like one of the things they do is a social event of just the mentees, instead of having these meetings where half the people don’t actually want to be there... And I think it’d be fun to just have a day where we do come together as a group and just hang out, you know, be silly, get to know people, you know, have fun.”
- “You could literally put mentees together, you know just pair them up and be like, hey, get to know each other. Maybe one of your one-on-ones is actually a two-on-one and you actually get together and you kind of make friends with that person. That person can kind of be your... not accomplice, that’s not the word I’m looking for... kind of, they keep you accountable for the different things you want to do. You set a goal for yourself but that person also looks in on you and they want to help you. If you say you want to go study more, then that person can be your study buddy, things like that.”

Non-Academic Programs

- “Maybe not focusing – even in the meetings – of course the academics and professionalism and things of that nature are of course important – but maybe focusing even on things, you know other aspects of life that are affecting students, especially coming in can be a really challenging time, so maybe talking about things like that.”

- “Like the coming in as a freshman, talking about things you may encounter, things you may be dealing with, you know emotions, how to manage the school and work type of thing, things of that nature.”

Location/Size

- “Helping them become more aware of the office, because like the office is very secluded, when you walk by you don’t really read that sign and we are the last on the sign.”
- “I think the size plays a part. If you are not a very social person a small area with so many people would make you feel nervous because you will always feel like you are on top of somebody else and always watching you. So I think we just have such a small area.”
- “Location, location, location.”

Which staff members have you worked with?

- “All of them.”
- “Brooke and Denida.”
- “The GA, social work intern, scholarship coordinator, academic advisor, program coordinator, director. So that’s like 8.”
- “Terrel for me, like every time I had an academic question, I always went to his office. He has helped me out so much. And I had this problem and he told me to do this and do this, and it happened. It was a really easy process to go through.”
- “I would say Phyllis and then Brooke. Phyllis offered me the tutoring session so I talked to her, and then Brooke just financial.”

What impact has each of these people had on you and your success here at IUPUI?

The biggest impact from the staff is their ability to connect students with resources both internal and external to the institution.

- “I think everyone back there helped a little. When I was a mentee there were a few old people, like not old people, not like that, but they had left so like the only one that is still back there from when I was here is Ms. Washington and I think she helped me a lot with the college transition.”
- “I feel like the staff works close with you that they start to see things in you that you may not have seen yet. They know how to kind of bring out the best in you and push you and not seem like they are pushing you. I know when I came my freshman here (late admit) I had the ga that was my mentor so I was meeting with an adult, but she made me feel comfortable and I was struggling with some classes and they have the ability to make a bad situation manageable.”
- “I was looking for child care for my son. I could not find anything. I had no money to pay for it. Couldn’t find anything and I was panicking because I have to go to school and I had to take 12 minimum credit hours. And Ms. Washington told me to meet with Denida (social worker) and she emailed me within like 30 min with tons of resources about where to find places and even financial resources to help pay for day care. And he’s been there ever since.”

How did your participation in events impact your knowledge of the 21st century scholar office? Do they have events that are tailored to one specific service?

- “The kickoff is the most informational about the program. That is when they talk about the scholarship and requirements. The mentors reiterate that in group meetings. I’d say that is the most informational.”
- “For the last two years, not this year, we had volunteering events where they would invite all of the 21st century scholars in general to volunteer. We went and cleaned up a neighborhood by the white river. They are small events. Last year we had a game room center event where everyone would just come to campus center and play games.”
- “Our program director and the scholarship coordinator will put on little events throughout the semester that the mentees and mentors can go to that are about financial literacy and like lifestyle stuff.”

What obstacles prevent you from going to events put on by 21st century scholar office?

Students mentioned they are already juggling a lot on their plates with classes, work schedules, and other clubs and this prevents them from attending events. There was no mention that the events themselves are not what the students are looking for, only that they cannot find free time to participate.

Work

- “For me, it’s work.”
- “Last time I was working nights. So I was going in right around 3ish, and so normally my meetings go until like 5:45ish or 4:15 and stuff like that, so I couldn’t make it.”
- “I’m in class Monday and Wednesday, all day, and then Thursday, Friday, and Saturday I work usually some times in the afternoon around 1 or 3 until close.”

Overwhelmed

- “When you’re a freshman it’s such a different environment that I just didn’t want to be... didn’t have the capacity... to do anything other than what I was doing at the time. But normally it was just work, but sometimes it was that I just wasn’t available to do anything extra.”
- “Time... my schedule.”

Other activities for clubs or classes

- “I had other activities too. Like we had this thing where we basically raise money for the kids all throughout the year, and we have a lot of stuff going on, so I kind of get distracted by that and forget about other things.
- On Sunday I’m in a fraternity and we have chapter, and we usually have something we have to do after that. And I usually don’t have time on Tuesdays – my one day off – and even then, I’m also in KSG, and that’s every other week, so it’s just very little time.”
- “I would say work and all that, but then I had like other activities too. I’m involved with the organization Jagathon and we had this thing where we basically raise money for the kids all throughout the year, and we have a lot of stuff going on, so I kind of get distracted by that and forget about other things and get overworked.”

Only wanted to do bare minimum

- “I just basically went to two or three just because I knew we needed to, but every once in a while I’d go to one that was interesting to me.”

What have you learned as a result of participating in 21st Century Scholars?

The participants responded that they learned it is alright to ask and accept help as well as learning about all of the resources available both in the program and on campus.

General 21st Century Knowledge

- “It’s more than just scholarship, like people care and they want to see you succeed and they want you to graduate on time.”

Support from Others

- “I learned that it’s ok to ask for help, because I like to do everything by myself, but being here, they always tell us that you can always just ask us, like they already know the answers to those questions. So I learned that instead of waiting it out, I can always just ask for help.”
- “I learned that it’s okay to not do everything. And it’s okay to know that you can’t do everything... you don’t have everything in your control all the time and that’s ok, you know, to let that be a thing and to not stress out about it.”
- “You are not alone. No matter how alone you feel you are not alone as long as you are in 21st Century Scholar, even if you aren’t you are not alone.”
- “To not be afraid to learn new things and try new... I realized like step out of your comfort zone.”

Resources

- “They also taught me about different things and resources that are on campus, and different grants and other things and resources.”
- “I always feel like the 21st Century taught me about the different other resources that could help me and the different other events that are going on around campus, because that helps.”
- “There are so many different resources just in the staff of the office.”
- “If you need anything, odds are you can go to the advisors.”

Skills

- “I learned about things like time management. I learned about things like different careers and different career paths and their associated majors, things of that nature. Those were really big things to me, based on talking to different people in the program. Talking about different careers and career paths and different majors, and time management were really big for me.”

More Support

- “I get more support and more care here than I get elsewhere. They really have a true, genuine interest.”
- “They definitely exhibit warmth and more willingness that I see in other offices on campus.”
- “Even with my advisor, I’ll go into the [specific school advising] office, and it’s like, ‘oh, fill out this thing and then wait,’ or, ‘come in for 15 minutes and then you’ll be enrolled, and that’s it. Move on.’ And I get that they’re busy, but I feel like maybe they should care a little bit more about me. And I feel like here, they sit down with you and talk about what you need to talk about. They’re here for you. And they’re more than that, it’s also just answering all the questions you have about life, you know, about financial things, about budgeting, time management, it’s all right here and consolidated into one place and I like that.”
- “Anything child care at IUPUI is hard to find but 21st Century Scholar said they would take care of me.”
- “Definitely just that personalized support. If you come down here a lot and utilize the office the mentors and staff will start to recognize you. Just getting that friendly face and that comfort level to talk with them about struggles or concerns is nice.”
- “It doesn’t feel like an office, office, like if you go to bursars and somebody asks “hey what’s your question” and that’s the end of it. I think it’s more like the environment.”
- “I’m a first gen and my family supports me, but sometimes they don’t know how to and it’s nice to get the support and be held accountable by other people.”

Best method for 21st Century office to communicate what is going on in the office?

The students felt that traditional email announcements were helpful but also saw an opportunity to use text messages. Participants indicated they are better able to find a past announcement via text message than in email.

Email/Canvas

- “Kind of like a list serv to my actual IUPUI email.”
- “Emails would be the big key, since everyone checks it now. It’s college, you have to check your email, and 21st Century always pops up, like every day, and so I’ll look over it and see what they say, and then move on. Like even though I don’t respond to it I’ll just look at it and say, ok I can’t do that or maybe I can fit that into my schedule.”
- “I know there is a canvas page for mentors and then another for all other people. They send out a lot of announcements on there.”
- “Just like the emails they send out. I know they say they don’t get as much responses from that, but just like announcing it and flyers, things like that.”

Text Messages

- “I think what would help for me is like a quick text, like notify kind of thing, because I can just keep it on my phone, I know where it is, and if I’m interested I can go back. It’s something I do all the time and every day anyway. Groupme is a thing I use all the time for presentations and projects, and it’s basically texting. I can look back at the history and find something I’m looking for. It’s something I know well. So I guess that’s more of my thing.”
- “Yeah, the no-reply text thing would be really good.”

High School

- “I’d like to get more info at my high school”
- “Maybe if high schools had a 21st century advisor in the office. That would probably be helpful”

General Reminders (no specific method)

- “I think just reminders, like, hey this is going to come up in a couple of days, and then like the day before, don’t forget to come to this thing, you know. Something quick, simple.”

Any additional comments about 21st Century Scholar office?

- “I’m grateful for it. I feel really lucky because I have a lot of friends. So I’m more grateful for it now than when I was when I signed up in the 6th grade. Grateful for the whole entire thing. I’m grateful that people are paying for me to go to school and that we go to meetings and stuff.”
- “I don’t know why they have you sign up in middle school. But why would those students be thinking about that way back when? My mother just said we needed to fill it out”
- “I just wish we had a bigger and better location but that is a whole other thing. Move it upstairs, put signs up to help people know where to come because I had people say they didn’t know where 21st century scholars office is and I’m like, ‘well follow me.’”

What do you get from 21st Century Scholars that you don't get elsewhere?

The students really felt that the support they got from people in the 21st Century was the greatest benefit they received .from the 21st Century Scholar program that they felt they could not get from any other program.

Mentoring

- I'd say the mentoring program, that's the big thing after scholarship; I'd say the biggest key for me was the mentoring program.

Conclusion & Possible Implications

Participants felt that the 21st Century Scholar office provides the services and support students need. Students were very positive regarding how comfortable they felt to go to any member of the office. The students felt the biggest benefits were the support system and resources provided by the 21st Century Scholar office. The students felt that the emails the office sends with announcements or reminders of events were very helpful. They also felt a text message system with no-reply texts would be easy for them to refer back to if they would like to attend the event. There were participants that were not able to attend as many of the events because of other classes, clubs, or work.

The students found out about the program in many different ways. The most common way participants received information was during orientation. Other comments included learning about the program from outside programs, family members, and the welcoming staff. There were a few students that thought participation was mandatory. Orientation presents a great opportunity to reach more students. Incoming first-year students are required to attend orientation and participants seem to be receptive to the office's message at this time.

Students reported that the staff is so welcoming and helpful they always felt they could go to them with any problems. Prior to coming to campus many participants thought the 21st Century Scholar program was only a scholarship. However, once they got to campus and became involved they realized the program offered much more. Making sure the 21st Century Scholar students know what the program at IUPUI offers before coming to campus could encourage more students to become involved in 21st Century Scholars office services.

The participants felt the mentors or fellow mentees could play a very important role in helping other 21st Century Scholars become more involved. Students' suggestions included having the mentors playing a bigger role in reminding their mentees of events and having mentees develop a "buddy system" to keep each other accountable and remind others of programs and services. Many of the students in the focus group felt that being informed and reminded of events and other important announcements through a no-reply text or the Groupme app could be beneficial. Participants indicated that they get so many emails that any from the 21st Century Scholar office may get lost, but text messages or messages on Groupme may be easier to keep track.

Once the participants became engaged it is clear they perceived great benefits from the 21st Century Scholar program. The biggest obstacle for the program is communicating the benefits students could receive. Participants in the focus groups valued the personal connections they made with staff and other students in the 21st Century Scholars programs. The further development of those relationships appears to be critical to facilitating student success while at IUPUI.