

A Focus Group Report
Student Affairs Assessment and
Campus Inclusion and Community
Division of Student Affairs

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS FROM LOW INCOME FAMILY BACKGROUNDS AND THE NORTHWESTERN EXPERIENCE

Spring 2013

Pell Grant Recipients
Pledge Scholarship Recipients
Ryan Scholars
QuestBridge Scholars
Gates Millennium Scholars



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Purpose	7
Methodology.....	7
Themes.....	9
Theme 1: The College Search Process.....	11
Theme 2: Factors Important in College Decision Making Process.....	14
Theme 3: The Financial Aid Process.....	17
Theme 4: Need for More Guidance	19
Theme 5: Welcoming Experiences and Wildcat Welcome	21
Theme 6: The Academic Experience	25
Theme 7: Academic Advising	29
Theme 8: Interaction with Faculty	32
Theme 9: Involvement	34
Theme 10: Belongingness	38
Theme 11: Money and Stress	41
Theme 12: Support Networks.....	43
Theme 13: Students' Recommendations.....	45
Conclusions	48
Recommendations	50
References and Recommended Readings	52
Appendix A: List of Concerns Submitted by QuestBridge Students.....	53
Appendix B: Email Invitation Sent to Students Randomly Selected to Participate in Focus Groups.....	58
Appendix C: Consenting Process, Focus Group Script, and Questions	60

Introduction

An article appeared in the May 14, 2013 issue of the *Northwestern University News*, describing the academic strengths and diversity of the Class of 2017. The subtitle announced, “Newly formed class is strongest in Northwestern’s history and sets diversity record.” Part of the diversity that we are trying to achieve at Northwestern includes attracting and enrolling students from a broad spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. Indeed, as was announced in the May 14 article about diversity, “fourteen percent of the Class of 2017 received Pell Grants.” In other words, at least 14% of the undergraduate students in the Class of 2017 will come from low income family backgrounds.

What do we know about these Northwestern undergraduate students who come from lower income family backgrounds? Who are they? What are their demographic characteristics? How, if at all, does their socioeconomic status affect their

Northwestern experience? What can we do to ensure the success of these students?

Anecdotal evidence suggests these students may experience Northwestern differently than their peers who come from families whose annual incomes are much higher. In fact, in some cases, these experiences may negatively affect students’ overall levels of satisfaction and/or success.

The Questbridge Scholars at Northwestern reinforced these issues in 2012 when several of them met with Vice President for Student Affairs, Patricia Telles-Irvin, to talk about their experiences. They left her with a five-page document outlining their concerns. This document can be found in Appendix A (p. 53). In the end, this is what prompted this focus group project, completed in Spring 2013. The project was reviewed and approved by the Northwestern Institutional Review Board (IRB #STU00079319).

Background

In addition to Pell Grants, there are a number of other scholarships and grants available to undergraduate students who come from families considered to be low income. These include Pledge, Ryan, QuestBridge, and Gates Millennium scholarships.¹ Below is a brief description of these scholarships/grants and the students who are eligible to receive them.

Pell Grant Recipients. According to Michael Mills, Associate Provost for Enrollment Management, the most common description of a student who qualifies for a federal Pell Grant is a student who comes from “a family of four with one in college making \$40,000 per year or less., [but] it’s a sliding scale based on the number in a family and other wealth-related factors beyond income” (email correspondence, April 29, 2013). A federal Pell Grant, unlike a loan, does not have to be repaid. The maximum Pell

¹ Good Neighbor, Great University Scholarship recipients were not distinguished in this study. According to Financial Aid, not all Good Neighbor, Great University Scholarship recipients are considered low income. Those that are, are also recipients of Pledge or Ryan Scholarships. In this way they are accounted for in the data presented in this report.



Grant for the 2012-13 award year (July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2013) was \$5,550.

Pledge Scholarship Recipients. According to Carolyn Lindley, the Director of Undergraduate Financial Aid, “the Pledge Scholarship is the backbone of Northwestern’s no-loan program. The neediest students, defined as needing over 90% of the full cost of attendance and who are eligible for a federal Pell Grant, are provided with a Pledge Scholarship to cover what would have been their loan. This award is currently \$5,500 for an incoming student and increases the amount the loans go up for the rest of their undergraduate career. Some students choose to borrow anyway, but that is another topic.”

Ryan Scholars. Lindley goes on to explain, “Each year from the Pledge Scholarship recipients between 20 and 25 students are chosen to receive a Ryan Scholarship (it replaces the Pledge Scholarship in their package). Mr. Ryan wanted to support former President Bienen’s no loan initiative and he provided several million dollars to help with this goal. The Ryan Scholars are chosen based upon their admission rating, their past accomplishments with an emphasis on leadership qualities whether in the classroom, on the playing field, or at work. In contrast to QuestBridge, the Ryan Scholars do not apply for the assistance; they are selected. They remain a Ryan Scholar for four years unless they are no longer a student in good standing” (email correspondence, August 6, 2013). Eighty-three (83) Ryan Scholars were enrolled as undergraduates at Northwestern in Spring 2013 (Table 1, p. 6).

QuestBridge Scholars. The mission of QuestBridge, a national program, “is to create a singular place where exceptionally talented low-income students can navigate educational and life opportunities.” They recruit, develop, and support motivated low-income students – beginning in high school through college to their first job – to be successful at America’s best colleges, graduate schools, and companies. If a high school senior is “matched” with one of QuestBridge’s partner colleges, like Northwestern, during the Early Decision admission process, the student is offered a generous financial aid package that covers 100%

of demonstrated financial need, making college very affordable for low-income students. QuestBridge finalists can also apply to one or more of the partner colleges through the regular decision process. Admission through Regular Decision is not binding and does not come with a guaranteed financial aid package. According to QuestBridge website (<http://www.questbridge.org/>), “most College Match finalists have come from households earning less than \$60,000 annually (for a typical family of four), and over 71% are in the top 5% of their high school class.” Fifty-three (53) QuestBridge students who were “matched” with Northwestern were enrolled at our institution in Spring 2013. Another 173 Northwestern students affiliated with Questbridge but admitted through the regular admission process, were registered in Spring 2013 (Table 1, p. 6).

Gates Millennium Scholars. The Gates Millennium Scholars Program, established in 1999, was initially funded by a \$1 billion grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) Program selects 1,000 talented students across the country each year to receive a good-through-graduation scholarship to use at any college or university of their choice. Gates Millennium Scholars are provided with personal and professional development through leadership programs along with academic support throughout their college career. In 2012 – 2013, seventeen (17) undergraduates at Northwestern were Gates Millennium Scholars (Table 1, p. 6).

Table 1 (p. 6) illustrates the demographic characteristics of the 1318 undergraduate students at Northwestern who received one or more of these grants/scholarships in 2012 – 2013 and were considered to be low income for the purposes of this study. It is easy to see that the Northwestern undergraduate students who are considered low income come from extremely diverse backgrounds and may not fit the stereotypes we have of them.

- A third of the low income undergraduate students were White (34%). Another third were from Asian/Pacific Islander backgrounds (28%).

- Half of the low income students (51%) were in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences; 20% were enrolled in the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science.
- Slightly more than half (52%) were female.
- Although information about the level of education achieved by their parents was not available for every student, nearly a quarter (23%) of the low income undergraduate students in this study were first generation, that is, neither of their parents had a college degree.

- Half (51%) of the undergraduate students in this study lived in a University residence hall, college, or community.

The demographic profile of the undergraduate students considered low income is useful, but there is still much we don't know about these students. How, if at all, does their socioeconomic status affect their Northwestern experience? What can we do to ensure the success of these students?



Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Northwestern Undergraduate Students Receiving
Pell Grants, Pledge, Ryan, QuestBridge, and/or Gates Millennium Scholarships

Spring 2013

Sources: Enrollment Management, Financial Aid, Registrar's Office, 2009 – 2011 CIRP Freshman Surveys, 2012 COFHE Survey of New Students, 2013 COFHE Enrolled Student Survey, Residential Services

	Pell Grant Recipients	Pledge Scholarship Recipients	Ryan Scholars	QuestBridge Scholars (Matched)	QuestBridge Scholars (Regular Decision)	Gates Millennium Scholars	Total Low Income Students*
Number	1234	502	84	53	173	17	1318
Gender							
Female	642 (52%)	270 (54%)	47 (56%)	30 (57%)	100 (58%)	12 (71%)	691 (52%)
Male	592 (48%)	232 (46%)	37 (44%)	23 (43%)	73 (42%)	5 (29%)	627 (48%)
Racial/Ethnic Background							
Asian/Pacific Islander	347 (28%)	111 (22%)	12 (14%)	4 (8%)	40 (23%)	3 (18%)	363 (28%)
African American/Black	172 (14%)	86 (17%)	23 (27%)	21 (40%)	26 (15%)	3 (18%)	190 (14%)
Hispanic	216 (18%)	115 (23%)	22 (26%)	17 (32%)	30 (17%)	10 (59%)	227 (17%)
White	409 (33%)	155 (31%)	22 (26%)	5 (9%)	69 (40%)	0 (0%)	444 (34%)
Two or More Races	73 (6%)	29 (6%)	2 (2%)	5 (9%)	6 (3%)	1 (6%)	76 (6%)
Not Applicable	17 (1%)	6 (1%)	3 (4%)	1 (2%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	18 (1%)
Year/Class							
First Year	226 (18%)	85 (17%)	19 (23%)	9 (17%)	41 (24%)	1 (6%)	232 (18%)
Second Year	293 (24%)	103 (20%)	20 (24%)	18 (34%)	42 (24%)	3 (18%)	308 (23%)
Third Year	301 (24%)	125 (25%)	21 (25%)	13 (25%)	53 (31%)	3 (18%)	324 (25%)
Fourth or Fifth Year	414 (34%)	189 (38%)	24 (29%)	13 (25%)	37 (21%)	10 (59%)	454 (34%)
School/College							
Bienen School of Music	56 (5%)	20 (4%)	7 (8%)	0 (0%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)	62 (5%)
School of Communication	142 (12%)	58 (12%)	12 (14%)	4 (8%)	17 (10%)	3 (18%)	150 (11%)
School of Education & Social Policy	85 (7%)	42 (8%)	9 (11%)	5 (9%)	14 (8%)	2 (12%)	92 (7%)
McCormick School of Engineering	249 (20%)	107 (21%)	12 (14%)	16 (30%)	39 (23%)	1 (6%)	269 (20%)
Medill School of Journalism	72 (6%)	58 (12%)	7 (8%)	4 (8%)	8	1 (6%)	77 (6%)
Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences	630 (51%)	246 (49%)	37 (44%)	24 (45%)	90 (52%)	10 (59%)	668 (51%)
First Generation College Student**							
Yes	271 (22%)	158 (31%)	20 (24%)	17 (32%)	49 (28%)	9 (53%)	283 (22%)
No	647 (52%)	224 (45%)	41 (49%)	19 (36%)	83 (48%)	5 (29%)	702 (53%)
Unable to Determine	316 (26%)	120 (24%)	23 (27%)	17 (32%)	41 (24%)	3 (18%)	333 (25%)
Living Situation							
On Campus Residence Hall	642 (52%)	254 (51%)	48 (57%)	32 (60%)	102 (59%)	7 (41%)	669 (51%)
Not in Campus Residence Hall	592 (48%)	248 (49%)	36 (43%)	21 (40%)	71 (41%)	10 (59%)	649 (49%)

*Number of students receiving various scholarships/grants at Northwestern does not total 1318 since students may be a Pell Grant recipient and a QuestBridge, Ryan, and Gates Millennium Scholarship recipient, or any combination thereof. According to Financial Aid, 16 undergraduates may not be "low income," even though they qualify for a Pell Grant.

**For the purposes of this study, students were considered first generation if neither of their parents had a college degree. Data was gleaned from the following surveys: 2009 – 2011 CIRP Freshman Surveys, 2012 COFHE Survey of New Students, and the 2013 COFHE Enrolled Student Survey.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to (1) explore the effect of socioeconomic background on the Northwestern undergraduate experience; and (2) to listen to students' ideas for how Northwestern could better foster a nurturing campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. We hope what we learn will inform the decisions student affairs and other University departments will make about programs and services we can and should provide to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds at Northwestern. More specifically, the following questions guided this inquiry.

1. What do students from lower income family backgrounds consider when deciding which college to attend? Why did they choose Northwestern?
2. What challenges do students from lower income family backgrounds face in the transition from home/high school to college and what could Northwestern do to be more helpful during this time period?
3. What experiences—positive and challenging—do students from lower income family backgrounds have with financial aid at Northwestern or from outside groups?
4. What initial programs, activities or

experiences made students from lower income family backgrounds feel welcome or unwelcome at Northwestern?

5. How do students from lower income family backgrounds describe their academic and social experiences at Northwestern? What is positive and what unique challenges do they face?
6. How and in what context do students from lower income family backgrounds interact with faculty?
7. In what settings and to what degree do students from lower income family backgrounds feel they belong at Northwestern?
8. When students from lower income family backgrounds encounter a problem or an issue at Northwestern—academic and/or social—to whom do they turn for advice and counsel? How could this safety net be strengthened?
9. What ideas do students have for resources and/or services at Northwestern that would enhance the overall experience for students from lower income family backgrounds?

Methodology

Five focus groups consisting of between 10 and 12 participants were conducted between May 6 and 10, 2013, from 5:30 – 7:00 pm in Norris University Center. The composition of these groups was deliberate and based on questions posed by University stakeholders about how these students were fairing at Northwestern.

- Pell Grant Freshmen (Wednesday, May 8)
- Pell Grant Seniors (Monday, May 6)
- Ryan Scholars (Tuesday, May 7)
- QuestBridge Scholars (Wednesday, May 8)
- Random Group (Thursday, May 9)

Initially, a total of 300 undergraduate students (60

students per focus group for a total of 300) were selected at random by the Senior Assessment Analyst – Student Affairs from a list of all undergraduate Questbridge and Ryan Scholars and Pell Grant recipients obtained from the Associate Provost for Enrollment Management. A total of 56 students actually attended.

A copy of the email invitation, authored by Patricia Telles-Irvin, Vice President for Student Affairs, can be found in Appendix B (p. 58).

Each focus group lasted 1.5 hours. Since the focus groups occurred over the dinner hour, a light supper was provided. Participants were each given a \$15 gift

card to Starbucks in appreciation of their time and willingness to share their thoughts with us. Trained facilitators facilitated the focus groups. All had completed the CITI training required by the IRB. They were: Mary Desler (Student Affairs Assessment), Jennifer Dowd (Student Affairs Assessment), Kamilah McCoy and Tracie Thomas (University Career Services), Lesley-Ann Brown (Campus Inclusion and Community), Amy White (Norris University Center), and Maria Genao-Homs (Multicultural Student Affairs). The consenting process, focus group script, and questions can be found in Appendix C (p. 60).

A second source of data was used in this study: the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey. Among the 4222 Northwestern respondents were 722 undergraduate students previously identified as coming from low income family backgrounds. Their responses on selected variables were compared with the responses of the Northwestern students who are not considered low income, allowing us to supplement the focus group findings with quantitative data.

Were the low income respondents on the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey representative of the low income students involved in this focus group study? A comparison of the low income survey respondents and the low income non-respondents is illustrated in Table 2. When comparing the low income survey respondents to the low income non-respondents, the following conclusions can be drawn.

- A higher percentage of the female students who were considered to be low income responded to the Enrolled Student Survey.
- A higher percentage of Asian and a lower percentage of African American students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds responded to the survey.
- A higher percentage of low income students enrolled in the School of Education and Social Policy and a lower percentage of students enrolled in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences responded to the survey.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
2013 Enrolled Student Survey

	All Northwestern Respondents (N=4222)	Low Income Respondents (N=722)	Low Income Non Respondents (N=596)	Low Income Total (N=1318)
Gender				
Female	2374 (56%)	412 (57%)	279 (47%)	691 (52%)
Male	1848 (44%)	310 (43%)	317 (53%)	627 (48%)
Racial/Ethnic Background				
Asian/Pacific Islander	822 (19%)	220 (30%)	143 (24%)	363 (28%)
African American/Black	210 (5%)	85 (12%)	105 (18%)	190 (14%)
Hispanic	367 (9%)	134 (19%)	93 (16%)	227 (17%)
White	2335 (55%)	230 (32%)	214 (36%)	444 (34%)
Two or More Races	180 (4%)	43 (6%)	33 (5%)	76 (6%)
American Indian	3 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
International	233 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not Applicable	72 (2%)	10 (1%)	8 (1%)	18 (1%)
Year/Class				
First Year	1029 (24%)	129 (18%)	103 (17%)	232 (18%)
Second Year	1084 (26%)	176 (24%)	132 (22%)	308 (23%)
Third Year	1067 (25%)	167 (23%)	157 (26%)	324 (25%)
Fourth or Fifth Year	1042 (25%)	250 (35%)	204 (34%)	454 (34%)
School/College				
Bienen School of Music	210 (5%)	39 (5%)	23 (4%)	62 (5%)
School of Communication	537 (13%)	73 (10%)	77 (13%)	150 (11%)
School of Education and Social Policy	282 (7%)	63 (9%)	29 (5%)	92 (7%)
McCormick School of Engineering and Science	842 (20%)	159 (22%)	110 (18%)	269 (20%)
Medill School of Journalism	373 (9%)	42 (6%)	35 (6%)	77 (6%)
Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences	1978 (47%)	346 (48%)	322 (54%)	668 (51%)

Themes

Thirteen themes emerged from the focus groups exploring the effect of socioeconomic status on the Northwestern experience. They are listed below and then each is described more fully on the pages that follow.

These are the themes that emerged from the focus groups or what we heard most consistently. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that every student who participated in the conversations brought a unique perspective that didn't always fit the theme. Nevertheless, what is reported below was seldom disputed. When writing this report, a conscious decision was made to use more rather than less student quotes, allowing the students to tell their own story.

Also, in the discussion of the themes, quantitative data from the 2013 Enrolled Survey are presented where relevant.

When writing this report, a conscious decision was made to use more rather than less student quotes, allowing the students to tell their own story.

1. During the college search process, many students from low income family backgrounds seem to stumble onto Northwestern rather than intentionally seeking us out. National programs like QuestBridge are effective recruiting tools for Northwestern (p. 11 – 13).
2. No doubt, for many undergraduate students, financial aid is a major factor in the college decision-making process. But for students from low income family backgrounds, financial aid is the only way possible for them to attend Northwestern. It is only after the financial aid piece is in place that students consider other factors in the decision-making process, including the academic reputation of the institution, specific programs and majors, and location (p. 14 – 15).
3. Students from low income family backgrounds find the financial aid process confusing and stressful. This is especially true for students who are also the first of their families to attend college. For new students completing the financial aid forms

for the first time, clearer, more timely information, early in the process, would be helpful (p. 16 – 18).

4. Students from low income family backgrounds would benefit from more guidance through the admission and financial aid processes, the transition from high school to college, and college life itself. Some find help, but it is seldom from their families. Many just “figure it out” on their own (p. 19 – 20).
5. For the most part, students from low income family backgrounds describe Wildcat Welcome positively. Initially, the socioeconomic differences between them and their peers are muted. But after the newness wears off, the first few weeks of college are eye opening experiences for many. All in all, finding other students from similar backgrounds is helpful (p. 21 – 24).
6. Adjusting to the academic rigor at Northwestern appears to be no more or less stressful for the undergraduates from low income family backgrounds than it is for other students. Nevertheless, many of the students from low income family backgrounds feel less prepared than their peers who come from “better” high schools (p. 25 – 28).
7. Student satisfaction with academic advising varies. Most advisers are seen as “nice” enough, but students long for a more personalized experience (p. 29 – 31).
8. Students from low income family backgrounds seem uneasy approaching faculty or they don't know *how* to approach faculty. At the same time, the majority reported there was at least one faculty member at Northwestern who had taken a personal interest in them. They also acknowledged faculty members were

willing to talk to them individually (p. 32 – 33).

9. Most students from low income family backgrounds were able to describe one or more student organizations and/or groups to which they belong. But there is evidence that the lack of financial resources affects their ability to participate *fully* in the Northwestern experience (p. 34 – 37).
10. There are a variety of places and/or groups where students from low income family backgrounds feel they belong or where they feel connected to Northwestern. At times, though, students describe feeling “different” (p. 38 – 40).

11. Students from low income family backgrounds think about money—a lot. It adds a level of stress other Northwestern students may not experience (p. 41 – 42).

12. When faced with a problem or an issue at Northwestern—academic, social, or personal—students from low income family backgrounds turn to a wide variety of people for support, advice and counsel. Leading the list are other students (p. 43 – 44).

13. The need for additional support dominated the suggestions for how we can improve/enhance the Northwestern experience for students who come from low income family backgrounds (p. 45 – 47).

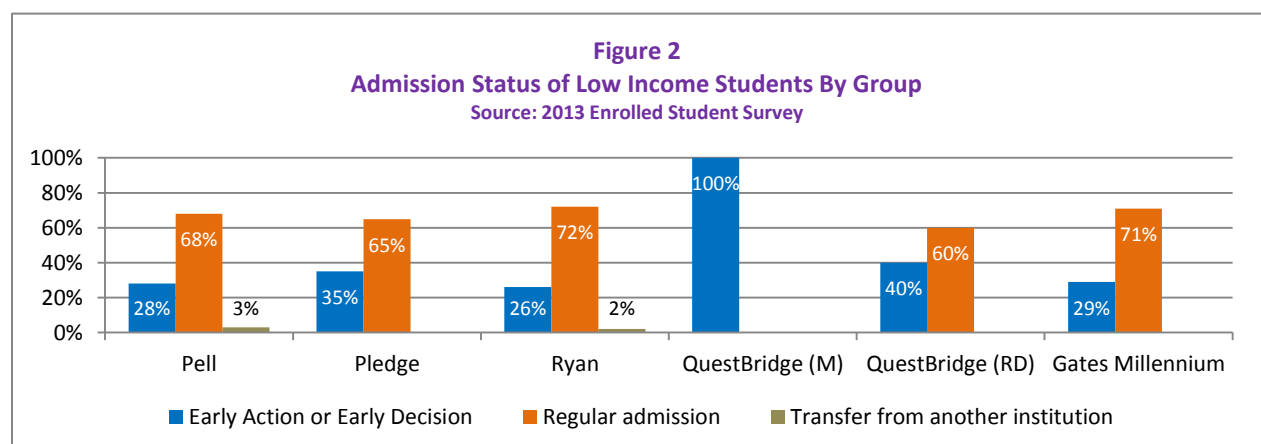
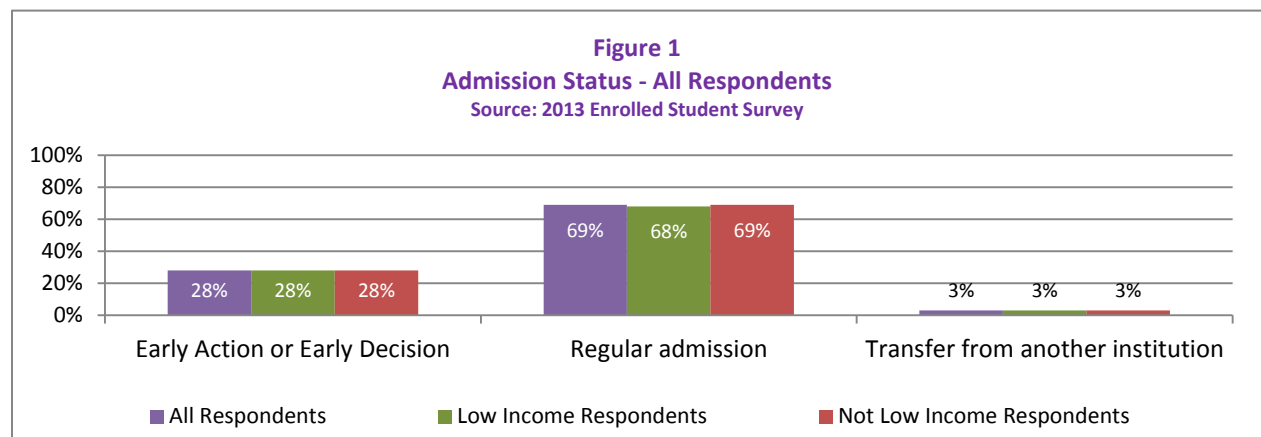


Theme #1: During the college search process, many students from low income family backgrounds seem to stumble onto Northwestern rather than intentionally seeking us out. National programs like QuestBridge are effective recruiting tools for Northwestern.

Students' high school experiences varied greatly. Some attended public high schools. Others reported having attended private college prep schools. Some reported having strong college guidance counselors. Others told stories of high school counselors that only knew about state schools and/or community colleges or were of little help. But one thing that emerged was the often serendipitous way in which students found out about Northwestern.

Regardless, on the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey, 28% of the students from low income family backgrounds reported that they were admitted early decision (Figures 1 and 2). Of course this includes all of the QuestBridge students who were matched with Northwestern.

"I am the first of my family to go to college so my situation was a little more difficult. I didn't have anyone to watch . . . people [in my high school] were expected to figure out the college process. We had our guidance office, but you had to take the initiative to go see them. No one even told you that. You had to put those pieces together on your own. I just went along with names that people were throwing at me like, 'You should look at this school. You should look over here.' I knew I wanted to get out of Milwaukee, whatever happened. I refused to go to Madison. That was the fall back for pretty much everyone in my school." (Pell Grant Senior)



"I came from a really small high school and we were lucky. We had college guidance built into our schedule during my junior and senior year. We had to fill out these really long surveys, had to talk about our academic interests and extracurriculars—basically delineate pretty much everything we wanted from a school that got put in a packet with our resumes and transcripts. Then the guidance counselors would look at it and do this whole calculation thing where they created a list of schools that they thought were the right fit for us. So that was really cool, but for me, not all the schools fit with exactly what I wanted. So it came down to me needing to search on my own." (Pell Grant Senior)

"Our support staff at my high school were not that amazing. My brother had been through the process. He picked out a couple of colleges for me." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I just checked out colleges that my peers in my AP classes were checking out. I didn't end up applying to too many colleges. My only stipulation was that I wanted to leave Illinois, but the only colleges that accepted me were in Illinois." (Pell Grant Senior)

"My high school graduating class was 1000 kids. I had a brother who went to college but was 7 or 8 years older than me—FSU, not that great. I was just watching what all of my other peers were doing. It just happened that one kid said, 'I'm applying to Northwestern.' Living in Orlando, Florida, I had actually never heard of Northwestern. Never. So I said, 'I guess I'll apply there. OK, this looks like a good school.' I ended up here also because I didn't want to stay at home. This was one of two schools that I got into. The other one was a state school at home. All my guidance counselors knew about were the local state schools." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I'm from Nebraska. Counselors in my high school didn't really know much about universities other than the University of Nebraska Lincoln and Metro Community College because just about everyone goes to UNL [Lincoln] or UNO [Omaha]. I wanted to take the SAT and they were like, 'Why?' I felt like I knew more than they did. I was telling them how to help me." (Ryan Scholar)

"Most students from my high school went to community college or didn't go to college at all. When I told my high school counselor I wanted to go to an Ivy League college, she asked me 'What are your back-up schools?' I got very little support from my actual high school in trying to get into a college like Northwestern. My oldest brother was the most helpful." (Student from Random Student Focus Group)

"I looked up school online. No one in my school talked to me about schools. My parents didn't know much about any schools. Mostly the internet." (Student from Random Student Focus Group)

"My high school counselors were not that great. I went to a smaller Catholic school. So myself and my friends—my peers in my classes were the ones to tell me 'You'll need to apply to different colleges.'" (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

National programs like QuestBridge are effective recruiting tools for Northwestern. These programs introduce students to Northwestern—and schools like Northwestern—which may be unfamiliar to high school counselors and/or students' families and/or are considered financially completely out of their range.

"I actually came across Northwestern by getting a pamphlet about the QuestBridge Scholars. They would send your application out free to any of the schools in the pamphlet. So I ended up applying here. No one had brought up the name of the school [Northwestern] to me before. No one had talked about anything outside of our area [Ohio]." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I couldn't travel to visit a lot of colleges. I couldn't really afford to. One of the things that helped me choose, even think about Northwestern, was the Quest Scholar program that would offer me a full ride if I qualified for it." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I didn't want to think about where I was going to college until my senior year. I never went on any visits to any colleges. I was considering going to a community college first. My high school guidance counselor told me about the QuestBridge program and it was also about a

week before it was due. I finished the application and I got in here [Northwestern] and to two or three other schools, but they didn't offer me any aid so I decided I was going to go here. I didn't have any knowledge about how awesome the University was, who came from here, or what my experience would be. Mostly I just wanted to be close to home and be able to go here without having huge loans." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I didn't know anything about Northwestern. I just knew it was one of the QuestBridge schools. My mom and I knew I would get great financial aid if I got into a QuestBridge school. So because of that, I checked into Northwestern." (Ryan & QuestBridge Scholar)



Theme #2: No doubt, for many undergraduate students, financial aid is a major factor in the college decision-making process. But for students from low income family backgrounds, financial aid is the only way possible for them to attend Northwestern. It is only after the financial aid piece is in place that students consider other factors in the decision-making process, including the academic reputation of the institution, specific programs and majors, and location.

For most students who participated in the focus groups, financial aid was the key consideration when choosing to attend Northwestern, whether that aid was through a traditional package that included a Pell Grant, or through programs like Questbridge, Ryan, and/or Gates Millennium. Again and again students in all five focus groups spoke of the importance of aid.

"Financial aid was pretty much everything for me. I applied to Illinois Institute of Technology for architecture. I would have had to take out a loan. I had no idea how the hell I would do that. Northwestern offered the best financial package so I decided that was where I would go even though they didn't offer the major." (Ryan Scholar)

"Finances for me was the biggest focus. I was ok with going to any school that could support me financially." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"They told me Northwestern meets a 100% need, so I'm 100% applying." (Pell Grant Freshman)

Once the financial aid piece was in place, students considered other factors in the college decision-making process, including the academic reputation of the institution, specific programs and majors, and location.

"I went on how much it was going to cost and what the value of the degree would be and if it was close to home." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Financial aid and proximity to home. I'm from Chicago and I'm very close to my family. Once I got into Northwestern I said, 'OK, that's a really good school and it's close to home.'" (Ryan Scholar)

"Financial aid [at Northwestern] was comparable to all my other options, and it was the best school I got into, so I ended up choosing that." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I applied for a number of colleges in the area. Northwestern ended up giving me the best package and it was also the school with the best name that I got into." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"Once I knew that Northwestern would meet 100% of need, I didn't take finances into account. So I took a look at things I'm interested in and where Northwestern ranks there. But not only that, I live really close to home [Skokie]. Being there for my family was extremely important for me. That's one of the major influencing factors in my decision." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"It's great that they have such a good financial plan, because outside of that, it's a top university in the nation. No one is going to deny that. It's a prestigious institution and I knew I'd be proud to be a part of it. Also Medill. I knew I wanted to major in journalism and there's really no place better to do that." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"It came down, basically, to financial aid. That was a really critical thing. I did get into some schools that said, 'here are your loans' and goodbye. I can't do that. Northwestern was close by so I could go home if needed to, but at the same time, just the name alone, 'Northwestern' opened a lot of doors as well." (Pell Grant Senior)

"In the end, it came down to financial aid. I had the opportunity to go to the U of I without

paying any money. But I decided the prestige [of Northwestern] and size of the school, I felt like I'd get a little more attention." (Pell Grant Senior)

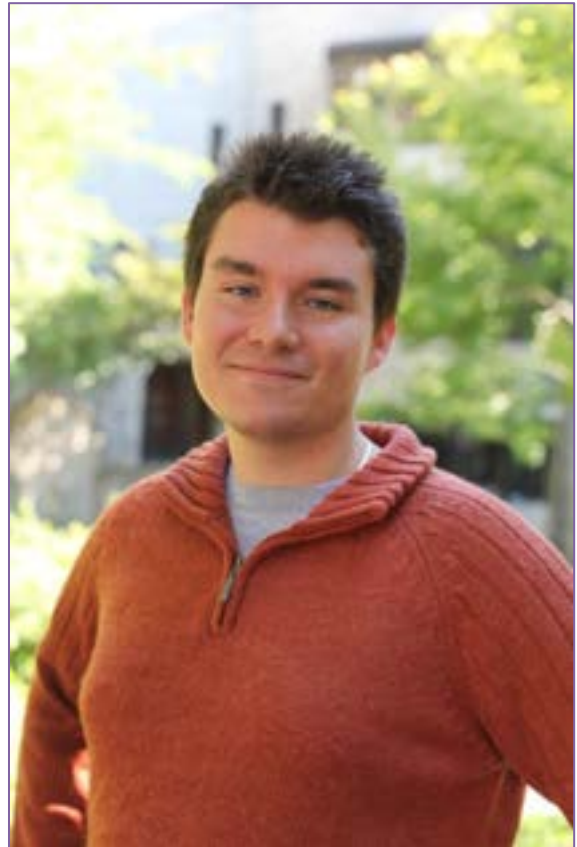
"Another thing that influenced my decision was the marching band. It didn't have an audition process. I was grateful for that." (Pell Grant Freshman)

The Wildcat Days program was important to many of the students from low income family backgrounds that, otherwise, would have been unable to visit Northwestern during the college search process.²

"Northwestern actually flew me out to visit campus and do Wildcat Days. They put me up in someone's room and that was really great. It was really helpful. I didn't visit any colleges prior to applying because I just could not afford flying . . . \$200 this way and back." (Pell Grant Senior)

"My decision came down to Emory or Northwestern. I visited for Wildcat Days. That was pretty awesome. I don't think I would have made the decision to come if I hadn't been able to visit. It was really awesome that I didn't have to pay for it. I love it [Northwestern]. Financial aid was super important, too. For Emory, I would have had to have a loan. The combination of me being able to visit, financial aid, and Northwestern having the major I wanted was important." (Ryan Scholar)

"Northwestern paid for my flight to come visit here, otherwise I wouldn't have had been able to visit." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)



² According to Susanna Kwan, Senior Assistant Director of Admission, "the admissions office works with the financial aid office to identify high-need students from our admitted roster of students. We send an invitation out to the identified candidates, informing them that they have an opportunity to visit Northwestern cost-free to experience NU before making their college choice. For these 'fly-in' students – they experience more than just the traditional Wildcat Days program. They are typically flown in on Sunday, they get to participate in a 'see Chicago' tour that our office organizes (a bus/trolley trip through downtown), they stay overnight in the dorms with a current student host, and then go through all of Wildcat Days program on Monday, with an additional program in the evening – typically a reception/party hosted by Multicultural Student Affairs. The students then fly home on Tuesday." (Email correspondence, 2013)

Theme #3: Students from low income family backgrounds find the financial aid process confusing and stressful. This is especially true for students who are also the first of their families to attend college. For new students completing the financial aid forms for the first time, clearer, more timely information, early in the process, would be helpful.

Students from low income family backgrounds, especially those who are also first generation, often don't understand the financial aid process, including the estimate of family contribution, the impact of loans, the effect of outside scholarships on their overall aid packages, etc. For many, they are filling out the financial aid forms themselves, without the assistance of their families.

"I had no idea how to fill out a FAFSA or the College Board 'other thing.' I had no idea how to do all that. I just had to sit down and work it out." (Ryan Scholar)

"My family is an immigrant family. My parents don't speak English. I have to fill out all the forms on my own, get everything from them, talk to everyone on my own. It is incredibly stressful. I'm really scared I filled out one little box wrong and then I'm not going to be able to go to college. Because I don't have their support, it makes it more stressful." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I wish I had known the impact of loans on long term. I'm still a little confused on it, which I wish I wasn't. It would have been helpful my junior/senior year [in high school] to know what potentially a financial aid package could look like and, also, the impact of loans for a long-term financial person situation." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I wish I had known the impact of scholarships on financial aid. I won a scholarship through my high school, and I reported it, and it was actually deducted from my Northwestern scholarship so I had to pay the same amount. That was really frustrating. I also got another scholarship that I worked really hard for but ultimately, they really didn't help my financial aid package. I wish I'd known that. It's not that I wouldn't have worked as hard to get them but, that was really frustrating when I found out." (Pell Grant Senior)

"If you get an outside scholarship, they [Northwestern] actually take away their [Northwestern] scholarship. They say, OK, now you have this scholarship, we can take away some of ours and so we get the same amount of money. In actuality, you get extra scholarships so your family doesn't have to pay as much, but they don't see it that way at all. That really makes me angry. And my work study was taken away and some of the scholarships Northwestern gave me were taken away because I got outside scholarships." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I applied for whatever scholarship I could get my hands on. I maybe applied for 50 different scholarships and ended up winning the two largest ones I applied for. So I made the mistake of reporting it and they took away my work study the entire year freshman year. I was real sad. That was my life. I learned my lesson—just be quiet and let Northwestern pay for that. And it's been great." (Pell Grant Senior)

"They should be transparent about things like that. For example, if you're working over the summer, did I just work for absolutely no reason whatsoever? That could be extremely frustrating. The people fill out all these scholarship forms for no apparent reason. They really need to make everything transparent." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"Not knowing the logistics of how financial aid works—I got this email about a housing deposit or something. Oh \$600—I have never had \$600 in my bank account in my life. So I called financial aid and they said, 'Oh, if you are matched, you don't have to pay that.' I had to call the office and freak out about it. Things like that and not knowing how you get refunds from financial aid when you have more than the costs. Not knowing how that worked. Part of that might have been harder for us because

when we came in, QuestBridge wasn't a student group. Things like that should be conveyed more clearly to people who are on significant financial aid." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I thought the family contribution was what you had to pay. OK, I thought, \$2000 of \$50,000, OK, we can handle it. I worked by butt off to earn that much that summer and didn't find out until I got to campus that was just an estimate of how much it would cost to supplement what you needed which was a great shock and also another miscommunication. There is a gap on the QuestBridge website—there is some gap between what was written on the [Northwestern] website about QuestBridge scholarship and the information I got from Northwestern. It colored my summer." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I didn't know what a student refund was until the end of my sophomore year. I was freaking out. I'd spent all my money to buy books. I thought there was a balance on my account so I went in to ask them. They said, 'Oh no, that's your refund. You can use that to buy books. I felt sort of stupid and then I felt like I shouldn't have this money. I talked to other people and I guess it's common to have a student refund.'" (Ryan Scholar)

"I got my work study taken away because my senior year I applied for a hundred different scholarships. It sucked because I'd gotten the scholarships, but then it didn't really help my financial aid. It's really frustrating. They say I have to pay this amount, but there I nothing I can do but take money out of my pocket to pay for it." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"Clarity is an issue. First, when we get estimates of our family contribution, those don't turn out to be what they really are on paper. I've had them be lower or higher. The other one, when I was applying I also got work study and when I applied to outside scholarships, the work study got taken away." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"We were trying to apply a scholarship toward room and board—or toward tuition—but Northwestern applied to toward the other. We

wanted it to be switched because the scholarship was loose. I could have applied it wherever I wanted. But Northwestern wouldn't let me. Then I was trying to get whatever that form is—your parents can get a tax deduction: T99 or T900? Northwestern would not issue us one and it caused my dad a lot of stress because he was afraid he wasn't going to get the tax refund. I think it all worked out in the end, but it was a really big headache." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

When students from low income family backgrounds seek help from the financial aid office, their experiences sometimes—but not always—leave them frustrated and stressed. The fact that students don't understand the financial aid process and/or regulations only exacerbates the situation.

"Since we've had to reapply for financial aid, I've gone into the office to get things straightened out that I was supposed to get taken care of. One of the times, they were fine, but a couple of other times, they have been really rude and not very helpful whatsoever. It's confusing. So confusing. Over the phone, even when I went in there, they said, 'This is what you have to do blah blah blah. OK. Got it?' No. It's really confusing. It was stressful." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"My parents got divorced over last summer so our economic situation changed drastically from last year when I applied for my financial aid. I don't know if it is going to affect me positively or negatively. I don't know if my parents are going to be expected to pay a whole bunch more because they both have jobs now. I went in to explain. My dad told me to bring in the divorce papers and show they only have to pay so much money. And the guy was basically, 'we don't care. We don't care how much your parents intend to pay, or how much the court ordered them to pay. We don't care about that. We are just going to see what we think they can pay. That's what you are expected to pay.'" (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I went to financial aid just to ask questions, and I felt like none of them got answered. They just gave vague, circular answers. 'That's not what I asked you.' I left thinking, OK, I'll just have to figure this out on my own. That is such a horrible

feeling. I just got out of high school. I barely know how to write a check. How am I supposed to figure out these papers and forms? And what money am I getting? Refund stuff.” (Ryan Scholar)

“My experience with financial aid is they are not super understanding. They say, ‘Well, you were supposed to pay this on this date and you didn’t.’ It’s tough when your financial aid situation changes. There are a few people in there that are very helpful.” (Ryan Scholar)

“I’ve gone in to talk to people a couple of times—my last time was awful. I felt like I was inconveniencing the lady. I was really confused about a loan. It was good news that I didn’t actually need the loan, but when I went in to cancel it, she said, ‘You could have just done that online.’ This was a very large sum of money. I didn’t want to risk messing something up online. I’ve had curt—almost mean—interactions with people in the financial aid office. I was going in about a positive thing and came out feeling really crappy.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)



Theme #4: Students from low income family backgrounds would benefit from more guidance through the admission and financial aid processes, the transition from high school to college, and college life itself. Some find help, but it is seldom from their families. Many just “figure it out” on their own.

For many students, their parents—many of whom had never gone to college themselves and sometimes did not speak English—were of little help in the college and financial aid application processes. Likewise, once admitted, students from lower income family backgrounds had limited access to information about what college would be like. Some found help, but it was seldom from their families. More often than not, they talked to other students. Many just “figured it out” on their own.

“I would have appreciated someone a little more close to me to guide me through [the admission] process, especially when you have a guidance counselor who has three or four hundred students that they need to worry about as well. It makes it really difficult to have that one-on-one with them.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I wish someone had told me that colleges are different—more than location and size and stuff, but that the feel of colleges is different too. But I didn’t have anybody who was really knowledgeable about that kind of thing.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I knew people who went here. I heard stories from them. And I also did the campus tour and the campus tour guide explained a lot of things pretty thoroughly. Also reading a lot about Northwestern ahead of time really helped.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“When I found out I had gotten into Northwestern, it was like, ‘OK, that’s great.’ I didn’t have to worry about this anymore so I ‘shelved it.’ Most of the things that I found out about Northwestern were from the website. No one in the past two or three years from my high school had gone to Northwestern so I didn’t have anyone to talk to about it. I really didn’t know that much about it. I didn’t know that Northwestern was that impressive.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“My transition was very hard – my parents had no idea what it was like to go away to university. It was difficult to explain that I needed to get all these things—that I was going to live on campus. My father wondered why when we only live 45 minutes away. It was this big ball of confusion for me. I had really good counselors that helped me get in, but once I got it—I got all this mail from Northwestern that I really didn’t look at. I didn’t look at any of the checklists. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do. Everything was super last minute. I didn’t have anyone keeping me on track to make sure forms were put in. It was really difficult to not have a parent or guidance to tell me ‘this is what you have to do.’ It was uncomfortable to get someone to help me. I didn’t know what I needed or didn’t need.” (Ryan Scholar)

“My parents didn’t know what going to university/college. What do I need? What do I need to get? Northwestern would send you a list of a thousand things you needed. I wondered, ‘Do I really need all this? Do I not? Do I have to buy all this? Do I not?’ It’s overwhelming.” (Ryan Scholar)

“When I was getting to leave, my parents [asked] ‘how are you going to get there? Do you know where it is?’ Just asking me a lot of questions, and the closer I got, the more I realized I didn’t know as much as I should have. I was introduced to Northwestern by a student teacher at my high school. So that summer, I started asking him questions. He let me know more about where to go, campus life, and small little details like that. It would have taken a long time to know.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I personally feel that people from a lower income background—their families, their parents—will likely not have attended college. I would guess that the majority of students at Northwestern have parents that have attended college. So there is a wealth of information can

be passed down from parents to the students that I felt as though I was lacking. Personally, for me, I was raised by foreign parents, and they didn't know anything about college . . . there was just so much that I had to figure out on my own.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I’m the first from my family to go to college and I’ll be the first to graduate. So the kind of experience was a little bit difficult because I

didn’t really have anyone to watch.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Upperclass minority students definitely helped me out. They shared this document that had some much helpful practical information in it about books, grades, what we should buy and what we shouldn’t. The upperclassmen just took it on themselves to fill a void that Northwestern didn’t provide. (Ryan Scholar)



Theme #5: For the most part, students from low income family backgrounds describe Wildcat Welcome positively. Initially, the socioeconomic differences between them and their peers are muted. But after the newness wears off, the first few weeks of college are eye opening experiences for many. All in all, finding other students from similar backgrounds is helpful.

As freshmen, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds recognized that the pre-Wildcat Welcome programs were valuable ways to make connections at Northwestern before school begins.³ Nevertheless, only a handful of students who participated in the focus groups reported that they attended one of the pre-Wildcat Welcome programs, citing their socioeconomic backgrounds prohibited their participation in these programs. Still even in these programs where everyone was new, students from lower income family backgrounds sometimes didn't feel like they fit in.

"I got to do the Freshman Urban Program [FUP]. It was a good program to start off with and get to know a bunch of new people considering I really didn't know anybody before I got here. But during the program, we did a little thing about what we did over the summer. Most people said 'Oh I went here and I went here'—and I babysat. I wondered if I was going to fit in. It was a little bit scary. But thankfully, a lot of QuestBridge people talked to me. During the actual program, we had a little reunion of QuestBridge who also did the [FUP] program and we got to meet each other." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I went on the same program [FUP] and I wouldn't have done it if they hadn't offered a scholarship to QuestBridge students. It got me really excited about Chicago. It shaped a lot of this year for me. I joined the Civic Engagement Certificate Program and made me realize what's off campus and how I could shape my college experience." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I chose to do one of the pre-Wildcat Welcome programs. I did that because I heard a lot of students love to do that. I did the Project Wildcat camping trip. It put a lot of pressure on my family—I asked for a lot of camping gear that I really couldn't afford. That ended being a very crucial part of my freshman transition, socially, hanging out with my group from that. The cost associated with that program was a burden on me at the time. It made it hard seeing other people didn't have that." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I know there were a bunch of pre-Wildcat Welcome programs before we started. A lot of them you had to pay for. So I didn't do any of those. I didn't even look at them because I knew I wouldn't be able to do them. But SAW we didn't have to pay for." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I had signed up to do one of the pre-Wildcat Welcome programs, but it ended up I couldn't do it for economic reasons. We were going to have to ship my stuff up or my dad was going to have to end up driving me up. Logistically, it just wasn't going to work. So I got up here and a lot of people were going out. They already knew people. And I didn't know anybody. My roommate had done a pre-program and so she knew everybody. So that was one of the hard things about Wildcat Welcome week for me." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I did the Freshman Urban Program. I don't remember how much that cost. I think they said on there if you had financial concerns to let them know. I think I may have gotten a discount, but that might be a complete lie. But I remember being able to do it. That was really really important to my transition." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

³ The four Northwestern pre-Wildcat Welcome programs offered through Student Affairs include Project Wildcat (PWild), Alternative Student Break (ASB), CATalyst, and the Freshman Urban Program (FUP). The cost of attending these programs ranges from \$215 - \$375 plus "rentals." Two academic-related pre-Wildcat Welcome programs include the Summer Academic Workshop (SAW) and the EXCEL program, an intense five-week initiative at the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science.

Although they weren't mentioned by many of the students in the focus groups, two of the academically-related pre-Wildcat Welcome programs—the Summer Academic Workshop (SAW) and EXCEL—were valuable experiences for those that participated in them.

"Another thing that helped with the transition was EXCEL. I lived on campus for a few weeks. The biggest resource was upperclass engineers who were also minorities and had been through a year of Northwestern." (Ryan Scholar)

"I was [high school] graduation day when I realized I would be 3000 miles away from home. I thought, 'OK, I adjust well to new environments, but I just didn't want to think about it.' I did a summer program—SAW—Summer Academic Workshop. I remember coming here alone. I was in the cab and I didn't want to leave. This is too scary. How did I end up over here? I knew absolutely no one. There was that moment. But I quickly adjusted. I met some people. There were a lot of minorities in SAW. I had a set of friends or people to go to. I was pretty settled coming in here." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I did the Summer Academic Workshop sponsored my Multicultural Student Affairs. Someone from Northwestern recommended that I do that. That was really good for me transitioning into Northwestern. Most of my friends that I've made were from that. That was a big part of my transition." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

For most students who participated in the focus groups, Wildcat Welcome was a positive experience. They attributed this to their peer advising (PA) groups, the Essential NU programs, the residence hall/college programs, and the programs for new students hosted by their academic schools. The differences in their socioeconomic backgrounds compared to many other new Northwestern students were apparent, though.

"Wildcat Welcome was awesome. I loved the interaction with these people in your PA groups. They facilitated relationships right off the bat. In my personal view, socioeconomic inequality was not present during Wildcat Welcome. Everyone seemed so even keeled. Everyone was jolted

away from home. Everyone was here. Everyone was making friends. That was a natural transition until people begin to change and adapt their lives according to their resources. Wildcat Welcome was an awesome experience." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I really like how they do PAs and PA groups. When students are initially brought in—and they have nobody else—it's really nice to know that you're going in and have a small group of people that even though you may not have anything in common with—and you might not know anything about each other—you are spending time together and it does give you the opportunity to have others in your same situation. But after a while, you get used to what it is like, and you get into your own routine. Even though you are forced together with these people at the beginning, if you form a great relationship with them, that's amazing, but it's not a necessity because you do find other people. But it's nice at first, definitely, to have that group." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"The Essential ENUs made me think about things I hadn't thought about before I came to college. There were funny skits. They were kind of 'essential.' I liked those." (Pell Grant Senior)

"The Mosaic part of Wildcat Welcome . . . they do a thing where you have . . . they will say something different like if you are low income, people stand up. It was really eye-opening to see how many people were wealthy. Obviously I don't consider myself wealthy. To find out that international students pay all of it to go here. That was a shock to me. I never thought that people had that much money. They can pay for everything and not have to worry about it. It was a wakeup call. There are people at this school that can afford to go here and pay all of it or most of it." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I really enjoyed Wildcat Welcome week, but that was because I lived in Slivka Res College the first two years. Slivka is well-known for having a structured and good community. There are a lot of leaders who are very involved in the dorm. So when you come in as a freshman, there are a lot of people who are really interested in meeting you and showing you around. That's why my

transition was pretty decent into Northwestern. Having a community of people you see constantly—a dorm of 200 or so people. There is someone you will find that has the same interests as you. That was really helpful for me.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“Wildcat Welcome was my one of my favorite weeks. I loved it. It was a very new atmosphere. I might have Bienen bias here because the Bienen School of Music is very small and you do get to know a lot of people. You got to see commonalities between all of us.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“Wildcat Welcome was terrifying to me. I’m a shy person. I don’t make friends that easily. I knew no one coming in. But it was really welcoming. It was really great. You meet way more people that you imagined. I met people from my dorm, my PA group, so the transition wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be, but it was still kind of scary.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“I liked my PA Group, but I could definitely tell there were some socioeconomic differences: the type of things they had done. We talked about what we did with our summer vacation. A pastor came in (the diversity ENU)—I liked that. It was a way to be really inclusive. I stood for a lot of things that a lot of other people didn’t, but I wasn’t standing alone. So I knew other people were in that situation, too. But during Wildcat Welcome week I got super homesick which was funny because I’m from Chicago. So I actually had to leave because I was freaking out. It was just so different. It was a totally different environment. It was like living with people that I couldn’t relate to for a lot of different reasons.” (Ryan Scholar)

“My best friend that I have now—she wasn’t in my PA group—but she lived in PARC with me, next door. She still to this day remembers the first time we met. ‘I knew we would be friends because you came to my room, complaining about how everyone talked about going to Europe over the summer. And I went to Walmart over the summer.’ She said, ‘Me, too.’” (Ryan Scholar)

“You don’t have to pay for anything during Wildcat Welcome. That was good.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“During Wildcat Welcome week when everyone talked about what they did in the summer—they went on all these elaborate trips to Europe. I thought, ‘Yah, I worked at a grocery store 40 hours a week.’ It was a little bit crazy how much money people spend without thinking about it, even when people just go to eat out multiple times a week who knows where. It surprised me a little about how little people cared about money.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Still, after the newness wore off, the first few weeks of college were eye opening experiences for many.

“My peer advising group was really essential and a key part of my Wildcat Welcome. It facilitated this understanding that we’re all here for the first time. None of us are really comfortable with this transition. It helped me understand that I’m not the only one that is being shocked by everything here. It really helped me open up to everyone I met. Everyone here was just saying ‘hello’ to random strangers, getting to know one another. But after that first few weeks of college, that diminished. Eventually, people distanced themselves away from one another based on what kind of people they are. It is more likely you will stay with people who have your similar background.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I had nobody and that was really hard at first.” (QuestBridge Scholars)

“It was a little bit crazy about how much money people spend without thinking about it. Even when people go to eat multiple times a week at who knows where. It surprised me a little bit, how little people care about money.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“It’s always awkward saying, ‘No, I can’t go out and eat with you. I have to go to the dining hall.’ I didn’t want to make my socioeconomic status known. Trying to explain that was a little awkward.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Finding students with similar backgrounds early on was important to most of the focus group students.

"I come from a lower income family and a low income neighborhood where it's 40% African American, 40% Hispanic, and 20% other. That was what I was used to. It was a really strange transition here for me for that reason. It was strange for me to come here: I'm not the only White girl in class. The first six weeks were hard just getting my foot in the door and getting used to my surroundings more than anything. After I started building relationships to people who are similar to me, it became comforting and 'normal.'" (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I wanted to see people who had a similar background to mine who I could really connect to. Wildcat Welcome didn't really do that for me. But afterwards when I met the Latino community on campus, it was really welcoming." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"When I wear a QuestBridge shirt, someone will say to me, 'Hey, you're a QuestBridge Scholar. I am too.' And then we chit chat. It may not go further than that, but it's nice to know you're not alone. There are people who come from a similar background that are also here. We're here." (QuestBridge Scholar)



Theme #6: Adjusting to the academic rigor at Northwestern appears to be no more or less stressful for the undergraduates from low income family backgrounds than it is for other students. Nevertheless, many of the students from low income family backgrounds feel less prepared than their peers who come from “better” high schools.

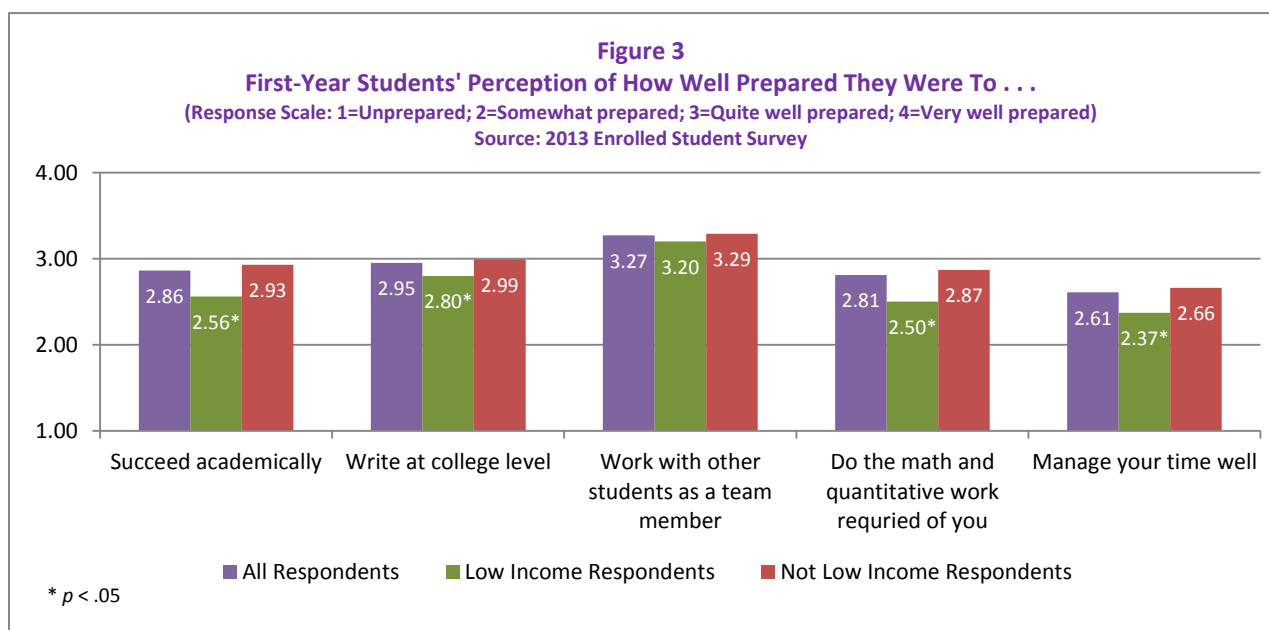
Students generally come to college knowing that they will need to work harder than they did in high school or that college will be harder than high school. Even the most motivated students can struggle as they find out what no longer works and what new methods or strategies they need to develop. Indeed, this transition is exactly what the students from low income family backgrounds described in the focus groups. Moreover, when they compared themselves to their peers who came from “better” high schools, many felt their academic transition was even more intense due to a lack of preparation in high school. This uneasiness shows up in the focus group comments and in the data from the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey (Figure 3).

“Academically, it’s a lot harder here than high school so you have to put a lot more time in. You do have to stay up sometimes and have those late nights in the library or your room— wherever you study. I know I’ve had them. But that’s the only way to stay on top. The quarter system is a battle field. It’s nonstop. It really is rigorous adjusting.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I was not expecting it to be nearly as hard as it was. By the time I got here, I’d had nine months of slacking off and not doing work. That was a shocker. There was a lot of reading. In high school I just skimmed. You can’t do that here. They ask questions about it. You have to write papers about it. You actually have to do the work.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Initially, it was really abrupt. My high school got out in the beginning of May. I had until the very end of September of nothing. It was abrupt. Automatically you have this course load and it starts the very first class.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“For me it was like, ‘oh, this isn’t bad.’ Fall quarter went really well for me. Granted I had three classes fall quarter. I was playing football, but having three courses was a great thing for me. Having four courses is more hectic and starting your freshman experience, it might not be the best.” (Pell Grant Freshman)



"I did not expect to study as much as I do. I've done very well this year, but I'm also putting more work into doing well." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I wasn't expecting a big portion of the grading to be based on three midterms or two tests. That means I have to study more. In some classes, the grade was based on 10% participation and over 50% was based on tests. So you only had two shots. If you did bad on your first test, you really had to pick it up on your last test. I wasn't expecting tests to be a huge part of the grading." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"[College] is a unique way of learning. It requires that you have a lot of self-discipline. I wouldn't say the transition was very difficult, it was just a new method of learning." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"The quarter system. I didn't realize the speed at which you operate in the quarter system. So that kind of slapped me in the face the first couple of weeks. And then, along with that, the whole midterm schedule. When I took my first midterm, I was dumbfounded about how much it covered and how short of a time frame you had to get that ready." (Pell Grant Senior)

"In McCormick, I had to learn to manage my time at lot more so I could fit in long hours of studying and long hours for problem sets that took about 15 hours total. It would have been helpful to know that other students were also feeling frustrated." (Pell Grant Senior)

"There is a disconnect between the way I was used to being taught and the way the professors and TAs were teaching." (Ryan Scholar)

"With papers I fell into this pattern that a lot of people do where you do papers at the last minute. There was a philosophy class I was in at the end of my freshman year, and the first paper I got a B on. [On the next paper] I stayed in on Friday and worked on the paper all weekend long. I actually came up with my own idea of what something meant, rather than 'ripping off' what the professor said in class. And then I got a worse grade. After that I got really disillusioned with papers. I realized it's sometimes more about your TAs opinion or the professor and how the professor wants to say, 'No, my idea is right

and yours is wrong.' After that—I don't care as much about papers." (Ryan Scholars)

"There is just a different style of learning than what I grew up in. A lot of it was based on memorizing facts and equations and you actually never knew the theories behind them. That's where I struggled the most. It was all very theoretical, especially in chemistry. The people that I know fared well in their engineering programs, they had some sort of history. They had experience with Java or they had experience with coding. The students who did well in engineering had that experience, that background. Or they had a parent who introduced them to some of this. I was just following blindly." (Ryan Scholar)

"I thought the freshman seminars were really good, but I was also surprised at how many classes were really big and the professor never got to know me. I was surprised at, generally, how little class discussion there was. It's gotten better my junior and senior year. But freshman year, that was a bit disappointing. I started to search out smaller classes where people would actually know me." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I was surprised at how different high school is from college. I remember going into—I knew I had a midterm on this one day. I really didn't understand what a midterm was. But I thought, 'OK, a unit test or something.' Then I walk into it. Oh my god, I was not expecting that. I hardly studied for it. I didn't know that was the expectation. I didn't have any siblings who went to college. My parents went to college while me and my sister were growing up but they never discussed what it was or how it was different. The fact that we didn't have assigned homework was a surprise, too." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I was surprised that I actually had to study—or spend time actually understanding things. In high school, the largest paper I had to write was six-pages and we wrote one six-page essay over four months. That was a transition: how much I needed to write in a short period of time" (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Some students from low income backgrounds found the academic experience intimidating at first. A perceived lack of preparation in high school usually influenced these feelings. Despite their struggles, students described an impressive degree of resiliency. They stuck with it.

"In class I thought everyone here is smarter than me. They used such big words. I didn't even know what they meant. In high school—even in my AP classes—people didn't have this intellectual thing going on. When I got here, people had more background knowledge than I did. It was a big problem for me at the start of my freshman year. I wouldn't participate in class because I was really scared of sounding dumb. I didn't know how to communicate on that level. It was hard. I didn't even want to talk to professors." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Coming in I knew college was going to be hard. That was a given. For some reason, I thought homework wasn't a 'thing' in college. I knew my [high] school wasn't the best in the area. Coming in, I took chemistry earlier in high school. I thought this [chemistry at Northwestern] would be easy. I can handle this because I've experienced it already. It was completely different. The level of academic standards here is so much higher and so much more challenging than I ever experienced in my life. Here it is a whole new ball park. I had to get used to catching up with the readings and do so much more. I didn't know to go to office hours and have them explain things to me. There was a point when I thought, 'OK, I'm too behind. I can't catch up.' There were a lot of those feelings: I can't keep up with this. No matter how much I try, it's just not going to work out. I can't keep up with students who come from better schools. They've done so many more academic programs than I have. I'm still struggling. People are still a little bit above me, but I try and keep up." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I thought I would be able to handle it, but I knew I was in for a very different from high school. My high school is not considered 'fit' for someone to go to a college like Northwestern. At first I panicked and thought I didn't belong here because I couldn't tolerate the work load. I dropped a class and it really wore down on me. My freshman year was a very difficult

adjustment to the academic work load. It was really detrimental to my ego." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Academically I figured that since I had performed so well in high school that it would be similar, that I wouldn't struggle, that the teachers/professors would be just as willing to be helpful as my high school teachers were. And just as understanding. My first day that I sat in my chemistry class, I realized that was completely false. There were people who obviously knew what they were doing. I never took a 'real' chemistry class before. I had this sense of pride where I didn't want to ask for help. It was embarrassing to me that I couldn't do it. Coming from a high school where I got straight As and I thought, 'Oh crap. I'm actually going to fail or get a C.' That was really discouraging." (Ryan Scholar)

"I came thinking, 'Oh, it's going to be hard, because it is Northwestern.' But I worked hard in high school. I could pull it off. And then I get here and I realize I know this kind of surface level thinking process about my classes. Then I realized it's on another level and I wasn't ready for it. I feel like my school did what it could—my high school was focused on getting kids to graduate, not preparing students for top universities. In my high school chemistry, we didn't even touch lab equipment or anything. We watch videos and filled in the blanks. I really felt [the influence] of my socioeconomic status then. I felt really discouraged my first quarter, down in the dumps. I didn't know how to do this. I skated by in my high school. I never had to work super hard for anything academically. It was tough and I didn't know who to turn to for help. I was scared to ask for help. I wasn't used to asking. I had to learn—going into Winter quarter—that my worth wasn't necessarily tied to how good my grades were. That was a really hard concept. It was ok for me to experience failure because that was how I was going to grow." (Ryan Scholar)

"Being a premed student is extremely difficult in general. It was a big wake up call for anyone. Going into chemistry and . . . it depends on how much you are dedicated to it. After the first midterm in 101, hundreds of people dropped the class. I think it depends on how much you are

dedicated to what you are doing and how much you are willing to stick through the rigor.”
(Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

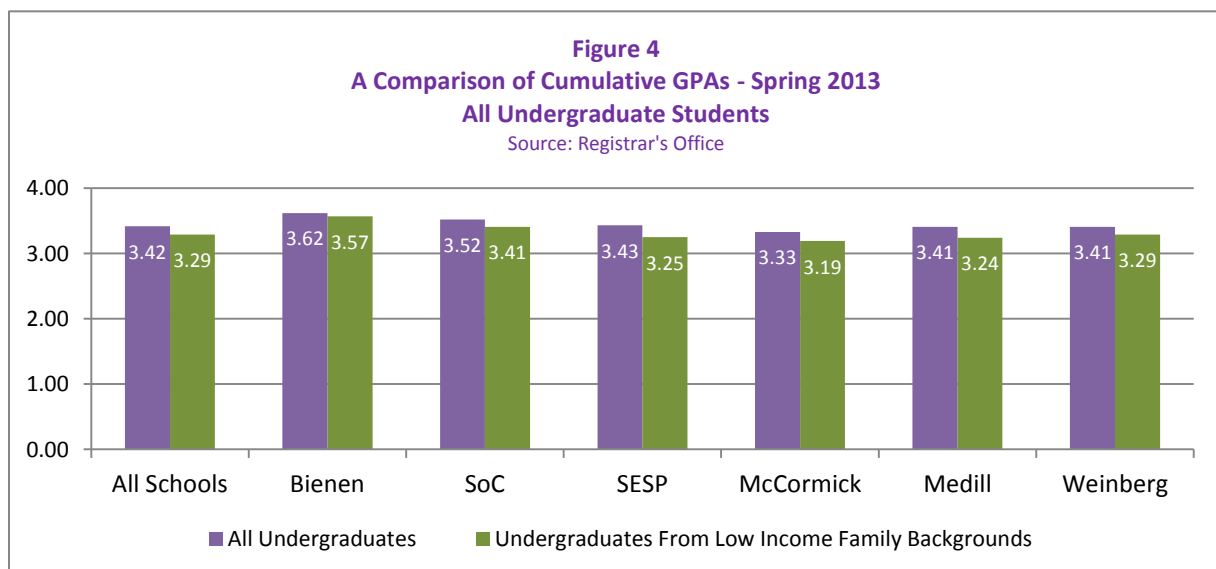
“A couple of years ago my family moved from the suburbs of Chicago to Arkansas. My high school was a joke. I would do my homework at school and never take anything home. It was a bit transition coming here. Everyone is cut throat, going for the high grade. It was a big wake up call. My older brother kind of prepared me for it. It still sucked, but it’s gotten a lot better.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Some classroom experiences stood out.

“I switched out of McCormick into SESP where I thought people would be more understanding and welcoming. We were in a class one day, talking about students from low income backgrounds. A student raised her hand and said, ‘Well, how do those kinds of students even get into universities like this?’ It was a snobbish

remark. The professor who I knew—whom I had talked to before—shot a glance at me and could see that I was uncomfortable. She tried to handle the situation as best as she could. She explained that they can be encouraged. They have a lot of support systems that . . . some schools in low income neighborhoods do talk about things and there are resources for them. That is when it was clearly shown to me that there is this complete lack of understanding between economic classes. I don’t see economic class as an ‘ability,’ in other words, someone from a lower class unable to do something like [someone from] a high economic class. But that is how a lot of people view it if they are from a high economic class. There is a disconnect as to how they are perceiving us. That was frustrating for me.” (Ryan Scholar)

Finally, when compared with all undergraduate students, undergraduate students who come from low income family backgrounds have slightly lower cumulative GPAs (Figure 4). The difference may not be statistically significant however.



Theme #7: Student satisfaction with academic advising varies. Most advisers are seen as “nice” enough, but students long for a more personalized experience.

Students in the focus groups were asked to share their experiences with academic advising. Much like other students at Northwestern, students’ experiences varied between advisers and schools. Many found their academic advisers helpful. Similarly, on the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey, when compared to students not considered to be low income, students from low income family backgrounds were more likely to agree that advising in their major had been effective and that advising was effective in helping them select electives that enhanced their Northwestern experience (Figure 5).

“[Advising in] McCormick is hit or miss. You either get an incredible adviser who actually wants to be an adviser or you get advisers who have to or were asked to do it.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“My academic adviser is awesome. She is so welcoming. You are able to walk into the student center [SESP] and they all have their doors open and whoever you need to see, you just walk into their office and say ‘hey, do you have time to talk?’ My academic adviser spends the first 10 minutes or so asking me how my life is. It’s really welcoming and comforting to have that.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I got really lucky and got an incredible adviser who still checks in with me all the time. And my

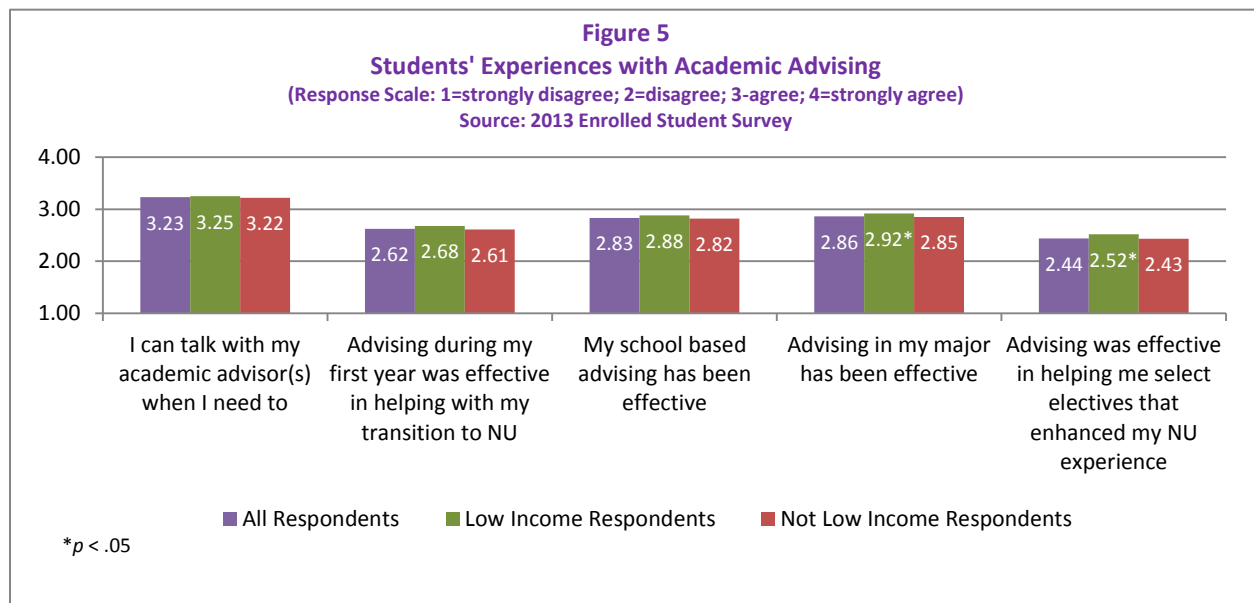
peer advisers were also great and really knowledgeable. My transition was really aided by the help of these people. (Pell Grant Senior)

“The advising in Weinberg is pretty good. Our freshman advisers are our freshman seminar teachers. I have a pretty close relationship with my freshman adviser. He’s been really helpful. He’s written me a recommendation for some of the summer programs I’m doing this year.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“SESP’s advising is phenomenal.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I have a nice, general Weinberg adviser. He is a physics professor so he has nothing to do with what I am studying. He’s a nice person. My quarterly meetings with him are very pleasant. He told me a lot of the standard stuff. Nothing ground breaking.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“I’ve had two advisers: my freshman adviser when I was in Weinberg and Susan Olson for SESP. What I get more from my advisers here is moral support with my transition and any other struggles I am having, like having a hard time talking to a professor. It’s good to have them for that purpose.” (QuestBridge Scholar)



But some students had different experiences with academic advising. Some reported that their academic advisers provided a superficial level of advising which they [students] attributed to large caseloads or the advising structure within their school.

"I don't feel like our conversations were very meaningful or that I got a lot out of them." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"All my adviser does is approve the schedule I already developed." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I don't feel there is a need for advising. I just look at the catalog and requirements. I don't understand the whole need for an adviser. My freshman adviser—she was new—and she was really nice and everything. She wanted to help, but she didn't know anything I couldn't figure out from the course catalog on my own." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"We would go in there with questions and I'd walk out more confused. She said everything is ok without really explaining anything." (Pell Grant Senior)

"In Weinberg—which is huge—and in econ—which is huge, there is not a lot of love from the advisers. Not that my adviser wasn't nice, but I don't feel like our conversations were very meaningful or I got a lot out of them. Like my first one, he said, 'You want to study abroad? You should really study abroad.' He didn't ask me my major. Then this year he said, 'Do you have a major yet? Make sure you declare a major. Alright, nice talking to you.' So I think the adviser program could have been a little more specialized or maybe there were a couple of more advisers and you were required to see them a little more often." (Pell Grant Senior)

"My freshman adviser was in the philosophy department. He was saying stuff way over my head. Honestly, I had no idea what he was talking about. He had his advising sessions. I said, 'I'm premed. I'm going to take this class and this class.' He said, 'Oh yeah. That's great.' It literally lasted three minutes. When I declared my [psychology major] I met with my psychology adviser. She was really nice. She explained everything I had already heard before online: all the requirements. Maybe I just haven't had any

questions about it. I know the courses I should be taking." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"My academic adviser is really nice and easy to talk to. She is very supportive. But then when I asked her for a recommendation, I got a 'no.' Not a direct 'no.' She said she'd look into it. She'd talk to her colleagues. Next time I met with her, she never brought it up again. But otherwise, she's great." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

In general, students wished that advising provided answers to more of their questions as they entered and progressed through college. The students from low income family backgrounds shared many instances of confusion about choosing a major, requirements for a major/program, and placing into courses.

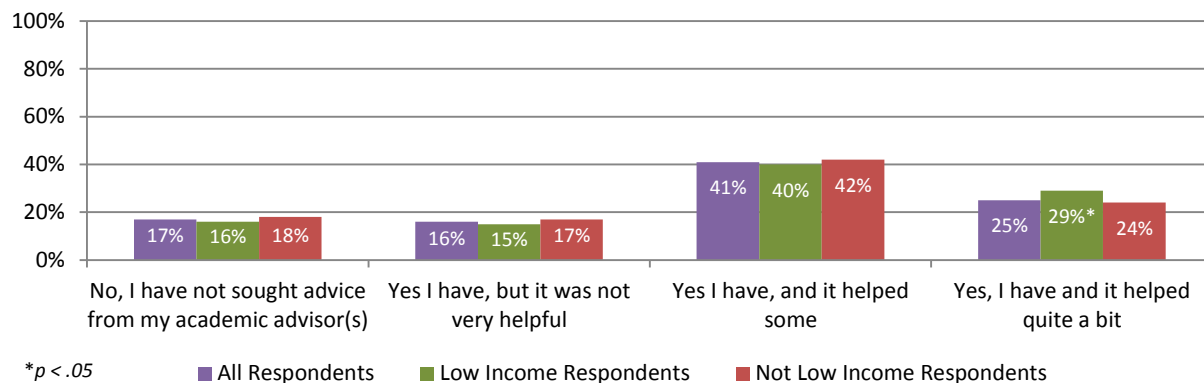
"I wished somebody had told me it doesn't matter what you major in, almost . . . You should just study what is most applicable in your life." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I assumed that if you were premed you were also a biology major. . . I was just kind of confused by freshman year." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I had placed into sort of an entry level to intermediate Spanish class. After a few quarters I realized there was no way I could even major or minor in Spanish which was sort of my goal after I heard a lot of people were double majoring. Maybe if I had told someone that I had really wanted to pursue this, they would have seen about placing me again, seeing if I could move up. I think that I placed at a good level for me and everything. I kind of always regret not having a double major now, or even a minor." (Pell Grant Senior)

"My academic adviser is extremely friendly and happy and all that good stuff. But I was convinced I wanted to go into the Kellogg certificate program. She didn't explain well enough exactly what I was getting myself into. She said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, do it.' But she didn't explain what I would have to put into it. I researched it myself and realized how competitive it actually is and how many courses I would actually have to take. She didn't tell me that. I had to find out for myself. She wasn't being my adviser; she was just being my cheerleader." (Ryan Scholar)

Figure 6
Students' Experiences Seeking Advice from Academic Advisor(s)
During Current Academic Year
2013 Enrolled Student Survey



Several students specifically addressed the advising needs of low income students who may also be first generation college students and not have the support from parents.

"There is a wealth of information that can be passed down from parents to the students that I felt as though I was lacking. The level of advising that I received might have been fine for someone who was receiving more advice from their parents. But the level of advice that I received from my advisers--there was a lot of room for improvement there. There was just so much that I had to figure out on my own." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I look at my friends and ask, 'What do they do?' A lot of them talk to their parents about the classes they should take. That's something I can't do. I can't ask my mom, 'Hey, do you think I should be taking labor economics or behavior economics?' I can't do that at all. I'm just doing

it on my own, researching, trying to figure things out." (Ryan Scholar)

In the end, students desired a more personalized experience with an adviser, one who knew them and who knew more of, and could consider, their background when providing guidance.

"My academic adviser did not understand my life or my background. I don't talk to her. I had to find other people that I could relate to on my own." (Ryan Scholar)

"I have a Weinberg adviser and I meet with him once or twice a year. I wouldn't feel comfortable asking him for a recommendation. I just don't know him well enough. He's a great guy and he's helpful, but I think a major adviser would be a lot more helpful. Plus he has 250 other kids to handle. I don't think he would really remember me if I passed him on the street." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Table 3
Low Income Students' Experiences With Academic Advising
In Current Academic Year by School
Source: 2013 Enrolled Student Survey

	All Schools	Bienen	SoC	SESP	McCormick	Medill	Weinberg
No, I have not sought advice from my academic advisor(s)	16%	11%	13%	3%	16%	28%	18%
Yes I have, but it was not very helpful	15%	3%	13%	17%	20%	14%	14%
Yes I have, and it helped some	40%	29%	46%	38%	47%	31%	39%
Yes I have, and it helped quite a bit	29%	57%	27%	41%	17%	28%	29%

Theme #8: Students from low income family backgrounds seem uneasy approaching faculty or they don't know *how* to approach faculty. At the same time, the majority reported there was at least one faculty member at Northwestern who had taken a personal interest in them. They also acknowledged faculty members were willing to talk to them individually.

Students from low income family backgrounds described their relationships with faculty as tenuous at best. Interestingly, in the focus group it almost seemed that they were describing a protocol when it came to reaching out to faculty with which they were unfamiliar. Still 66% of the students from low income family backgrounds reported on the 2013 Enrolled Student Survey that at least one faculty member at Northwestern had taken a personal interest in their success (Figure 7). And 94% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement, “Faculty members are willing to talk with me individually” (Figure 8, p. 33).

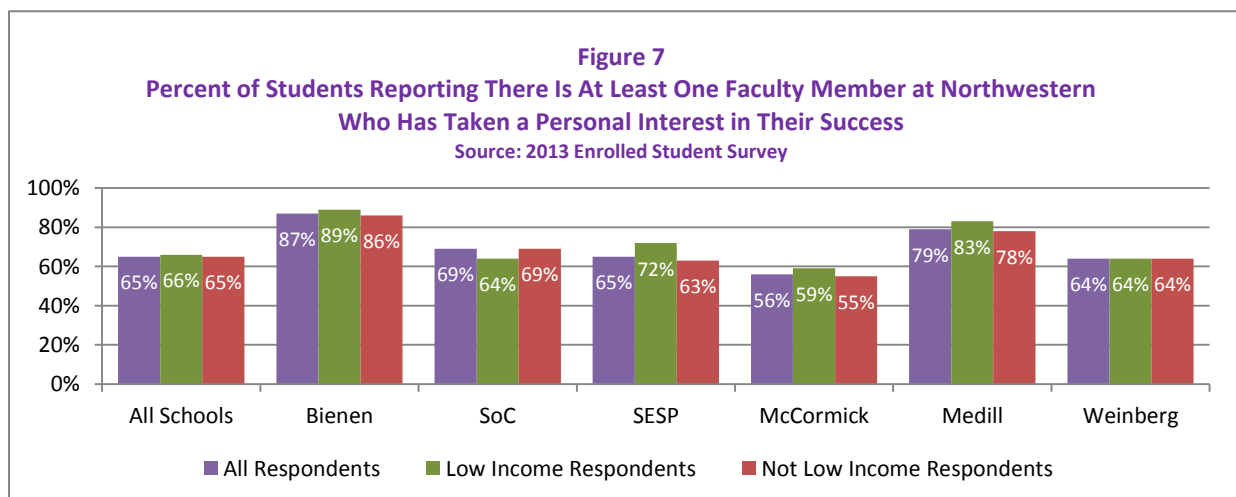
“Faculty are great and accommodating when you make the step. It’s just the transition to college. You have to take the initiative to meet with your adviser. At first, it is intimidating. ‘You’re a professor at a prestigious college. What am I doing in your office?’ You have to make that important for yourself and your own good.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“As a bio major and also someone who is premed, you are basically required to get to know faculty members for recommendations for med school. It is near impossible with the sheer

number of students who are in biology—either as biology majors or premed students who are not biology majors—and it’s so awkward. There are no advising meetings set up like there is in McCormick. No one sees you as a Weinberg student. You don’t get that interaction. Coming from high school where I knew all my AP teachers, you would chat during lunch. I would sit in my sit at lunch with my physics teacher and chat about everything. I lost that when I came to Northwestern. Even now—I’m involved in a research group on campus. I never really see my PI. I never feel like I get attention from any of the faculty members.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“You walk into office hours if you are struggling with something and they say something like, ‘What’s your name?’ And then they pull up your grades and say, ‘Well, you got this on this test and with the curve, it transfers to this, so you need this to get this grade.’ It feels really impersonal.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I’ve had professors say, ‘How do you not understand this [so basic]?’ I say, ‘OK, can you explain it to me?’ It’s hard to continuously do that if professors don’t want to do that. So by



the end of my sophomore year, I just gave up. I said to myself, 'I'm not going to seek out professors anymore.'" (Pell Grant Senior)

"Talking to professors is really difficult. I don't know what I am allowed to ask or how to approach it." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"In the classroom, I would not raise my hand because I really didn't understand what was going on, not only because the material was really difficult and I had never seen it before, but because you really didn't know what they were saying or what you should ask about. I didn't go to office hours because I felt like I should be able to figure this out for myself. I didn't know what to expect because every professor was really different. I don't have professors I can approach. I don't feel comfortable going to them because they are all smarter than me." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Fall quarter in classes, I really didn't talk to professors. Later I had a few that were really insistent, 'If you need help, come and see me.' They set up office hours on Sunday—and Saturday. I decided if he was opening himself up on weekends, I might as well take advantage of that. That helped." (Ryan Scholar)

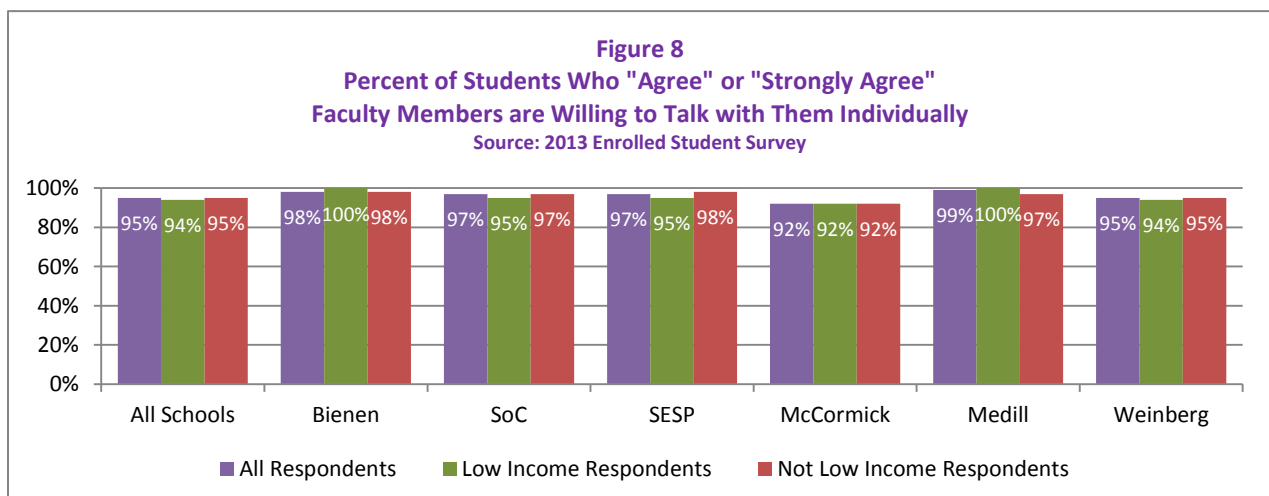
"As far as professors, it still scares me. It scares the wits out of me to try and email a professor or to communicate with anyone from that level of professionalism. It was something I had never done before. It takes me forever to actually sit down and convince myself to write an email to

an administrator. Even when we are talking about job applications, if I have to email anyone in an office, it scares me because it was something I was never exposed to, something that my parents never did." (Ryan Scholar)

"Communicating with a professor is very different from communicating with a high school teacher. I don't know how to navigate that. Coming from a low socioeconomic background, you kind of have these preconceptions in your head about how you will be perceived by a professor. Then you have to be extra careful. You think they will chalk up any shortcoming of yours to that. You have that worry in your head. It makes it extra hard." (Ryan Scholar)

"With sciences classes, especially, there is a lot of disconnect between students and professors. A lot of the students mostly work with graduate students. Even my 102 professor works for Obama. They're not really on our level. They don't know how to even talk to undergraduates. They are more used to talking to graduate students. They're not on the same level as us and they don't want to come down to our level." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I've heard it's important to seek out a mentor—to have a mentor. I don't think that—for how much it gets said on campus—I don't think the professors or the advisers themselves actually put forth the effort to become a mentor." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)



Theme #9: Most students from low income family backgrounds were able to describe one or more student organizations and/or groups to which they belong. But there is evidence that the lack of financial resources affects their ability to participate *fully* in the Northwestern experience.

Student involvement campus life outside the classroom was wide ranging. Still, in most cases, money was a consideration. The data from the 2013 Enrolled Survey supports this finding. In fact, compared to students who are not low income, students from low income family backgrounds are more likely to be involved in religious/spiritual groups, cultural/ethnic organizations, and volunteer service. They are less likely to be involved in “other student organizations and clubs” and fraternities/sororities (Table 4).

“What has involved most of my time is really being involved in the Latino community. I’m in Alianza. Currently I’m working on starting a new—it’s a Mexican folk dancing group. Getting dresses tailored from Mexico. Getting all the paper work in to apply for ASG and MSA status. That’s occupied a ton of my time. And then also within the Sheil community we are starting to lead Bible studies and that takes a lot of time.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Being in a sorority—the dues are expensive and . . . we have financial aid within our sorority, but that doesn’t cover much. Next year I’ll be living in the house though it will actually pay off because it will actually be less than living in the dorms even including dues. This year it’s been a huge drain on my family. It’s been hard to join other big extracurriculars that also have dues because my sorority dues are already extremely high.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I’m heavily involved in Greek life. Greek life is expensive. It’s very expensive, especially for me coming from my economic background. I can’t make a phone call and ask my parents for money. It’s more so, ‘go to your Kellogg studies and you’ll have the money.’ I’ve paid for my initiation. I’ve paid for the conferences, or my chapter tries to fund raise because a lot of us can’t afford to do these things, but we have to.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I’m heavily involved in Norris Marketing. I joined my freshman year fall quarter because I was looking for a campus work study job and I wanted—I found a graphic design position and that looked like the most fun of all of them. Our marketing group is really great and our boss is passionate about what he does and he wants to support the students. I’ve really grown throughout my four years working there.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I live in Jones Residential College. Because it’s the theater and performing arts dorm, they have free shows right down there on the first floor. So

Table 4
Percentage of Students Actively Involved in Various Student Activities
(Source: 2013 Enrolled Student Survey)

<i>Percent responding “yes” . . .</i>	All Respondents	Low Income Respondents	Not Low Income Respondents
Intercollegiate athletics (NCAA)	6%	6%	7%
Intramural athletics	36%	33%	36%
Club sports	17%	16%	18%
Music/theater group	23%	21%	24%
Student publications	19%	17%	19%
Student government	9%	8%	9%
Political group	7%	7%	7%
Religious or spiritual group	25%	32%*	24%
Cultural/ethnic organization	24%	35%*	21%
Volunteer service	48%	52%*	47%
Academic clubs, honor societies, or professional associations	34%	34%	34%
Fraternity or sorority	36%	25%*	39%
Other student organizations or clubs	64%	61%*	65%

* $p < .05$

when I wanted to do something. I would go mostly to those. Besides that, the talks and lectures they have here—they are things I really am attracted to. They are free and there is usually food. Anything higher than \$5, I'm hesitant. I don't think I should spend the money because I don't have the money. I have to save money for something else that might come up. It's not worth it. (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I lived in Willard my first two years. I was on the exec board. Because I was on their exec board, I was pretty much required—heavily expected—to go to all the events. Most of them are free and you are already paying social dues, but there are things like formals which cost \$40 to go to." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"My dance group is my primary activity. You don't have to pay any money for that." (Ryan Scholar)

"The activity I'm most involved in is gymnastics. It's hard because—my freshman through junior year, we paid \$250 per quarter just to go to the gym. That was a lot. It was really tough. Now it's \$80 a month which is a little bit better if you do the math, but it's still a lot. We go to the meets and we have to pay those fees. And of course, we're off campus so we have to pay for the meals. It really adds up." (Student from Random Low Income Group)

"I was in an organization called, AIESEC, which hosts these international conferences. They would advertise airfare deals to, like Costa Rica—only \$400—so cheap. But I still don't have \$400." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Nevertheless, there was ample evidence that the lack of financial resources often affected these students' ability to participate fully in the Northwestern experience.

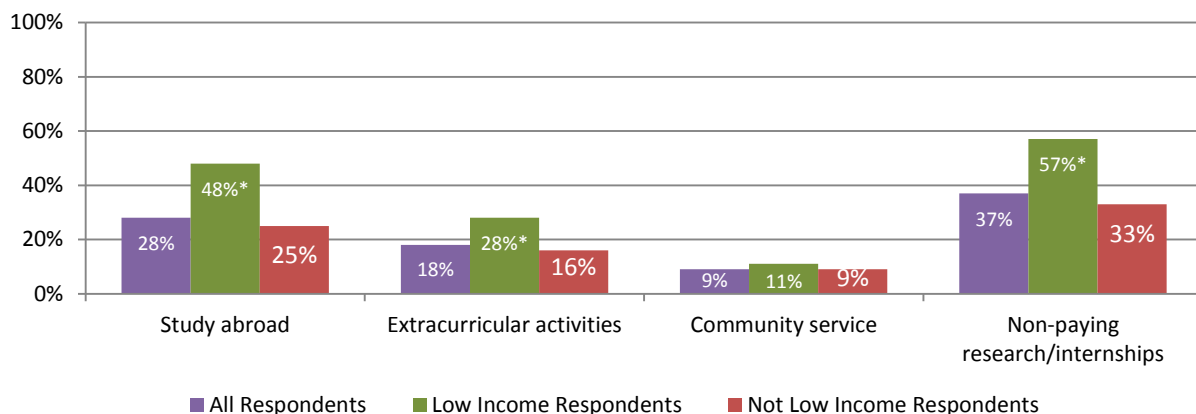
"Anything that requires me to pay more than \$5 to do, I hesitate, just because that's like, a meal. You're asking me to pay more than lunch to go to this event for however long." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I haven't seen as many plays as I would have liked. And random other things that happen that require you to pay like banquets and such. I don't do as much because, more often than not, I don't think it's worth my time to spend that much money to go." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"My freshman year was a mess. I was afraid I was going to get kicked out because of money. I didn't join groups because of the cost. It was very isolating. You can't get grants for these kinds of things." (Pell Grant Senior)

"My freshman year I really wanted to be in a

Figure 9
Percent of Respondents Who "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that
Due to Lack of Money They Had to Forego Involvement in Various Activities
Source: 2013 Enrolled Student Survey



sorority, like really badly, but I knew I couldn't afford it so I didn't even rush because I didn't want to fall in love with a sorority and then not be able to do it because I knew that would be an upsetting thing for me.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“I had originally wanted to do club swimming. What it came down to is I wasn't actually able to afford the fees for it. And that's, that's like a really big thing. Swimming has been a part of my life since I was four, and I wasn't able to continue doing it because of financial reasons.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Club sports. You have to pay. I can't do that.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I had to have a very serious conversation [with my parents] when it came to [sorority] recruitment time. They said, ‘You are going to have to pay for all of it yourself.’ It was a decision I had to make. I couldn't do it, even though it might be something I would gain from, because of the financial impact.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“My friends are always asking me if I want to take a Norris mini course with them or go to a fitness class somewhere, or yoga or something. I'm just not going to spend the money for those kinds of things when I need it for other types of things. If somehow those were more accessible or somehow cheaper, it would be something fun . . . additional.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I'm in Model UN. They have a lot of conferences you can go to that are optional. But you have to pay for them so I don't even apply to go because I couldn't pay for it even if I got it. I live in Shepard and I'm on their exec board. I'm munchies chair—we put on munchies every week. You have to pay for it and then you get reimbursed. That's been an issue. I don't have \$150 in a bank account just ready to be used. Things like that have held me back.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Socioeconomic status mostly affects the social experience. But then, it also affects my academic experience.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“My socioeconomic background has influenced it [involvement in campus activities] a lot because I live at home. Because of that, if I end class at 2 pm, I just go home rather than waiting for activities at night. So I'm not a participant in many of them because of that.” (Student from Random Low Income Group)

“I would have enjoyed being on the club lacrosse team, but for what you get out of it—you have to pay \$200 to be a member—what you get out of it isn't worth that. There are tons of things like that.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Ski trip. Everyone asks, ‘Why don't you go on ski trip? It's only \$200.’ I ask, does that include the airfare? ‘No, that's \$700.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Study abroad and internship opportunities were also off limits for many for the students from low income family backgrounds (Figure 9, p. 35). Since these activities often prevent students from maintaining work-study or summer employment, study abroad and internships pose two issues: an upfront cost and the opportunity cost of lost wages. For focus group participants, these limitations affected their ability to gain experience and build their resumes.

“I fully intended to study abroad until I realized how expensive it really is despite all the financial aid I'm receiving. They say, ‘Oh yeah, the tuition goes over,’ but you still have to pay for your flight over, which is probably like \$1000 at minimum, and like food and travel expenses while you are there . . . It's just not going to happen, I realized.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I've never had the opportunity to do any unpaid or even minimum wage type of research, like, during the summer because I've had to work full time at a job, and I can't, like, do both of those types of things. It's been really hard to, like, beef up a resume, I guess. You have to choose being able to support yourself in the next school year.” (Pell Grant Senior)

Some students also commented that the time they spend in their work-study jobs prevents them from participating in campus activities, even if the events are affordable. Below are examples of this limitation.

"I don't find myself able to be involved in things or go to things because I work almost twenty hours a week because I need the money. I still have bills. I still have

classes. I can't put my classes off to go to any events. So I spend a lot of time doing my homework and or at my job doing my homework. If I were to get involved in anything, it would have to be something really meaningful. But other than that, I don't see it as worth my time at all." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I have four classes and two jobs. So I haven't been as involved as I would have liked to. I'd love to get involved, but I don't know how I could manage my time." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I've always had to have a work study job and I work a lot of hours during the week. Sometimes it would be frustrating when everyone is really focused on extracurriculars—what groups are you a part of or what leadership experiences do you have outside the classroom? I consider me working a lot during the week, kind of like an extracurricular. It's a work study job and it's been a huge part of my college. People don't view a work study job as cool and important like an extracurricular. I just don't have time. I have to be making money." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I work on the weekends. So I go home. I'm never here on weekends. So many things happen during the weekends, especially various volunteer activities and stuff like that—which I'd like to be more involved in, especially for my major—biology and premed." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Students recognized that some funding for different activities is available, but that the offers are hidden

Table 5
Students' Work Experiences
Source: 2013 Enrolled Student Survey

<i>Percent of students responding "yes" . . .</i>	All Respondents	Low Income Respondents	Not Low Income Respondents
Did you work for pay in the last year?	57%	80%*	52%
My job was part of a financial aid package (e.g., work study program)	57%	83%*	49%
I worked because I needed money for school expenses	73%	93%*	67%
My job was related to my field of study or future career	45%	41%*	46%
My job was primarily off-campus	37%	33%*	38%
My job prevented me from taking a course	12%	15%	12%

* $p < .05$

or difficult to find. Moreover, funding for all events and activities does not exist, and students advocated for funding to be able to fully participate.

"Northwestern does offer a lot of grants, but they don't advertise it very well. SESP has Opportunities Fund, but no one really knows about it because SESP doesn't really talk about it. MSA has grants available, but again, they don't really talk about it. You have to find out on your own. Even CSI has a bunch of different grants, but if you didn't get the email, too bad for you, you can't apply." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I wanted to join the gymnastics club, but I couldn't afford to do it. If they could subsidize something like that, that would be great. I can't afford to do things—especially like clubs and stuff because there are so many user fees." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I heard that there is a new grant or something to cover student activities. Some kind of scholarship fund if you want to be involved in student activities which I think is phenomenal." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I read an article about how unpaid internships are a luxury for people who come from more money backgrounds. But Northwestern has Posner Fellowships which was a \$4000 research grant for after your freshman year which was even more than the URG." (Student from Random Low Income Group)

Theme 10: There are a variety of places and/or groups where students from low income family backgrounds feel they belong or where they feel connected to Northwestern. At times, though, students describe feeling “different.”

For the most part, students who participated in the focus group were able to describe at least one place/group on campus to which they felt they belonged. For new students, it was their residence hall/college community or their fraternity/sorority. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors were more likely to mention a student group or a group of friends.

“Personally, I would say I’m closest to people I live with. I live in Elder. I do feel really close to my fraternity as well. But honestly, I am closer to my hall mates. Once I established that close relationship, I immediately felt like I belonged here and I couldn’t really ask for more.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Definitely where I feel I belong the most is CRU and Chi Alpha. I have the most important part of my life in common with these people.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I went through rush and joined my sorority. I have some really good connections there. I feel like I belong here now.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I don’t feel like I’m a Wildcat because of my school classes. That doesn’t make me feel like ‘woo Northwestern.’ I feel ‘woo Northwestern’ when I am with my student groups. I’m part of APO and we just got rechartered a week or two ago. I feel very connected to Northwestern when I am with that organization.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I’ve gone from really being associated with my [residential] college to being associated with my major. It is always the same group of people in the labs and the study places. So you get to know them a lot better. My group at Northwestern has become fairly flexible. My friends are my friends but my ‘group’ changes depending on what my situation is.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“I feel like I have a place at Northwestern. Friends in my major and friends in my dorm—I’m

still very close with. They are all from very different socioeconomic backgrounds. But I’ve always been used to that. Overall the experience has been pretty good.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“My experience in the Black community hasn’t been that positive. Is that my community? There was always a struggle finding my place there. There’s this rhetoric about not actually belonging even though we are a part of the greater Northwestern community. There was always that struggle. I started to find my place in my association with student groups and my major. Overall for me to say I feel like I am a member of the greater NU community is hard because it’s a very complex issue.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“I feel really lucky. The Evans Scholars—we all live together. We’re all from a similar background. So I feel really comfortable there. We do everything together. It is a place I can call home on campus.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“I feel most comfortable when I am with the gymnastics team. We have the same interests. We all love doing gymnastics and it’s a small group of us. If you had asked me that question when I was a freshman, I probably would have said, ‘No, I really don’t fit in here at all.’” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“I joined a sorority and I met a lot of my best friends through that.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Most of my friends now are people I lived with last year in the dorms—just because of proximity.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

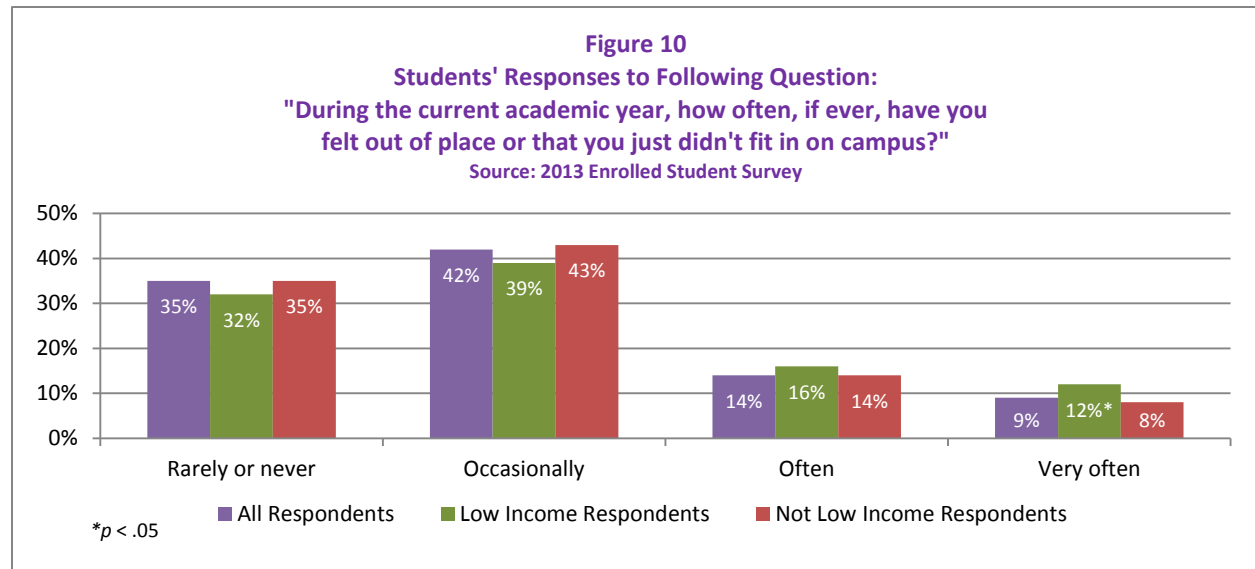
“I feel an immediate connection with other QuestBridge students. I want to say, ‘I totally get

you—at least on some level.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“I honestly don’t feel like I have found one [a place where I belong] yet.” (Ryan Scholar)

However, some students struggled describing a place where they felt they belonged. This was largely because, on some level, they felt “different.”

“I thought being at the Multicultural House would make me feel a lot safer. It did to an extent where I met a lot of my close friends. It



“Your socioeconomic background has a huge impact on who you connect with well. I haven’t experienced nearly half of the things that many of these students have. Half of the people I’ve meet have been in Europe and all these different countries. They go on vacation often and have all these things. It felt as though I really didn’t have much to say. All these people experience all these things. What have I really done? I’ve been living in Skokie the majority of my life. I know it is a bad way of thinking, but you really can’t really help it sometimes. The reason I feel I belong now is because of the connections I have. I’m starting to learn more and more that just because someone has a different background, does not mean that you can’t make a connection there. In fact, some of the people I feel closest to at Northwestern come from very wealthy backgrounds. Learning to adjust to that, realizing that everybody is different, was very important in me and feeling like I belong here.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I also feel like I haven’t found a place where I belong here. Had I not met two other Mexican girls in my dorm, I’d probably be in my room by myself, having dinner by myself. (Ryan Scholar)

was really nice to be there and to be around my culture. But there are also people at the Multicultural Center who are at high socioeconomic statuses who don’t necessarily know where I come from or will make jokes about low income things. I realized that just because someone was from a similar race doesn’t mean they are going to understand my background. To say I have a definite place where I belong is kind of ‘ify’ because I know I can go places and feel comfortable, to an extent, but I don’t always feel I can be ‘me.’” (Ryan Scholar)

“I don’t have one definite place where I feel this is where I’m supposed to be, these are the people I can trust. I do have a group of close friends in my dorm. We have dinner together. We go places together. But I am still not at the level where I can say anything or tell them everything about my life and my background.” (Ryan Scholar)

“I’ve been a part of a lot of extracurricular activities but I choose not to say I’m . . . to share that part of my life like, ‘Yeah, when I go home, I’m probably going to have to work and help my mom with the rent.’ I don’t feel comfortable

sharing that part of my life with people. Number one because when they are talking about their lives, I can see that our lives don't match up. I'm willing to share it, but I don't want them to think, 'Oh, her life is bad.' I don't want them to take pity on me. Number two. I don't want it to get misconstrued. It's like me making excuses for hard things in my life. I choose to tell it to certain people who I trust and whom I've gotten on that level with. But even with people that I've hung out with, they don't know that when I go home, it's just my mom or that my mom was unemployed for part of this year and I had to take care of things for myself. It's just being wary of sharing that part because I don't want to be misunderstood." (Ryan Scholar)

Some students described how they intentionally do not discuss their family backgrounds with others, a factor that seems to affect their sense of belongingness. In fact, these students who are receiving substantial financial aid—"full rides" in some cases—are concerned about how other students will respond to them if they know they are not paying anything to attend Northwestern. They steer clear of any discussions about the cost of attending and their financial arrangement with Northwestern.

"I'm not ashamed about my background, but I don't want to throw it out there in people's faces. It seems like something taboo to be talking about. Then it makes me feel uncomfortable when there really is no reason why I should be uncomfortable." (Ryan Scholar)

"People who don't get financial aid—hear that you do—they think it is unfair. 'What do you mean you're only paying XYZ to go here? I'm paying this much money. That's not fair.' Sometimes there is a little bit of animosity toward people who get financial help I don't there is the understanding that we need it more." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"I don't ever discuss financial issues with my friends. You have to compartmentalize." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"You're not supposed to talk about what socioeconomic background you come from, in general." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"It was always awkward to say, 'No, I can't go out and eat with you. I have to go to the dining hall.' I felt 'normal' as long as I didn't have to make my socioeconomic status known. But whenever I had to say, 'no' to something with a group of people who could always say, 'yes' to it—and try to explain that, was a little awkward." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"When QuestBridge had one of their first meetings, it was pretty awesome to meet them. We talked about how we got here and how lucky we felt and how it was a miracle that we were even here. It was really nice because you could share that. I could share that with my roommate. I shared it with a couple of my friends from my school, but other than that, you really didn't want to tell anyone else because there are some kids you are paying everything to come here. There are others who have \$20,000 in loans a year. You don't really want to sing out loud, 'Oh yeah, I'm not paying anything.' It's a little bit rude of you. At least me, I try and keep a lower profile." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"I hate not being able to say what Northwestern has done for me [i.e., not talk about QB scholarship]. I hide the financial aid I get." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"People like Quest Scholars don't acknowledge the fact that they are Quest Scholars unless they are at a Quest Scholar event. You know everyone else is a Quest Scholar, too. We all need money to go here otherwise we wouldn't be able to go here. It blows my mind to think that people think it's not fair that we get money to go here." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Theme #11: Students from low income family backgrounds think about money—a lot. It adds a level of stress other Northwestern students may not experience.

Students from low income backgrounds think about money—a lot. It adds a level of stress other Northwestern students may not experience. The focus group participants described a number of the financial “stressors” they had experienced. It begins with just not being able to afford to go home very often during the academic year.

“Coming to terms with being really far from home is one thing. Coming to terms with being far and then not having access to home due to socioeconomic factors is stressful. I’ve been home twice since I started college and that is rough. My family doesn’t have money and that adds stress like buying books. Just having casual . . . having a bike . . . having a work study job while juggling academics and, for me, football. It’s been a lot and it’s been very stressful. It was a shock not being able to go home for Thanksgiving and things like that.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

Another big consideration for students was the price of books and other academic-related equipment. Students in all the focus groups reported relying on the interlibrary loan system and online purchasing options, like Amazon. Medill students also mentioned the high price of other equipment for class, like cameras. Even when students found cheaper options, they regretted that their materials

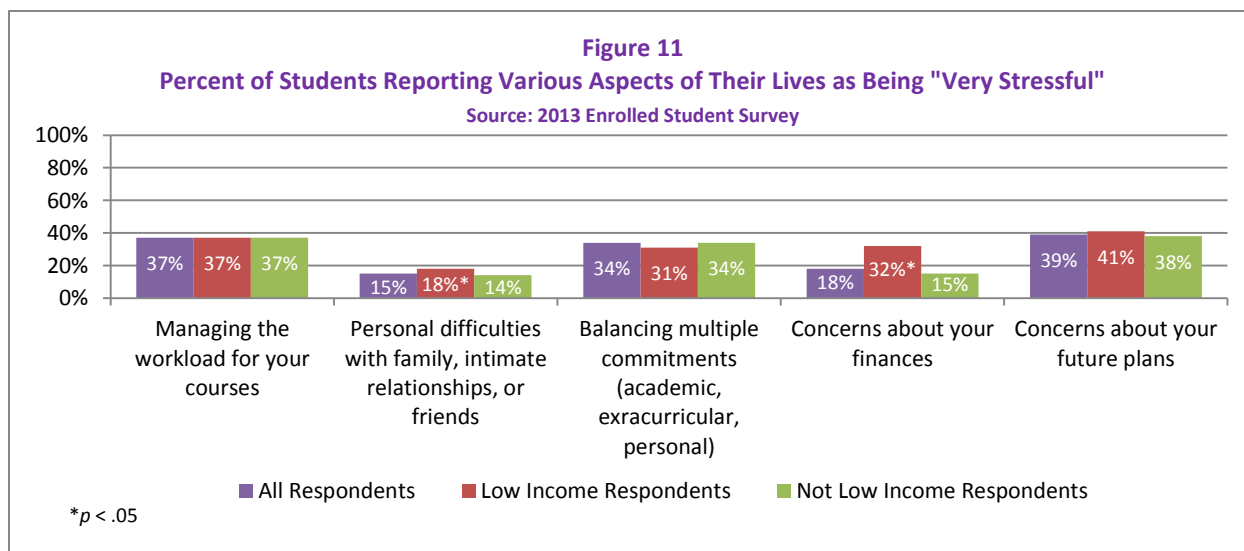
might not look as good or function as well as the materials of their peers.

“People from lower incomes don’t go to Norris to buy their books. We order them on Amazon. So it takes a week or two for my books to come in. It was two weeks before I had everything.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“I didn’t have my reading material for a good portion of the fall quarter. That was very stressful and something I was not prepared for whatsoever.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“This past quarter I found interlibrary loan. I have about 75% of my reading material through interlibrary loan which is a wonderful invention.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Just my last quarter of college, I realized the power of the interlibrary loan. I was disappointed in how often, at least in half of my classes each quarter, I would buy the book at the beginning and then we wouldn’t end up using it and they wouldn’t even say anything or they would say, ‘Sorry about that.’ The course packs: a lot of the time, I wouldn’t really need it. Sometimes it wasn’t actually necessary for the class. I had to pay for it. It was kind of frustrating. It happened a lot.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)



"I don't buy a lot of my books—which is probably a bad thing. If I buy them, I always buy the edition before the edition I am supposed to and then check homework with other people to figure out what the numbers are. Textbooks are too expensive to buy. It can be annoying. There are some textbooks, especially when classes are in sequences where two books cover the same material. Just different teachers decide to use different books. It seems like a waste to have two very similar books." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

"Interlibrary loan is where I have gotten the majority of my books this year as a whole. The only down side is that it takes about a week or so—a week and a half—to get them. That can be stressful when you don't have your materials at first." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I bought an econ book for \$120 and then the professor never used it." (Ryan Scholar)

"In Medill, there is a lot of equipment we need, like state-of-the-art computers. Medill basically says that. We need really good audio recorders that cost about \$100. One of the things that they don't say we need is an expensive camera and expensive camera equipment so my dad got a cheaper one. And walking into my first multimedia class, about half the class did have really good cameras. Although the teacher said she wasn't going to grade us on the quality of the work with our cameras, when you have your pictures compared with someone else's pictures whose taking them on a \$500 camera, they are very different. Our teacher was really good about loaning us her equipment, but she wasn't going to loan us really expensive equipment either. I know that Medill gives out financial aid for equipment, but it's just loans. I already have a lot of loans. I don't want to get more loans." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"You get this letter in April/May that says, 'OK, you're in Medill now. This is all the technology you have to buy—a \$2,000 laptop, \$100 software, \$600 for Photoshop.' I saw that and I thought, 'Oh my god, I'm going to have to switch out of journalism. I can't afford any of this.' I knew I had a scholarship that was paying my tuition, but I thought they aren't going to pay for

all this stuff. It's a lot of stuff they expect you to have for certain journalism classes. That was my one big scare I had before coming here. It eventually got worked out. I think they give you some extra aid at the beginning of your freshman year at Medill." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Books. I didn't realize how much books actually cost and how much you needed to set aside for it. But also that there were alternatives to buying books. [For example,] you can go to the library to get them. Oftentimes you can survive without them. Interlibrary loans. Knowing those resources would have been really really helpful." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I understand textbook costs, but sometimes there were extra items required by the professor that were in almost the \$100 price range that to me seemed rather unnecessary." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

I can't always afford to buy the class materials and that makes it harder, too. It makes it harder to study. It makes it harder to do the homework. You might have an hour window where you can borrow someone's textbook to do the work and it might take more than that." (Student from Random Low Income Group)

And, true or not, students from lower income backgrounds think it is less expensive to live off campus.

"I wish someone had told me about the living situation. I stayed on campus for two years and finally moved off junior year. I realized how much cheaper and affordable it is. I should have done that sophomore year. It would have saved me—and Northwestern—a lot of money." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I live off campus now and so I have a lot more money than I did when I lived on campus because it's cheaper. My freshman and sophomore years I worked all the time at my jobs. And now I have more money so I don't work as much. And I get to eat out more. My quality of life has really improved. I've been able to be more involved in things and not constantly at work." (QuestBridge Scholar)

Theme #12: When faced with a problem or an issue at Northwestern—academic, social, or personal—students from low income family backgrounds turn to a wide variety of people for support, advice and counsel. Leading the list are other students.

To whom do students turn in times of need? People who understand first-hand what it means to come from a low income family background and people who will listen. Leading the list of people they turn to for support are other students.

“My priest. It was unbelievable what was happening at home. My whole world was falling apart. That whole week, I just really wanted to go back home. Like I didn’t belong here. We had a really long discussion and from there on I can go back to him for anything.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“For me, I haven’t gone to any adviser for support. I mainly voice what’s happening to friends and every now and then, my fraternity. Most of the advice they give sucks. But it is nice to joke around with them. It helps you realize there is a logical approach if you step out of your emotions and do what makes sense. Realize it’s really not that bad.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“When it comes to academics, I’m always one to go to an adviser and literally be like, ‘This is what’s going on. I have an idea of what I should do, but I want to see what you have to say. What do you think is the best alternative?’ With academics, it’s really easy to go to an adviser and lay out what the problem is. They can help me solve it.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Something I found really helpful at Northwestern was talking to people that are older than me. When I was a freshman, talking to the juniors and seniors and seeing what they have done.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I really had a hard time my freshman year. My adviser was the person I went to and he helped me sort out whether this program was right for me. And we ultimately decided that it wasn’t. But I’m really glad he was there to listen to me

and help me figure out exactly what I wanted to do with my life.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“For me, its mentors outside of Northwestern. I’ve met people from national organizations that have been really helpful to me. In the IE [Engineering] Department, some of the advisers were really willing to listen. Our department head is awesome. I’m pretty sure she gets a knock on her door every five minutes because everyone loves her. They should clone her.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“For me, it’s definitely my friends. I turn to them for academic and personal support, especially my friends who I met through Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, probably because we have that religious context [in common]. In RTVF, we have a lot of collaborative projects, so for academic things, I turn to people in my major.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I’ve found various mentors in different departments here at Northwestern. There’s Tracey [staff member] in CSI. There are a lot of people in MSA that I know I can go whether it’s a social issue or I don’t know what class to take.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“I live in Jones and on my floor there is a mix of premed majors with students from QuestBridge and a whole bunch of people I met during the summer program. They are representative of me, in a sense. Whenever I have a problem, I just go to them and whine a little bit. They give me advice or they help me out. Those are the people I go to. The attributes they have: they are similar to me and we know a lot about each other’s backgrounds. I always have someone to go to, someone to complain to. (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Freshman year in McCormick was one of the most humbling experiences. I wouldn’t have survived if it hadn’t been for my network of people that I had from EXCEL . . . and NSBE. Work

in groups with people. Study with people.” (Ryan Scholar)

“It’s usually been a SESP professor that I turn to. Part of that comes from the fact that most of them are in the field of teaching or have experience teaching so they know what it’s like to deal with ‘humans.’ They know how to relate. They know how to interact. They have been the people I am most comfortable approaching.” (Ryan Scholar)

“For me, it’s the fellows we have in PARC. I love PARC even though it is a ‘crap hole.’ It’s a really small community and we went through a hell of a time in September together. Our assistant master—she’s a grad student in the history department—and she just the best. She is so easy to talk to. Just the faculty that come and hang out with us. Like an hour ago we had ‘master’s tea’ where we ate brownies and drank tea. That is where we chat about issues and stuff. We’re all really close. I do feel I can trust



them because of what happened to Harsha at the beginning of the year. They were so ‘there’ for us. The res college system is great in that sense.” (Ryan Scholar)

“Through University Christian Fellowship, they have an adult campus minister. Through this community I have been connected to a lot of older women, people who actually live here. These adults can be there for me right away. I had a church family who adopted me. The connection to older people—and just knowing that someone was close by if something went really wrong was really important.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

First generation students are less likely to turn to parents because they recognize their parents don’t understand the college experience.

“My friends in student groups. They have the most in common with me. But I found my sophomore year that I wouldn’t necessarily want to share my day-to-day anxieties with my mom because she would just worry. She doesn’t have a super good context for what going away to college would be like. For example, that a high level of anxiety is actually normal. She probably would have thought that any anxiety would be a cause for concern and she should be worried about me and checking in on me more. I have backed away from confiding in my parents about simple things.” (Pell Group Senior)

“My parents have no idea what I am going through.” (Pell Group Senior)

“A lot of my friends might go to a parent or something like that: advice about their major or whatever it is. But I feel I would ever approach my mom with these kinds of things because she didn’t go to college. She doesn’t really know how a lot of stuff works. She thinks this looks like Hogwarts. That is a weird disconnect sometimes with my friends. Only my close friends know my background. This is what makes me feel separate from peers at times. They have that there. They can go to a family member who’s been through a university experience and has a really well-paying job and knows the path. I don’t have that.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

Theme #13: The need for additional support dominated the suggestions for how we can improve/enhance the Northwestern experience for students who come from low income family backgrounds.

What more could be done to enhance the overall experience for students from low income family backgrounds? Students' suggestions all focused on the need for more support: supportive people, an office dedicated to working with students from low income backgrounds, and additional funding that would enable them to participate more fully in the Northwestern experience. Here is how they described it.

■ Include socioeconomic issues in the ongoing conversation at Northwestern about diversity.

"There's a lot of privilege on this campus and a lot of people who come from high places. It's hard to navigate when that is such a big population. If there was a way somehow for them to understand what that means and what population of students at Northwestern are from lower socioeconomic statuses. Just so they could understand that everyone is not like them. Not everyone goes to Turkey or Aruba for spring break. Some of us do go to the malls for spring break and that's it. I would feel more accepted on campus if I thought more people were more understanding. Everybody does not have the things or resources that they do. Some way to organically facilitate that discussion." (Ryan Scholar)

"Now with the big push for diversity on campus, awareness of socioeconomic diversity should be part of the campus conversation. Recognizing it doesn't matter where you are from. Everyone's situation is different. I don't feel comfortable talking about finances, but I've had to bring it up because I have been offended by what people have said. It's very easy to stereotype and make assumptions about where people are from." (Pell Grant Senior)

"We need to talk more about it. It [income status] can't be a taboo topic." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"The rhetoric that is spoken about people from lower socioeconomic statuses. I don't tell people

often that I'm a QB scholar. Having a resource office would be wonderful. Some kind of education that educates people that all people are equal—much of the problem is institutionalized." (QuestBridge Scholar)

■ Identify a staff member/office charged with providing support and information to students who come from low income family backgrounds.

"There should be a resource center—a place to do homework together. A place like the MCC." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"A person that would be there to be there for you when you are going through this new stuff that you never really expected would be extremely valuable. I could have definitely used someone like that. There are people who go to college who know absolutely nothing. They are very intelligent, but their knowledge of the world is very limited because they come from a family who can't provide them with that information." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"Students of color or LGBTQ and who also get Pell grants have somewhere to go: Black House, MCC, LGBT Resource Center. But students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are not minority students or LGBTQ need an office that works with low income students. Where am I supposed to go? I didn't have a place to go. Where do I fit in? There should be resources in place for low income students and not treat low income as something that goes a lot with other things." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"Everyone at my high school was the same socioeconomic level so every knew about my background. We need a resource center that understands us." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"We need an office to go to, a resource where someone is looking out for us." (QuestBridge Scholar)

"[We need] someone to educate us because we—I didn't know the many opportunities and the many ways of paying things, and the many ways of achieving this." (Pell Grant Senior)

"I feel as though the majority of the people coming from these economic backgrounds will have somewhat of a case similar to mine whether their families have some problems or they come from very like a foreign family where information isn't well received. I feel as though—a person that would be there just to provide you—and kind of be there for you when you're going through all this like new stuff that you never really expected—would be extremely valuable. I could have definitely used someone like that during my first weeks here and just because there are some people out there who go to college that absolutely know nothing. They are very intelligent, but their knowledge of the world is very limited and that's primarily due to the fact that they probably come from some family that that won't be capable of providing them that information." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Identify someone in the Financial Aid office who could serve as an ongoing liaison to students who come from low income family backgrounds.

"Having some sort of available resource about helping us fill out FAFSA forms. I never know where I can go. It's hard to ask people because I found out a lot of people don't fill them out." (Ryan Scholar)

"Some kind of low socioeconomic status financial adviser . . . someone that could understand where we are coming from . . . someone that understands your background . . . someone that understands what you are trying to do exactly." (Ryan Scholar)

"An emphasis of meeting with financial aid. Scheduled. Twice a quarter. Meet with a financial aid counselor about these things. A checkup." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"Financial aid is the only way I can be here. The fact that right now, I don't know if I will be here next year because of financial aid, that's terrifying. When you entire college career banks

on it and then we don't find out until the middle of end of June. I know that you can go into the office and you can sit down with them and they can help you with the idea of it, but I wish you could actually go in and say, 'This is my situation. Can you help me see that I'll actually be able to stay here?' Here are the scholarships you are most likely going to get. Here is the money you will most likely have to pay. Just those things where they actually sit down with you and explain, 'This is exactly where you are at financially.' That's a huge stress for me." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"Someone to go to when your financial situation changes drastically. What do I do?" (Ryan Scholar)

"Someone to talk to about how to get unexpected expenses covered." (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Identify additional sources of funding for students who come from low income family backgrounds that will enable them to participate fully in the Northwestern experience and centralize information about grants that are already available.

"If the University had some way to talk to those students that are receiving this grant . . . if there is some kind of a travel plan—a way to accommodate certain stresses. Maybe an emergency happens at home. Maybe just an info session on . . . giving students who don't have access to home more of a plan to facilitate travel home whether it be airport easy deals or things like that." (Pell Grant Freshman)

"I wish there was a program to apply for 'pocket money' so I could take advantage of things that the normal Northwestern student can." (Pell Grant Seniors)

"Northwestern does offer grants, but they don't talk about it. There are a lot of conferences and trainings that people could go to, but we can't afford it. But Northwestern has all of this wonderful delicious money that they could just let us apply for." (Pell Grant Senior)

"The University could do a better job of letting us know that there are grants available. I've had

great experience getting these grants and they have really helped me. I was even able to go abroad with some of them.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“Help with summer opportunities—internships that I didn’t hear about until late in Spring quarter and that always make it difficult to apply for SIGP grants and things like that. There were different abroad programs in the summer that I just didn’t know about until later. I since I always had to be sure I had a grant or paying job in the summer—that set me behind.” (Pell Grant Senior)

“Make student groups and events be free so I don’t have to worry about money.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“There should be scholarships for more activities at NU.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“We need resources that would keep me from being an ‘other.’” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Make it easier to study abroad.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“There should be a presentation about where to go for what—where to get a grant, etc. I got it from QB. Resources are there, just not well-known. You don’t know how to seek them out.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Why isn’t there money set aside, like \$1000 per student, for a laptop, travel grant, etc.? There should be initial grants when you really need something.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Further extension of summer internship program (SIGP) and the new student activity paying ‘thing’ is awesome. Open them up to even more students.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Subsidize things so we don’t have to pay everything all the time. Anyway to subsidize anything is always helpful. Anyway to help every day, like with books, anything.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Develop of a mentoring program for students from low income family backgrounds.

“A group on campus for low income students—information about how to save money. I’m learning now about all these opportunities I could have had.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“A mentoring program—a senior on financial aid in your major to give you advice.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“I wish Northwestern could be behind an organization where we could have free courses so we knew what we should be buying. Talk to students. If we can’t talk to our parents about what classes to choose, we could talk to upperclassmen with similar backgrounds. It would be really awesome.” (Ryan Scholar)

“Upperclass students do it in an unofficial way, but if there was a way for them to ‘officially’ be mentors apart from being a PA. They could be with students from similar backgrounds to help. There are a lot of upperclassmen who do feel passionately about that, who want to reach out. They do in small ways, but there is no official system.” (Ryan Scholar)

And there were more specific suggestions.

“Make it easier to go home.” (Pell Grant Freshman)

“Living in a single isn’t covered.” (QuestBridge Scholar)

“Dining hall meal plan—if you purchase every meal separately, it would be cheaper than a meal plan. The 13-week meal plan is the worst one.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

“Be able to redeem your Northwestern meals at places like Burger King or Panera. So when your friends want to go out for dinner randomly on a Wednesday night, you could use your Northwestern meals. I’m sure that can’t happen for many reasons.” (Student from Random Low Income Focus Group)

Conclusions

We learned much through the focus groups about how students from low income family backgrounds experience Northwestern. Some of what we learned was encouraging; some was discouraging. But what we learned was consistent with what is emerging in the literature about low income, first generation college students, particularly those that attend highly selective colleges like Northwestern. A brief summary of some of the findings that are emerging is presented below.

1. In a 2011 study conducted at Northwestern University, Johnson, Richeson, and Finkel (2011) found that “possessing a lower SES [socioeconomic] social identity in an elite university environment can manifest in heightened concerns about the central domains in that environment: namely, academic achievement” and “because they must manage their concerns about academic competency, lower SES [socioeconomic] students in an elite university context [are often] more depleted after engaging in self-presentation that is related to academic achievement.”
2. Ostrove & Long (2007) found that SES [socioeconomic] status influenced social and emotional well-being in the context of higher education.
3. Students from lower SES [socioeconomic] backgrounds are more concerned about their academic fit and competency in the elite university environment (Granfield, 1991).
4. Ryan and Sackrey (1984) reported that a sense of alienation—a sense that they do not belong—is not an uncommon psychological effect of a student’s move from a working class background to the academy.
5. Themes of alienation and unpreparedness are echoed in Wentworth and Peterson’s (2001) case studies of women from working class background attending a prestigious New England college.
6. Bourdieu (1986) introduced the concepts of “cultural” and “social” capital, the lack of which can influence the college experience for students from lower socioeconomic family backgrounds experience in college. Cultural capital refers to specialized or insider knowledge which is not taught in school, such as knowledge of high culture, and to educational credential. Social capital is comprised of contacts and memberships in networks which can be used for personal or professional gain.
7. Students from low SES [socioeconomic] backgrounds who attend four-year colleges and universities work more, study less, are less involved, and report lower GPAs than their high SES peers (Walpole, 2003).
8. The academic literature on the lives and experiences of working-class women and men of all racial backgrounds in the United States who attend college, especially as first-generation college students, consistently demonstrates that such students are at a disadvantage with respect to what they know about postsecondary education, have a more difficult transition from high school to college, and are less likely to persist to graduation than their middle-class peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Walpole, 2003).
9. In a study exploring student-faculty interaction in research universities, Kim and Sax (2009) concluded that as student’s social class gets higher, so does frequency of communicating or interacting with faculty. They also found that first-generation college students tend to less frequently assist faculty with research for course credit, communicate with faculty outside of class, and interact with faculty during lecture class sessions than non-first-generation students.

So where do we go from here? Northwestern University's commitment to diversity—including socioeconomic class—is clearly described on the Diversity website (<http://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/leadership-commitment.html>).

It is within this context—and considering the thirteen themes that emerged from the focus groups—that we conclude this report with five recommendations to improve the overall Northwestern experience for undergraduate students who come from low income family backgrounds.

Statement from the President and Provost

Northwestern University is committed to excellent teaching, innovative research, and the personal and intellectual growth of its students in a diverse academic environment. The foundation of this pursuit is made possible only by the distinct collection of students, faculty, and staff that converge at the university. It is through this mutual exchange of ideas, experiences and perspectives that sustains the depth of our learning.

True diversity is defined not only as differences in individual backgrounds, personal identities, intellectual approaches, and demographics; it is also the removal of barriers and the creation of space that allow individuals to fully engage in the life of the university. As individuals of our own unique identities—be it comprised of faith, race, sexuality, gender, disabilities, socioeconomic class, etc. — we each offer an irreplaceable opportunity to examine the issues before us from a newly encountered dimension.

The commitment to providing these opportunities equally to each and every member of our community is the force behind creating a diverse, ideal Northwestern University.

It is our responsibility to challenge the members of our community (students, faculty, staff, and alumni) to engage differences as strengths in order to improve campus culture and to develop an environment that ensures equality of access, opportunity, participation and representation. Northwestern University reaffirms and renews its commitment to diversity and equity. As a community we have a large length to cover to strengthen and sustain this pledge, but in order to remain ahead of the pace with modern society we will strive to support this enterprise as a piece of the foundation of our institution. And through fostering this ideal we hope to weave together the fabric of our community as dynamic, vibrant, and just—in order to foster the pursuit of each and every individual member of Northwestern University.

Only by exploring issues with people of different backgrounds and viewpoints can we challenge our assumptions, test our ideas and broaden our understanding of the world.

(<http://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/leadership-commitment.html>)

Recommendations

The recommendations listed below mirror those brought forward by the students in the focus groups. They describe five initiatives that would do much to provide much needed support, remove barriers, and create spaces that would allow students who come from low income family backgrounds to more fully engage in the Northwestern experience.

Include socioeconomic issues in the ongoing conversation at Northwestern about diversity.

Over the years, most of the conversation at Northwestern about diversity and inclusion has focused on the experiences of students from underrepresented minority groups. This is good and more than appropriate, but now it may be time to broaden that conversation to include other groups of students who may face unique challenges when it comes to fully engaging in the Northwestern experience. Students from low income family backgrounds are one of those groups.

Identify a staff member/office charged with providing support and information to students who come from low income family backgrounds.

By design, the number of undergraduate students at Northwestern who come from low income family backgrounds is increasing. The question is do we have sufficient resources and systems in place to adequately support these students during their transition to Northwestern, as well as during the four years they are with us? African American Student Affairs, Hispanic/Latino Student Affairs, and Asian/Asian American Student Affairs are three viable sources of support, but nearly a third of the undergraduate students who come from low income family backgrounds do not belong to these communities.

In the focus groups, students described gaps in the information they receive from Northwestern and/or academic advisors. The QuestBridge Scholars are quick to

describe how they are trying to fill that gap, meeting regularly with students from low income family backgrounds, sponsoring panel discussions, serving as mentors, helping answer questions about financial aid, etc. But is this their responsibility? An office/staff member designated to work with students from low income family backgrounds could do much to help with the transition from high school to college and provide support to students during their four years at Northwestern.

Moreover, this office could serve as a clearinghouse for other sources of support already available, including information about financial assistance for students wishing to attend a pre-Wildcat Welcome program, available grants (student activity, Posner, SIGP), emergency loan funds, etc.

This fall, ten students who are members of an organization called, Posse, joined the Northwestern community. Some of them—but not all of them—come from low income family backgrounds. The organizational structure of this program could serve as a model for how we could more effectively work with students from low income family backgrounds at Northwestern. They begin working with qualified high school students during their junior and senior year in high school, and then provide services designed to help with the transition from high school to college. Once on campus, Posse students meet regularly with a campus liaison and institutional mentors. Finally, career development is a key component of the experience.

Identify a contact in the Financial Aid office who would serve as an ongoing liaison with students who come from low income family backgrounds.

Students from low income family backgrounds are dependent on financial aid. Having a consistent contact in Financial Aid—someone who could specifically focus on the needs of students from low income

family backgrounds—would alleviate much frustration and stress.

■ Identify additional sources of funding for students who come from low income family backgrounds that will enable them to participate fully in the Northwestern experience and centralize information about grants that are already available.

Northwestern is to be commended for the financial resources that are already set aside for students who come from low income family backgrounds. Grants like the Posner Fellowship, the Summer Internship Grant Program (SIGP), the Weinberg student grants, and others, are enabling students from low income family backgrounds to engage in research and internship opportunities that they might not otherwise be able to participate in.

Centralizing information about these sources of financial assistance would be most helpful. And, of course, increasing financial support for these kinds of student activities would enable students from low income backgrounds to more fully engage in the Northwestern experience.

■ Develop of a mentoring program for students from low income family backgrounds.

In the focus groups, students spoke often about how helpful other students, especially older students were, in their transition and ongoing experience at Northwestern. Formalizing such a mentoring program would provide an additional layer of support for students from low income family backgrounds.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF CONCERNS SUBMITTED BY QUESTBRIDGE STUDENTS

List of Concerns:

- There is a lack of administrative acknowledgement or support to programs like Gates Millennium Scholars, Questbridge, and Great Neighbor Great University.
 - Providing a means for these students to get connected. A list for each other, a welcome reception, even a Facebook group. Some sort of safe space should be created.
 - Many freshmen from Whitney Young (17) for example don't even know each other and they all came from the same school.
- There is a perception throughout the Northwestern Community that students who get in through these programs are subpar intellectually. No suggestions for this at present, but changing the attitude of the community long term and providing communities for students short term is a goal.
 - Many students from the Great Neighbor program feel like when they reveal what school they came from it has a negative connotation here at Northwestern.
- Financial aid processes are difficult to navigate, difficult to find, and difficult to interpret.
 - Suggestions:
 - An itemized list of costs (more detailed) and aid package covering of that cost
 - More comprehensive/ consistent financial aid. You need to know far in advance what you will be expected to pay (>4 weeks, preferably budgeted at the beginning of the year per quarter)
 - Talk about the fluctuating costs per quarter in personal life as well as in tuition costs. It is important to make students aware of these changes in advance so they can budget and plan ahead of time and accordingly. For personal life concerns something as simple as a checklist could get students on the right track.
 - How to access stipends and transition to living off campus. Making this process more COMPREHENSIVE and INTERNAL.
 - Put an apartment finder/ guide together. This could be a work-study job. Alternatives to park Evanston and Evanston place and places outside of Evanston in general should be easier to find. Make commuting more feasible for students who would like to live in Chicago to save money.
 - Free food finder (we started one as a Google doc. but this could be made into an official app.)
 - The attitude of the employees at the financial aid office is often very hostile. Consider diversity training for them?
 - The office stresses it's trained to help and deal with low income students. A friend recently lost his Illinois state grant because the deadline was during the beginning of the semester schools but it was still summer for us here on the quarter system. He was not notified by financial aid, and due to the fact he lost the grant he asked financial aid if they could match it. People he spoke to literally told him all they could do for him is give him a loan and that since he wasn't a Questbridge match scholar it didn't really make him a Questbridge student. They were incredibly cold and unwilling to help him find other alternatives. He will probably be a commuter student next quarter due to all the expenses and financial aid is less for those students who commute.
 - The process for obtaining a monetary forward is extremely difficult right now. Many students wish to live off campus their junior and senior years both because their friends are doing so and because it is cheaper. For students with housing stipends it is difficult to obtain the money to pay for their September rent using Northwestern's current

system. Currently students must obtain a short term cash advance or loan and travel to several different buildings across campus to obtain that loan (limited to \$500 at a time so a student has to repeat this process two days to pay their rent and utilities most of the time). Students cannot access their full housing stipend until the end of September when school starts.

- Upon Acceptance:
 - Allow for students to become aware of each other's existence in a scholarship program by giving them a welcome letter and a list of contacts into their program. Money is taboo at Northwestern and it's difficult to connect with low-income students if you feel obligated not to talk about income at all.
 - Most Gates Millennium students have no idea others like them exist.
 - Admissions did not provide a list of these students to anyone, QuestBridge provided me with the list of match scholars.
 - This year's QuestBridge freshmen identify their closest friends and the people they most confide in as other QuestBridge students.
 - Provide ways for funding a pre-orientation experience for students. Make it clear that this is provided with financial aid and is an option for students if they would like to attend.
 - Most programs don't advertise financial aid, or maybe even provide it. I strongly advocated the accessibility of financial aid to all the QuestBridge students I knew before school started and this year we had the largest number of QB students participate in pre-orientation programs to date. Unfortunately since I only knew QB students, I was unable to identify Gates or Chicago scholar students about this opportunity. Knowing fellow counselors in other programs, close to no Gates or Chicago scholar students participated in pre orientation programs.
 - Have a checklist with deadlines for pre-Northwestern materials. This should be in print and email since many students may not have a computer or internet access at home.
 - Many students had to go to the library to check their email; many students that didn't live near a public library that provided internet had trouble checking it all together. Since incoming students are bombarded with emails from all different departments of NU, they are unsure of when certain things are due and the overall picture of if they are getting everything they need done. One list of due dates and to do list attached to the welcome letter would be incredibly helpful, instead of the student having to figure out everything when they arrive for welcome week.
- Wildcat welcome:
 - work study reform
 - Graph for pay and skills required for each job
 - Alternative ways to make money (Kellogg Studies, Psychology Studies, etc.)
 - Make sure that work study fair does NOT overlap with other important wildcat welcome events (i.e. activities fair) as is often the case. This makes for a divide between Northwestern students from day one and can prevent work study students from becoming active members of the wider NU community.
 - Presentation for resources
 - Make it clear to students that they have the following: free health insurance (to the point of ER), reduced ER pricing, free counseling sessions, free tutoring

- Many students have grown up without any type of insurance and going to the doctor when they're sick is just not something they internalized. Going to the doctor is usually correlated with paying a lot of money and if they don't know it's free for them to receive treatment they might not even consider it an option. This negatively affects their health, grades, and overall well-being at the university.
- Advising which is special
 - What sorts of careers are there? → What does an analyst even do sorts of questions. Many students will not be aware of the sorts of jobs a college degree can afford them. They will see: lawyer, doctor, teacher, and engineer but beyond that they may not have heard of the other jobs available to them. This may add a stress to succeed at something they do not actually enjoy.
 - What should I do as a freshman to obtain the job I want as a senior?
 - What sorts of majors lead to the job I want?
 - Adding a presentation from all the schools
 - Especially SESP and SoC
 - Having both the advisers from each school come and give presentations and having current students speak
 - A lot of these students don't at first buy into the idea of changing from premed to social policy and still think they will get a job when they graduate. They also feel like this is a "failure" in some way.
 - Help them realize that changing their majors doesn't have to decide their future. There are careers besides doctors and lawyers.
 - Panel of social policy student going into consulting, comm studies student doing finance, etc.
- A comprehensive technology tutorial over many useful programs including but not limited to: dropbox, Google calendar, Caesar, Gmail, Google drive.
 - Too many professors and even PA's expect students to be proficient in these software programs. For many students it may be the first time ever using the software, and for most the first time even having a laptop.
- Better diversity training for professors and more directed advising in general (has been seen in McCormick and Weinberg experiences)
 - Freshmen advisers in WCAS are poorly trained. Have some sort of way of them knowing what backgrounds students are coming from (Low income, high barrier, etc.) and being able to point these students in the right direction of resources if certain questions or concerns arise.
 - Professors with in the schools may make careless assumptions about student backgrounds or assume privilege from their students making low income students in the class feel excluded. This can be as careless as assuming a nuclear family type household to telling students that they are rich.
- Broadening BRIDGE program.
 - Many like EXCEL (engineering) and BioExcel (premed) are African American and Latino based and hurt low income students that might not identify with those racial groups but would still definitely benefit. Those programs favor wealthy minority students that probably don't need a summer enrichment program as much as other low income students, regardless of race.

- Adding the equivalent of Math 212 for chemistry, closing gaps between high schools and backgrounds is a huge struggle for many students freshman year. Especially in chemistry where there is no real “beginning” course.
 - Students who may have a “chemistry” course on their transcript are not necessarily prepared for the rigor that they see in the classroom. A “chemistry” course at my school was very simple, especially compared to the rigorous AP and pre-AP courses that other students in the class had participated in.
- Obtaining Textbooks and resources:
 - Books:
 - Allow for students to donate books to the library so they can be put on reserve and others can access them.
 - Make it easier for students to use books that are out of edition. Have teachers post problems and figures from the books or have books (again on reserve) that are specifically for photocopying pages or using in the library.
 - Further expansion of the interloan program
 - Matlab, Minitab, books and other McCormick materials are really expensive in general making these resources more publicly available (with appropriate plug-ins) can go a long way for students.
- Once at Northwestern: (student life)
 - Put a stress on internships → tracks for different careers should be clear.
 - Possible table of what different students choose to do with their summers (PreMeds, Prelaw, PreBusiness, PreGrad etc.)
 - Compile a resume book
 - This same stress should be put on fellowships → It’s like a scholarship for graduate school
 - Show research opportunities as an alternative to work study especially since many of these pay
 - Find a way to dispense advice from current to future students
 - Subsidize A&O and other events so that the barrier to access and stratification is less → Event tickets on your wildcard
 - SEF (Student Events Fund) at Harvard provides
 - Emory heavily subsidizes almost all events for every student.
 - Making DM a possibility for low income students → currently this really isn’t an option and I’m not sure how to make it one. Perhaps by having more meaningful fundraisers throughout the year or setting up a match price with the university. The entry fee is \$400 right now.
 - Greek life has a HUGE barrier to entry and a ton of costs to participate (fees etc.) Working with sororities to make more financial aid available may help this. This seems to be a problem more with sororities than with fraternities.
 - Sororities also have a point system which rewards those who spend more money on events. This makes it almost impossible to compete with wealthier peers to live in the sorority house since it is a point based system.
 - There is also a substantial amount of classism which takes place during recruiting.

APPENDIX B

COPY OF EMAIL INVITATION SENT TO STUDENTS RANDOMLY SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUPS

Email Invitation
Exploring the Effect of Socioeconomic Status on the Northwestern Experience
IRB # STU00079319
Spring 2013

Dear &FIRSTNAME;,

The Division of Student Affairs is committed to working with other departments, faculty, staff and students across the University to foster a nurturing campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. To that end, this spring we are exploring how socioeconomic status affects the undergraduate student experience. What we learn will inform the decisions we will make about the programs and services we can and should provide. As we move forward, I want to make sure I hear from as many students as possible. I hope you will help me achieve this goal.

You are one of 60 undergraduate students who are *[Questbridge Scholars, Ryan Scholars, receiving a Pell Grant]* and who have been randomly selected to participate in a focus group from [5:30 - 7:00 pm, on day, date, location].

During this hour and a half, we will be asking you and your peers a number of questions about your experiences at Northwestern and how your socioeconomic background may be affecting those experiences. We also want to hear your ideas for how the University could better assist students in the transition from high school to college, academically, socially, and in other ways.

Because the focus group takes place over the dinner hour, we will provide you with **a light supper** and, at the conclusion of the discussion, all participants will receive **a \$15 gift certificate to Starbucks**.

If you are willing to participate in this focus group, simply click "reply" to this message and tell us you are coming. Or send a message to sa-assessment@northwestern.edu. Either way, we'd like to hear from you as soon as possible. You will receive a confirmation email and, if you provide your cell phone number, we will call you the night before as a reminder.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to help us learn from your experience.

Sincerely,

Patricia Telles-Irvin
Vice President for Student Affairs

APPENDIX C

CONSENTING PROCESS, FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS

Exploring the Effect of Socioeconomic Background on the Northwestern Experience
Consenting Process, Focus Group Script and Questions
IRB # STU00079319
Spring 2013

Script & Questions

Welcome to one of five focus groups we are conducting this week exploring the effect of socioeconomic background on the Northwestern experience. This is one of five focus groups we are conducting this week.

My name is *[insert name of facilitator]*. I am the *[insert title of facilitator]*.

Assisting me is *[insert name of co-facilitator]* who is a staff member in *[insert name of department]*.

The purpose of the Spring focus groups is to (1) explore the effect of socioeconomic background on the Northwestern experience; and (2) to listen to students' ideas for how Northwestern could better foster a nurturing campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming for all students.

You are one of 275 students randomly selected from all undergraduate students at Northwestern who are Questbridge or Ryan Scholars and/or receiving a Pell Grant. In this group you are all *[Questbridge Scholars, Ryan Scholars, seniors, freshmen, or students receiving a Pell Grant]*.

Thank you for agreeing to come tonight.

In the next hour and a half we're going to ask you a number of questions about your college decision making process, the transition from home/high school to college, and your academic and social experiences at Northwestern. There are no right or wrong answers. Your experiences may be the same as or different from the other students in the group, but we want to hear them all.

Finally, we're anxious to hear how you think Northwestern could better foster a nurturing campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming for all students. Your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence and, while we hope you will free to share your thoughts, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to and you may leave the group at any time without penalty of any kind.

In order to help us remember your suggestions and experiences, we will be tape recording the focus group. To protect your privacy, we won't turn on the tape recorder until everyone has introduced themselves and, as you can see, we are on a first name basis only tonight. Your name will not be associated with the focus group results nor will your responses affect, in any way, your academic standing here at Northwestern.

The tape recording will be used only in the writing of the focus group report. Furthermore, the recording will be destroyed (or erased) once the final report has been submitted.

All of this information is repeated on the Consent Form you received when you came into the room. Would you take a few minutes and review the information again and, if you agree to continue your participation in the focus group and the tape recording, please sign and date the form. When you are done signing the form, please return one copy to *[name of note taker]* and there is a second copy for you to take with you.

[Allow time for students to review the information on Focus Group Consent Form and to sign it before proceeding to the introductions.]

Thank you. Let's begin.

[Do NOT turn on the tape recorder yet.]

1. In addition to your first name, would each of you briefly introduce yourselves in any way that you feel comfortable? For example, you might want to tell us your school and/or major, your hometown, your year in school, a student group in which you are most involved, and/or your racial/ethnic background . . . whatever you want.

[Turn on tape recorder.]

2. For this first question, we'd like you to think back to your junior or senior year in high school. When thinking about going to college, what was important to you? What criteria did you consider in the decision making process? Was there anyone who was particularly helpful during this time period? What help do you wish you'd had?
 - a. In the end, why did you choose Northwestern?
3. Much has been written and studied about the transition from home/high school to college. What was your transition like? For example, after you were accepted, what information from Northwestern did you find helpful? Where or from whom did you get this information? What information didn't you get that would have been helpful?
 - a. What were some of the challenges you faced as you were getting ready to leave home for Northwestern?
 - b. In the end, how did your socioeconomic background influence the transition from high school to college, if at all?
4. Now think about Wildcat Welcome. What initial programs, activities or experiences at Northwestern made you feel welcome or unwelcome at Northwestern? Again, how did your socioeconomic background influence those initial experiences?

The next few questions are about your academic experience at Northwestern and a little later, we will be asking some questions about your out-of-class experiences. But let's start with your academics.

5. What did you expect from your undergraduate academic experience? Consider what you expected from your coursework, interactions with faculty, number of hours you expected to study, and so on.
 - a. And now looking back, how closely did your expectations match your actual academic experience?
6. What has your experience been like in the classroom—academically? How well prepared were you for the academic rigor here at Northwestern? What's been easy for you? What have you struggled with?
 - a. How would you describe your personal contact or interaction with faculty?
7. Describe your experience with academic advising in your school. For example, what were the strengths and weaknesses of the academic advising you received?

Now let's talk about your experiences out of the classroom.

8. Which out-of-class academic or extracurricular activities have occupied the most of your time and energy? Overall how satisfied have you been with the number of opportunities available to you outside the classroom? How has your socioeconomic background affected your participation in extracurricular activities, if at all?
9. In what settings—and to what degree—do you feel you belong at Northwestern University? Where and with whom do you feel most comfortable? For example, maybe you feel most comfortable with peers in a

particular class, or in a living situation, or some extracurricular activity. In other words, overall, do you feel you have found your place at Northwestern?

10. When you encounter a problem or an issue at Northwestern—academic, social, or personal—to whom do you turn for advice and counsel either here on campus or elsewhere? What personal attributes make this person or group of people understanding, helpful, and approachable?
11. Most of you are undoubtedly receiving some sort of financial aid from Northwestern. Describe your experiences applying for aid, actually receiving aid, and your interactions with the Financial Aid Office. What has gone well? What could be improved?
12. Finally, if money were no object, what resources and/or services would enhance the overall experience for students from socioeconomic backgrounds like yours? What more can we do to foster a nurturing campus climate that is inclusive and welcoming for all students, particularly students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

[Turn off tape recorder.]
Please give the students the \$15 Starbucks gift cards.