Multiprogram Longitudinal Evaluation of Nina Mason Pulliam Legacy Scholars Program

Annual Report: July 2003
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Executive Summary

Over 100 Nina Scholars will enroll at four partner institutions in Fall 2003, thus embodying and extending the living legacy of Nina Mason Pulliam. During its first two years the need-based scholarship program has demonstrated much promise and dedication to changing lives through educational opportunities. During this second year our evaluation has affirmed early signs of success and documented significant progress toward effective program implementation. We also have identified specific areas that require further attention.

The Nina Legacy Scholarship Program is a partnership joining the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust and four institutions of higher education in two states: Ivy Tech State College-Indianapolis (Ivy Tech); Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI); Arizona’s Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD); and Arizona State University (ASU). The Program serves nontraditional students whose personal commitments and financial circumstances would preclude a college education without substantial, long-term scholarship support. Benefits include full tuition and fees, a book allowance, an annual living stipend of $2,500, and extensive support services provided by program staff and their advisory councils.

The program encompasses three categories of scholars: adults, 25 years or older, with dependents in their family unit; college-age youths and adults with physical disabilities; and young adults, 18 to 25 years old, who have been raised in the child welfare system and are responsible for their own financial support (also referred to as foster-care youths). Applicants also must have demonstrated financial need, with priority given to those with incomes of 80 percent or less of the median annual income for the county in which they reside.

Each scholar cohort initially includes fifteen scholars at MCCCD, twelve at Ivy Tech, eight at ASU, and five at IUPUI. The first cohort of 40 students enrolled in Fall 2001 and 107 will enroll in Fall 2003. This multiprogram longitudinal evaluation is an integral element in the overall Nina Scholars Program. Its dual goals are to provide ongoing feedback to program staff to strengthen and refine the program and to contribute to a national scholarship model.

Multiple Measures of Success

There are multiple and diverse measures of scholar success, ranging from retention and completion, to academic performance and progress, to enhanced self-confidence and improved life circumstances. The overall program success rate for Cohorts 1 and 2 reveals high levels of accomplishment. (See Figure 1.) This “success rate” refers to the

Figure 1. Overall Program Success Rates
proportion of scholars retained plus those who have completed the program through graduation or moving to another educational institution. In the first two years of the program three scholars earned their AA degrees and one completed the LPN. The coming academic year will bring the first Nina Scholars to graduate with four-year degrees as well as additional Nina Scholars graduating with two-year degrees.

The great majority of scholars have demonstrated academic progress, and the academic performance of Cohort 2 scholars was statistically greater than a comparison group of peers who were eligible applicants not selected for the program. Members of Cohort 2 were retained through the spring semester at a significantly higher rate, attempted more credit hours, completed a higher percentage of those credit hours and earned higher grades than their comparison group.

Cohort 1 scholars were also retained at a higher rate than their comparison group, attempted more credit hours, and achieved higher grades, but not at statistically significant levels. Cohort 2’s higher level of academic achievement may be attributed to increasingly deliberate and effective selection processes that seek to identify scholars who are more uniformly college-ready. Members of the 2003 selection committees expressed confidence that the newest cohort also will achieve high levels of academic performance, retention and graduation.

Most scholars remain in the program, but there are others for whom this is not possible. Within specified guidelines, the scholarship program permits replacement of original cohort members with alternates chosen by the advisory councils. This facilitates the replenishment of scholar cohorts and fullest use of resources.

Although the majority of scholars who left the program were replaced by new scholars who are succeeding, it is instructive to examine the path of the 40 individuals originally chosen for Nina Scholar Cohort 1. At the end of this academic year, eight of the initial 30 MCCCD scholars, 27 percent, had not persisted in the program. Six of the eight were foster-care youths, one was physically disabled, and one was an adult with dependent children. Four of the 16 ASU scholars, 25 percent, had not persisted. Three were adults with dependent children and one was a foster-care youth. Three of the 24 Ivy Tech scholars, 12.5 percent, had not persisted; all were adults with dependent children. One of the 10 IUPUI scholars, a foster-care youth, had not persisted.

For all four Nina programs, eight scholars who did not continue, or 50 percent, were foster-care youths. This is disproportionately high compared to their 16 percent among the total scholars in the first two cohorts. Seven scholars, or 44 percent of those who were not retained, were adults with dependent children, a disproportionately low number in light of their 65 percent among the total scholars; and one scholar, or six percent of those who were retained, was physically disabled, also disproportionately low compared to 19 percent among the scholars.

**Scrutinizing Scholar Attrition**

Scholar attrition refers to scholars who (1) have been dismissed from the program for failing to maintain program and/or academic eligibility or (2) have withdrawn from the program despite their continuing eligibility. This latter component reflects an inability to overcome academic and/or personal obstacles despite continuing academic or scholarship eligibility. Evaluation
terminology frequently labels this as “student persistence,” with an emphasis on student actions and decisions, while using the term “student retention” to refer to actions taken and decisions made by educational institutions and scholarship programs. Finally, scholar completion reflects scholars who (1) graduate or (2) transfer out of the program to another academic institution, including the “Nina Universities,” IUPUI and ASU.

Diverse and complex factors have contributed to the scholar attrition rate. The large majority of withdrawals were not primarily due to poor academic performance but, rather, must be attributed to extremely difficult life circumstances. The very conditions that made them eligible candidates for the Nina program undermined scholar efforts and made continuation untenable. Continuing with the example of the first 40 Nina Scholars, six of the 16 individuals who left the program, 38 percent, did experience major academic problems (four of the six earned no credit hours), but even in these cases nonacademic factors contributed heavily to the lack of persistence.

Some individuals who did not persist were never fully integrated into the program, either because they did not hold realistic images of the necessary commitment level or, in at least one case, because the open-ended “freedom” of college life outweighed efforts to establish the discipline essential for success. For some, especially reentry adults, the necessary lifestyle change, including a decrease in work hours and income, was too great to be sustained. Especially for the foster-care youths, the lack of a supportive network of family and friends played a major role in their difficulties. Several not only suffered from the lack of support but also were subjected to debilitating demands such as primary responsibility for a younger sibling or interference from a previously absent parent. Physical or mental health crises and family financial problems were particularly confounding: one scholar who withdrew was living in a homeless shelter and two found it impossible to continue after becoming pregnant.

Future evaluation reports will continue to scrutinize the lack of persistence among a minority of scholars, but at this juncture two facts are preeminent. What is most remarkable is that such a high proportion of scholars confronted enormous challenges and were able to continue. The second realization is that, even for several who subsequently withdrew, being chosen as a Nina Scholar was a cherished accomplishment, one that affirmed the possibility of change.

The following are the comments of one individual who left the program to work full time to support her children after divorcing an abusive husband. They illustrate the long-term beneficial impact of involvement with the Nina program, even for those compelled to discontinue.

Receiving the scholarship was a wonderful honor ... and it provided the avenue through which I came to recognize the abuse [in my marriage] and was able to get out. It made the crisis that was already happening in the home so obvious. ‘Like the elephant in the room that you couldn’t ignore anymore ... Even though it’s impossible right now, college is very much in my future and is very important to me.

Primary Program Recommendations

As the programs enter the third year, their fundamental program infrastructures are established and sufficient time has elapsed for the proposed program elements to be
implemented and evaluated. As we will detail in this report, it is highly appropriate and reasonable to expect that specific standards be met at all four partner institutions, including:

- implement recruitment strategies that are sufficiently robust to attract members of all three program emphases;
- conduct thorough eligibility screening of applicants prior to selection committee action;
- communicate effectively with scholars regarding program processes, including potentially confusing issues such as probationary status and eligibility for transfer from community colleges to universities;
- distribute student handbooks to summarize scholar benefits and responsibilities;
- establish effective early warning systems for scholars in academic difficulty;
- emphasize mutual respect and responsibilities within scholar community to meet needs of growing cohorts;
- create framework for expressing differences and implement explicit strategies to resolve scholar conflicts;
- review original program proposal to facilitate full implementation or revise program design based on the experiences of past two years
- report evidence of specific efforts to correct program weaknesses identified by the program evaluation; and
- continue to emphasize “benefit to scholars” as the ultimate criterion for assessing program activities, policies and procedures.
Recruitment and Selection

In Indiana and Arizona, the recruitment strategies have become more deliberate and stable. The efforts of the community colleges and universities were increasingly integrated and mutually supportive. Program coordinators intensified recruiting contacts with Trust grantee agencies and modified their recruitment and outreach strategies to address previous concerns and increase the size and diversity of the applicant pool. New advisory council members were also recruited at ASU and MCCCD to enhance community contacts and strengthen recruitment of individuals living with physical disabilities and young adults raised in the child welfare system.

The resulting applicant pools for Cohort 3 increased over preceding years. In Arizona, the increase in applicants was about 75 percent over the size of the Cohort 2 pool, and in Indiana the increase in applicants was about 50 percent. There were 39 applicants for IUPUI’s five scholarships, 14 of whom were interviewed. There were 44 applicants for Ivy Tech’s twelve scholarships, 25 of whom were interviewed; 80 applicants for MCCCD’s fifteen scholarships, 35 of whom were interviewed; and 68 applicants for ASU’s eight scholarships, 16 of whom were interviewed.

Composition of the Cohort Selected

Our Year 2 Interim Report: February 2003 expressed concern regarding the selection of a lower proportion of foster-care youths and individuals with physical disabilities than were in the comparison group of eligible but not selected applicants, and the selection of a lower proportion of individuals from racial and ethnic minorities than in the comparison group. As seen in Figures 2 and 3, Cohort 3 has the greatest proportion of foster-care youths to date, but the proportion of scholars with physical disabilities continues to decline. The proportion of selected applicants from racial and ethnic minorities has surpassed prior years and now equals the proportion that is white.

Figure 2. Nina Scholar Cohorts by Program Emphasis

The MCCCD Cohort 3 includes individuals qualifying in all three program emphases. Slightly more than half are adults with dependents; one-third are foster-care youths; and 13 percent are individuals living with physical disabilities. The previous MCCCD Cohort 2 had also reflected a fairly even distribution of scholars across eligibility categories, with an increase from the first year in scholars with physical disabilities and corresponding decrease in
Jennifer Kasl, Cohort 1 — Independent, Resourceful, and Appreciative

A 2000 high school graduate, Jennifer Kasl became a Nina Scholar with the first ASU Cohort in Fall 2001. After two successful years in the program, she has established her independence and resourcefulness as a university student and describes the pursuit of her studies as “an honor.”

Although she has always negotiated the world adeptly, both Jennifer and her family were very “nervous” about her attending classes at ASU’s “huge campus.” The first thing Jennifer did was to spend the summer before her enrollment “learning the campus”: "I almost didn't want to come here. I wanted to get out of high school and get a job. I felt that would be the easiest way. And when I got here I was like, okay, a little nervous the first couple of days. Then all of a sudden it was like somebody had taken the burden and totally lifted it off my shoulders. All of a sudden I realized, ‘Oh my God, I’m here on campus and I’m fine’ and that was just the weirdest, the coolest feeling after the first couple of weeks to a month of being here. I was just like ‘wow’ and all of a sudden I just felt happy-go-lucky.”

To Jennifer, ASU is “so huge it’s like a big town and I hardly ever run into the same students at the same time.” She doesn’t “try to force friendships or anything; they will just happen.” She seeks “people that have more in common with me as far as major and career goals...I want to find people who accept me for who I am and not that I can’t see and that I’m different. That’s all they want to talk about and then the conversation is over...it’s kind of an obstacle for me and always will be, but overall I think that I’m making a little bit of headway at it.”

The Nina program has helped Jennifer feel like she is part of the group. She “loved” the scholars’ class and would get to class early just to talk and interact with the other scholars. She also believes that the class helped her maintain her motivation and be more focused on her subjects. In addition to academic and social support, scholars have helped Jennifer negotiate the campus during times that construction has turned it into an unfamiliar “obstacle course.” She feels accepted by her cohort “for who I am...they know that I’m just a person like everybody else.”

She deeply appreciated the accommodations made for her in the scholars class. While she usually must take course materials and have them scanned into Braille, the Nina course instructor and coordinator presented Jennifer with her Braille materials the first day of class: “I’ve never had that happen to me in a college class and I loved it and I think that’s actually made it easy because it’s right there, all I’ve got to do is read it. It just feels really neat to get the material along with everyone else.”

Obtaining access to course materials has been challenging at times. In her statistics class, Jennifer’s grade suffered because she “did not have access” to the formulas and answers in the back of the book. She “hesitated to ask” the disability resource center to Braille the answers because they already were behind in getting her chapter in Braille and she didn’t want to slow down the process even further. Similarly, she had problems with her plant biology materials. The taped materials were difficult to use because the chapters were taped in a different order than the lectures. Jennifer also spent a weekend scanning nearly 100 pages of missing materials in Braille.

Jennifer points to this last incident as a marker of how she has learned to become more resourceful and less dependent on university resources. In the past, “[I] would have freaked out, not to say that I didn’t this time, but then I realized this is what I am going to do...I think I am getting a little bit better at taking things step-by-step because if I look at the whole big picture I get overwhelmed....I always give myself time to freak out and then I’m like, okay, we’re done with that.”

Jennifer seeks out new classes and extracurricular activities to maintain her excitement and motivation. She recognizes that self-discipline, time management skills, and organizational abilities are critical to her academic success: “Those habits...[are] going to earn me good grades and ...give me time to do things I enjoy because I won’t be cramming for a test for hours on end.” She also believes that being a “self-advocate” is critical “because if you don’t say what you need here you’re not going to get it.” Finally, Jennifer has learned how to successfully cope with stress: “If I feel that I need time to myself, I’ll go ahead and take it. I’ll turn off my phone. I’ll unplug my answering machine ...and just listen to music and do the things that help me relax.”

Jennifer also joined Gamma Beta Phi, the ASU chapter of a national honor society. This motivates her to maintain her grades and also offers her the opportunity to meet other college students and do community service.

Jennifer looks forward to the personal and financial independence her college education will provide. She wants to get a place of her own and get off SSI (Supplemental Security Income, a federal entitlement program for the disabled). She hasn’t decided yet whether she will make these moves before finishing her degree. She also hasn’t decided if she will continue on to graduate school immediately or work for a year or so after graduation. Clearly, whatever she decides, Jennifer has developed the independence, resourcefulness, and appreciation for connection with others that will make her a successful Nina Scholar.
scholars with dependents. The program director believes that the composition of the incoming cohort is especially promising because it has potential to redress past concerns regarding the foster-care youths. One of the five new foster-care scholars is at the upper age range and has already demonstrated leadership skills in providing a role model for younger foster-care youths and engendering group solidarity so essential to their success. Despite the high dropout rate of this vulnerable group, the MCCCD program remains committed to recruiting and retaining foster-care youths.

One-half of ASU Cohort 3 are foster-care youths and one-half are adults with dependent children. Despite concerted efforts to recruit individuals with physical disabilities and the support of an advisory council that includes several university and community representatives with relevant life experience and professional expertise, the ASU Cohort 3 does not include students with physical disabilities. Neither did Cohort 2 originally, but one of two replacement scholars is in this eligibility category.

ASU advisory council deliberations suggest that a high percentage of younger physically disabled applicants were disqualified because they live with their families whose incomes exceed the eligibility standards. Our research suggests that ASU’s selection committee may be applying the income eligibility criteria to these applicants more stringently than the selection committees at other Nina schools and that further review is merited.

Logistical difficulties also make the university less accessible than the community colleges for physically disabled students. Because the ten community colleges are distributed throughout the metropolitan area, there is a community college within reasonable access to almost all residents. The narrowly delineated service areas for special-equipment buses greatly complicate transportation issues particularly for individuals using wheelchairs. As one applicant explained, each “dial-a-ride” bus is limited to a relatively small geographic area, thus making it necessary for him to navigate three separate transfers to reach the university.

Cohort 2 at both Indiana schools had included fewer scholars with physical disabilities than Cohort 1 and no scholars who were products of the child welfare system. This cohort composition shift towards the category of older students with dependents was partially corrected in the composition of Cohort 3. The IUPUI cohort included one scholar with a physical disability, and the Ivy Tech cohort included two scholars each in the physical disability and foster-care youth categories.

Scholars from racial and ethnic minorities comprise one-half of the Nina Scholar Cohort 3. The percentage of African-American scholars, which had been 40 per-
cent in the two previous cohorts at IUPUI, rose to 80 percent in Cohort 3. At Ivy Tech, the percentage of African-American scholars rose from 17 percent in Cohort 1 to 42 percent in Cohort 2 and 50 percent in Cohort 3. Students who come from racial and ethnic minorities comprise 63 percent of the ASU Cohort 3, in contrast to 13 percent in Cohort 2. Approximately one-third of the MCCCD Cohort 3 includes students from racial and ethnic minorities.

Summary

The programs continue to refine their recruitment and selection practices, and the academic preparation of incoming scholars has improved steadily. The selection committees continue to deal with difficult issues such as weighing factors of need and preparedness for college and using resources to the fullest by giving preference to students at the very beginning of college. Issues that require attention include more thorough screening of applicant academic and financial qualifications before interviews, and a continuing search for applicants who are foster-care youths or physically disabled. The programs should maximize their efforts to recruit individuals from all program emphases and from diverse racial and ethnic minorities.
Part II. Program Implementation

Student Orientation

Over the past two years, our evaluation clearly has demonstrated scholars’ ongoing need for systematic and detailed information regarding their scholarship program. They particularly need unambiguous statements regarding their responsibilities to earn 18 credit hours per year, maintain a satisfactory semester GPA, participate in scholar activities, and cooperate with program evaluation.

Although program coordinators described extensive discussions with individual scholars about program benefits and responsibilities, there were continuing incidents of scholar confusion about both. For example, the Indiana coordinators tried to provide more specific information in personal interactions and cohort meetings, but several scholars from both cohorts at each Indiana institution still reported lack of knowledge about key program policies, and this lack of knowledge sometimes resulted in misunderstandings with program personnel.

The program coordinators had begun the process of creating a scholar handbook and are encouraged to complete this. Online information would also be useful, and the IUPUI coordinator had created a web page for the program, but Ivy Tech scholars would have to make much greater use of the Internet and e-mail for the program to rely on this means of communication, and this may require additional computer resources for scholars.

Arizona programs experienced similar problems and are seeking similar solutions. MCCCDD scholars persist in their request for a scholar handbook containing program information and scholars at both Arizona institutions have expressed the need for answers to frequently asked questions. One ASU scholar suggested that each cohort have its own web page to provide program information, address concerns, and facilitate communication and social interaction between scholars. The MCCCDD scholars especially cite the need for information about transfers from the community college system to ASU.

The MCCCDD and ASU programs replaced two of the original Cohort 2 scholars this year with two “alternates.” Later entry into the program meant that these alternates missed the initial fall orientation and cohort community building, leaving at least one of the alternates feeling uninformed and disconnected, “kind of floating out there in space a little bit … in limbo.” Written materials and a web-based information center containing appropriate orientation and reference information, as well as more concerted efforts to draw and include alternates in monthly meetings, might remedy these feelings of uncertainty and dislocation.

All four programs must establish at the outset the scholar’s responsibility for participating in the evaluation. While the evaluators make every effort to accommodate busy schedules, scholar commitment to participation must be encouraged despite occasional inconvenience.

Finally, although the Trust clarified its policy regarding the eligibility of community college scholars for continued scholarship support if and when they transfer to the university, some confusion remained. The strengthening of scholar orientation may reduce the confusion, but it seems likely that each new cohort will take some time to fully comprehend the transfer policies.
Demetrees “De-D” Hutchins is a mature and convivial young woman who exemplifies the power of the Nina Scholars Program to help young people who have been in the child welfare system make the transition to college and surmount its challenges. De-D’s career during her first two years as a Nina Scholar at IUPUI shows how personal self-determination, prodded and supported by supportive program staff, can find the key to academic success in college. As the IUPUI program director observed, “Has there ever been a case of an academic turn-around like Demetrees? I am so proud of this young lady.”

De-D came to the Nina Scholar Program at IUPUI from a childhood where she was on her own since the age of 13. Having graduated from high school in the Indianapolis area in 1997, De-D enrolled briefly at IUPUI but soon withdrew. After working temporary data entry jobs for different companies for a couple of years, she found new direction as a Coordinator/Peace Education Facilitator at the Peace Learning Center for Americorps, where she taught conflict resolution and participated in plays presented to elementary school children in Indianapolis from 1999 to 2001. Her Americorps experience changed her attitude toward education: “In 1997 I thought college would be like high school and didn’t take it seriously.” She now realized that “college is like a job that pays off after you’ve finished.”

After taking a few courses at IUPUI, De-D was selected as one of the first cohort of Nina Scholars at IUPUI in 2001. Her new-found purpose helped but she still had to adjust to the demands of college. Her writing and computer skills were good—“I love computers and am on the computer at home constantly”—but her math skills were less well developed and presented a hurdle to get over in her initial plan to major in computer science. De-D was continuing to work and deal with the financial stress of living on her own, and she started losing study time and missing classes. She says that she would advise new students: “Get up and go to class; the college schedule is not like high school and you can float more and miss classes, which is the worst thing you can do.”

De-D became discouraged about her prospects in the computer science program after repeated frustrations with a particular math instructor. As a result, she lost momentum during her first semester as a Nina Scholar and finished only one course, Acting (one of her enthusiasms from her Americorps experience). IUPUI put her on probation, but the Nina Scholars Program continued supporting her for the spring semester to give her a chance to recover academically.

The program coordinator and another IUPUI counselor provided much-needed guidance and help during this period. De-D developed a very positive relationship with the coordinator, of whom she said, “I can bring any problems to her and we work through them step by step.” De-D had not seen professors as people she could turn to for help and needed “a middle person to communicate concerns, worries, doubts.” She also received support from another Nina Scholar during this time. De-D came to realize that “this scholarship is a blessing from God and I need to get on the grind and do what I need to do or I’ll lose this blessing.”

De-D switched her academic major to the New Media program in School of Informatics, which allowed her to continue developing her computer skills along with her artistic interests. De-D’s academic work improved during the spring and summer of 2002, and she attained a spring semester GPA of 3.1. One-on-one tutoring at IUPUI’s Math Assistance Center helped her re-take the failed math course in the summer, with a different instructor, and get an A this time. De-D entered her second year as a Nina Scholar in good standing at IUPUI. Since then, De-D has continued to succeed academically and develop her computer skills. She particularly values the laptop computer that Nina Scholars are given at IUPUI: “it works wonderfully for me: I can e-mail homework in.”

With the coordinator’s help, De-D moved into the student residence hall at IUPUI in 2002. She also was hired as a student mentor for the Nina Scholars Program in the 2002-2003 academic year, which reduced the financial pressure on her. She worked actively to keep other scholars, especially those in the second cohort, informed about college and program schedules and helped develop a web page for the program. Several of the 2002 scholars mentioned how helpful she had been. Finally, De-D has become active on campus with several organizations: Black Students United; Student Life and Diversity; and Young, Gifted, and Black.

De-D continued to make good academic progress during her second year as a Nina Scholar. Her semester GPAs were 3.00 in fall 2002 and 3.10 in spring 2003. She decided to specialize in New Media Arts and began to set her sights on a master’s degree once she finishes her bachelor’s degree in spring 2004. She hopes to work for a company like Industrial Light and Magic in the future. At the end-of-year celebration for the IUPUI Nina Scholars Program in May 2003, De-D was the “Mistress of Ceremonies.” De-D seems capable of mastering any situation in her life now that she has found and focused her powers of self-determination.
Maintenance and Improvement of Program Infrastructure

As the number of Nina Scholars steadily increases, the Trust and four partner institutions are mutually responsible for the ongoing refinement and enhancement of program infrastructure. Clearly, the program coordinators will continue to be a major strength and primary source of leadership, but their efforts must be buoyed significantly by the advisory councils and administrative support personnel.

In Arizona, MCCCD and ASU have augmented staff resources available to sustain the program leads. The MCCCD program director is now supported by a full-time assistant and the ASU program coordinator is supported by a quarter-time doctoral student associate. Two PhD academic professionals also provide direct administrative support at ASU: one serves as instructor of the Nina Scholars class and one serves as the financial coordinator of scholar benefits.

In Indiana, it has become necessary to formalize staff-scholar transactions that initially, with small numbers, could be conducted personally and individually. These transactions include screening applicants, monitoring scholar progress, solving scholar problems, and planning cohort activities. Trying to fulfill all the interpersonal demands of the coordinator role and also play the consummate administrator is highly demanding.

Increased administrative resources could help program coordinators monitor scholars’ resource needs for financial resources and disability aids more systematically. Such monitoring could help substantiate several program partners’ views that rising costs of living, especially on-campus housing at IUPUI, transportation, child care, and health issues, may merit an increase in the future living allowance.

At IUPUI, the program adviser tried to emphasize the interpersonal connection with scholars and rely for administrative help on the two IUPUI student mentors and a part-time administrative assistant for financial affairs. “She is awesome,” said the program adviser, “she makes this thing run.” Perhaps the administrative assistant’s role can be enlarged to help the coordinator manage the screening of increased numbers of applicants and oversee communications and meetings with larger numbers of scholars. This would allow the program adviser to maintain the level of interpersonal rapport with scholars that she has achieved. She lamented that in Spring 2003 she had been “bogged down more with the bureaucratic piece and [had] lost a little contact with scholars,” although most of the IUPUI scholars continued to praise her help, as illustrated by the following representative quotations:

Communication from the program adviser and the student mentor is exceptional. The program adviser is the key; she provides cohesiveness despite the different backgrounds of students.

Anytime something goes wrong, I can pop into her office and get it taken care of.

The Ivy Tech program manager has also emphasized personal relationships with scholars and relied for administrative help on student assistants, but it is unlikely that the program’s envisioned level of interpersonal relationships with scholars can be maintained by one coordinator when there are more than 30 scholars. Whereas some Cohort 1 scholars at IUPUI now are advised by academic program faculty, “program directors aren’t really advisors here
Lisa Cummins is a young single mother with a sincere commitment to serving others. After obtaining her GED in 1995, Lisa helped her mother with her cleaning business. When her mother died from lung cancer, Lisa volunteered to help her mother’s co-owner keep the business going. Lisa has two small children, one of whom requires special services. She faces a constant “battle” to get and keep the services her daughter needs: “I’m prepared to spend the rest of her life finding the right things for her, which change every year.” Lisa describes herself as a “good listener … one person come to.” Her story reveals her to be a strong compassionate woman unafraid to face the challenges and responsibilities involved in caring for others.

Lisa first enrolled at Ivy Tech in 2000, where she helped the office her education as a work-study student in the financial aid office. Although she does not receive child support, her family provides material and emotional support. She and her children have continued to live with her father while Lisa attends school. She is grateful for the help: “I’m blessed; he and my sister pick up my kids from day care.” Lisa learned about the Nina scholarship at work. She applied for and was accepted into the first Ivy Tech cohort in Fall 2001. She also regards the scholarship as a “real blessing.”

Lisa hopes eventually to obtain a bachelor’s degree in respiratory therapy. “When my mother was sick with lung cancer, it was hard for me to watch her when she couldn’t catch her breath for anything, scary for both of us. I decided if I couldn’t help Mom, I could pay tribute to her by helping other people to breathe.” In her respiratory care program, “we have to do community service, and I’m doing a walk for cystic fibrosis. It is a worthwhile requirement. You have to learn how to be giving … it’s not a natural thing. I’m going to be giving people my time to help people breathe better, so I need to practice being unselfish and not be paid for everything I do.” Lisa would like to work in a children’s hospital when she completes her program.

Lisa felt very prepared for college: “I had been out seven years and coming back was a well-thought-out decision.” She was confident about her reading, writing, and computer skills (she had a computer at home and used e-mail). She believed that she “had good study habits and a good memory.” Her biggest fear was math. Receiving an A in a college level math class—“a rough class”—was her proudest accomplishment during her first semester.

Lisa especially was fascinated by her science classes, where “everything comes together” but “every class I complete and do well in helps me realize I can do anything I put my mind to.” At the end of her first semester as a Nina Scholar, Lisa hadn’t yet met an instructor “that I haven’t got along with very well … They were always more than willing to help in any way they could.” She said, “I had an open mind—this is new, I’m an adult—and it made big difference.”

Lisa’s second semester as a Nina scholar was less successful. She reflects: “I had a lot going on and I let personal things get in the way of academic things. I missed classes when my children were ill. I got very discouraged early in the semester by one of my classes and by my clinicals, and I realized that I was falling behind in school.” Attempts to get tutoring in the difficult class and to participate in study groups didn’t work out. Lisa would miss her weekly check-in with the program coordinator “because I was doing bad and didn’t want to get a lecture.” She failed to finish enough credits to qualify as a full-time student in respiratory therapy and her borderline GPA threatened her continuation as a Nina Scholar.

Lisa received help from the program coordinator and her academic advisor. The program coordinator confronted Lisa about the new issues in her life and, as Lisa says, “worked it through: she did not give up on me and helped me find a counseling center to go to; it’s hard to be a single parent with no one to talk to about everyday stress. Without the assistance of the Nina Scholar Program, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Her academic advisor in respiratory therapy, “the kindest man,” also helped pull her back up. She came to realize: “I know my grades have been good before; I can’t let this pull me back down. I know I’m a procrastinator, and I need to learn study skills. It’s a hard thing to admit. When you have to learn on your own, you have to be self-disciplined. There are so many tests. I will study and pass them with the grace of God.” She and her academic advisor made up a contract to address hours to study, the use of journaling to track study habits, and working through the book Becoming a Master Student with a student mentor from the Nina Scholars Program. Lisa followed through on that contract.

This experience has made Lisa more reflective about education and about life as a whole. She has learned to “just take it one day at a time balancing family and school.” Aside from reading, her favorite recreational activity is taking walks in the park to find “peace with God and nature … I pray a lot.” Lisa loves to teach Sunday school for 2 year olds, which she described as “the highlight of the week.” Church is important to her, especially because they have activities for the whole family and accepted Lisa and her children as “the three of us, with no one asking ‘where’s their father?’”

Her children motivate her to complete her education: “If I didn’t have them to look at every day, I might not have the incentive to stick.” She reports getting along with other students at Ivy Tech: “Most students at Ivy Tech are adults who are here to better their lives, so we have a common goal.” Her family commitments preclude getting involved in campus organizations: “I know a lot of people here, but I don’t have time to meet with students outside class time.”

In Fall 2002, Lisa switched to part-time status. She said, “Tutoring with [the Nina mentor in Summer 2002] helped me a lot. I have plans now for how I study and how I take tests.” She did very well academically in her second year, attaining semester GPAs of 3.5 in Fall 2002 and 3.0 in Spring 2003. As she begins her third year as a Nina Scholar, Lisa still aims to finish her respiratory therapy program and work at a children’s hospital. She has come to terms with the challenges she faces and has the motivation and ability to overcome them.
at the community college level,” said the manager; “my advising load has increased therefore, especially with preparing for transfers.” As one program partner at Ivy Tech elaborated:

We might need an assistant coordinator for the case management component. The mentor focuses on specific behavior and solutions, but first the director (or an assistant director) would need to identify and help the student up front. Otherwise, we can’t maintain one-on-one case management support, working with the individual client and developing a plan so the person is successful and then follow through on the plan. It’s hard to keep up the follow through. It requires tracking—finding out how they’re doing in their courses. Students will hesitate in confessing about trouble. When they’re not keeping appointments or returning phone calls, we need to intensity our effort to contact them to find out what’s wrong.

At Ivy Tech, most scholars reported seeing the program manager regularly, although there were a couple of exceptions in scholars who were taking classes at night or at a satellite campus. A few Cohort 2 scholars seemed to think she might be “a bit overloaded” and needed “less stress,” although nearly all thought that she was a wonderful advisor and helper, and several said that their relationship had improved after some early miscommunications.

I think [the program manager] and I have gotten closer. She’s wonderful. I feel very comfortable with her and that means a lot to me.

[The program manager] and I communicate more effectively now. She understands me more, and I understand her goals and objectives more now. I ask her a lot about financial aid and school rules. I can get all this information from different sources but she is a one-stop shop, and if she does not know something she will find out for me.

Some of us come when they need help, and she gives help. I enjoy the time and talk to her personally.

Other ways to augment program personnel services might be to strengthen student mentoring and tutoring services, as discussed below, and to involve “old hand” scholars in the planning and operation of the program. This has been done with one student mentor at each Indiana institution, but it can be made a cohort-wide responsibility. It might also be possible to reduce the demand on program personnel at Ivy Tech by requiring scholar use of e-mail, so that administrative announcements are reliably received and acknowledged, personal contact facilitated, and scholar queries promptly answered. E-mail is little used at Ivy Tech and would require additional computer resources for scholars.

In Arizona, scholars continued to praise the program coordinators as “helpful,” “efficient,” “understanding,” “caring,” and “the lord’s angel in the flesh.” MCCCD maintains the largest scholar and several scholars believe that current staffing—the program director and part-time assistant—is inadequate to meet their needs for advisement and personal support. They feel that the coordinator’s job will become impossible over time. However, they may be reluctant to contact or make demands on someone who “has a lot on her shoulders” already.

I know that [the program director] has got a really full plate—she had a full plate when there was just 15 now there’s going to be 45 and I don’t know how she’s going to do it.
It’s been a little different for me this year just because she has another cohort to worry about and the third one coming on.

She’s very helpful the only thing I can say about [program director’s] position is that I feel that she has a lot on her shoulders for one person. I don’t believe that she’s [incapable] of doing the work; I just believe it’s kind of unfair because I call her and she’s always doing something. I feel even bad sometimes to call her but she’s already made it clear that that’s not a problem to call her.

As demonstrated by examples from all four institutions, scholar concerns about “bothering” their program coordinators may reflect a more general reluctance to ask for help. While this may lead to greater independence and self-sufficiency these outcomes should not result because the scholar fears he or she will “bother” or “burden” the coordinator if he or she asks for help.

Developing the Scholar Community

The four institutions have taken diverse approaches to developing the community of Nina Scholars. Some have advanced considerably in this regard and others have experienced more limited success or marked difficulties. IUPUI, beginning with the smallest cohort of five scholars, relied on personal relationships between scholar and advisor for the first half year and only gradually began to build a community. The advisor intensified these efforts in Fall 2002, as the number of scholars grew to nine. In addition to task-focused cohort meetings and informal social events, the advisor convened a joint retreat of IUPUI and Ivy Tech scholars. Several IUPUI scholars participated and seemed to find it very worthwhile. However, neither fall or spring scholar interviews indicated much interaction among IUPUI scholars outside scheduled activities. This perception was shared by some program partners at IUPUI: one said, “I don’t sense a connection; I’m not sure scholars communicate with one another outside the program activities.” Another elaborated, “I’m not sure it’s as close-knit as I would like; the program adviser is the primary support rather than there being mutual scholar support. With only five in each cohort, it depends on the jell of the personalities.”

The joint retreat had a complex effect on the development of scholar community at Ivy Tech. On one hand, Ivy Tech scholars were impressed by the familiarity of the smaller IUPUI group, and this stimulated some of them to generate more interaction at Ivy Tech. However, one such effort, a proposal for more scholar interaction oriented to mental health, apparently provoked disagreement between two scholars at a cohort meeting. The program manager later described it as a “heated discussion that was resolved but left tension; people are still making comments.”

Subsequent interviews suggested that some Ivy Tech scholars had become averse to cohort meetings, which were poorly attended. “The level of community is not good right now,” said the manager in the spring; “maybe they meet so regularly with me as individuals they forget about coming to cohort meetings.” One scholar corroborated this interpretation: “They have meetings once a month, but I don’t go because I can’t make sense of a lot of stuff that they talk about; so I meet [the program manager] when I need help.” A service activity organized by the manager to enhance interaction was attended by only a small number of scholars. In interviews, some mem-
bers of Cohort 2 suggested that Ivy Tech needed to provide more opportunities for the scholars to get to know one another rather than being so task-oriented during cohort meetings. Explicit team-building activities need to occur early in the year to lay a foundation of trust that can weather subsequent differences of opinion.

Another effect of the joint retreat was increased awareness among Ivy Tech scholars of differences between the two institutions in scholar benefits. Some Ivy Tech scholars became upset that only IUPUI scholars had been given laptop computers, and they raised this issue in both fall and spring interviews. They believe that access to laptop computers would facilitate their academic success. This concern, added to the previously mentioned confusion about transfer policy, created a feeling of unfairness of treatment among the Ivy Tech scholars that was remarked in several interviews and noticed by program partners.

The Ivy Tech program faces additional challenges in developing community. First, Ivy Tech students are more likely to be part-time students with full-time jobs, who attend classes at different times and spend little time on campus otherwise. In addition, Ivy Tech scholars in Health and Public Service programs are now attending classes at a satellite campus across town. In interviews, many of the Ivy Tech scholars reported knowing only the Cohort 1 scholar who had become the student mentor. Such community as did exist seemed centered on a small number of scholars who were active in student government and the Student Leadership Academy and reported much more interaction and friendliness.

The program coordinator wanted a “space for the scholars to hang out and feel more connected to each other,” and this recommendation was echoed by scholars, who felt it would allow them to get to know one another better. One scholar also suggested having a class together. Others remarked that celebration of program graduates could create more sense of identity:

Watching other scholars graduate, especially those with disabilities, really helps my confidence level.

To have successful scholars come out of the program is a big help.

Because MCCCD’s campuses are geographically dispersed, the program has relied on monthly cohort meetings in large part to build cohort community and overcome scholar feelings of isolation. Regular community service activities have also served as an effective mechanism to generate scholar cohesiveness, as well as increase the program’s visibility in the metropolitan area.

Several Cohort 2 scholars reported that the monthly meetings were sometimes repetitive and not informative. Several students complained that the meetings were not well attended and resented those who repeatedly failed to show up each month. While some students expressed a desire for closer contact with other scholars, others stated that more contact would simply add to their already overburdened work, school, and family obligations. These scholars apparently do not see that a stronger cohort identity based on shared experiences might reduce feelings of isolation and stress.

MCCCD scholars also suggested the need for more educational workshops at cohort meetings addressing, for example, study skills, transfer procedures, financial aid, and citation styles.
Luis Osuna’s story reflects a life-long passion for knowledge and its application. He received his bache- lor’s degree in civil engineering from the University of Senola in Mexico in 1986. He and his wife then moved to Phoenix, where Luis began working in the manufacturing industry. For ten years Luis sought work where he could gain technical and scientific knowledge and took various community college courses. He believed that furthering his education would further his professional position as well.

Luis’ life can be characterized by an insatiable love of knowledge: “My strength [as a student] is I love being educated. I like school and I like reading books.” His lifelong pursuit of education eventually led Luis to the Nina program because “they offer long-term education and my final goal is to go to ASU to com- plete a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.” Currently Luis is completing his A.S. degree in manufacturing-automation technology at Mesa Community College (MCC).

Luis was laid off in September 2001 from a company where he had worked for fourteen years. For the most part he has been unemployed since then except for the occasional temporary job. He has had trouble finding work in his field and the family has had to rely on his wife’s income for support:

“I was so happy with my job and everything was fine until they laid me off and I couldn’t replace that job with any other company. Some of these companies I’m not satisfied with because I’m not working in my field....I really don’t care to make a whole lot of money. I just care that I have enough money to support my family and be happy with my job and that’s all I need.

Luis hopes that completing his education will put him in a better financial position in the future.

Luis faced two major challenges when he returned to school. One “great challenge” was that so many things had changed since he last had been in school. For example, he had to start all over again in math “because it was too many years, it was all dusty—my knowledge, I had to go back.” While he welcomed the challenge of learning new material—“It was great to be in school and I tried to get as much as I could” he also struggled as well. Luis has persisted though. He has “discovered so many wonderful things, that the knowledge is right there.”

A second challenge involved a faculty member during the spring semester of 2002, which Luis described as “the worse experience I have ever had in my time in school.” He felt that this teacher, in addition to having a poor teaching style, treated him differently despite his past education because he was from Mexico.

He kind of humiliated me because of my accent or because something I don’t know what was the reason....I was at the point where I was going to drop school....Things like the problems I’ve had with my instructor I think it will subtract so many percent of my enthusiasm I have towards school and that discourages me and kind of makes me sad and frustrated....People also think that a person is less intellec- tually capable when compared to others who don’t have an accent and this is totally wrong....For some reason there’s a lot of racism. I’ve never found real people with the type of thinking that everybody is equal, and I’m not going to say because this person is from that place [or a different place] he or she is going to be less capable than me. Everybody is capable. I was born in Mexico and I studied in Mexico for 17 years and I studied psychology, sociology, ethics and logics and I was a professor. I just try to do the best I can and try to speak English much better and talking much better and do whatever I have to do in order to show the people that anybody can achieve whatever they want.

The MCCC program coordinator intervened on Luis’ behalf with this instructor. “She’s been aware because we always talk to her and tell her about the problems we have. The [program’s] strength is specifically the way they want to help people and the way they encourage people to go to school and to study.”

Luis believes that “the only way to better oneself is through education” and he is committed to persisting despite adversity. The program has given him not only the means to pursue his education but reinforces the importance of the education he has valued for so long:

We are encouraged by the Nina Mason Pulliam Legacy Scholarship to go to school, to study. This program is abso- lutely wonderful and it’s a great support to me. It supports me a lot economically: I appreciate overall that Nina gave me the opportunity to be in school. My wife and kids also encourage me and one of the things really important here is I’m so proud that my kids ask me to help do their homework and they see me as a role model because they say “my dad goes to college and he’s going to be a well educated man,” and that encourages me a lot. If we want to succeed, we must go to school and study.

As a Nina scholar, Luis definitely is helping the scholarship program achieve its primary goal.
I think if there were workshops they would kind of help us where it’s more of a direct intervention for whatever we’re going through. It kind of forces us to get together but we also leave with something.

Some MCCCD scholars have suggested technological interventions to solve problems of social distance and dislocation, including a website and monthly e-mail newsletter. A previous telephone tree established to remind scholars of monthly meetings and share information fell by the wayside after a while. Since then, communication within cohorts has decreased.

ASU’s program has relied heavily on the Nina classes to generate cohort cohesion, but only scholars in the newest cohort take the two courses. In subsequent years several scholars have expressed keen interest in new vehicles for maintaining cohort solidarity.

I think it would be really nice if they could make a mandatory meeting like on a Saturday afternoon where everyone could get together and just talk about school and talk about issues that are going on. Because I feel that as Cohort 1 we were all together and now we’re all apart again.

Maybe if we could be the head of a welcoming committee for new scholars and so we could kind of answer some questions that they may have that we’ve already run into.

I would recommend some workshops or study sessions … just different stuff that’s going to apply to all majors and then that way it might save a little bit of money too because [instead of individual] tutoring … we just have like a combined study group.

Beginning in Fall 2003 the program will sponsor a series of six scholar sessions focusing on high-priority scholar needs that have been identified during the first two years, and continued progress in the program will include attendance at least five of the sessions. Topics will include improving study and examination skills, financial management, successful interaction with professors, advisers and mentors, career planning, and balancing family, work and university.

Scholar participation in school and community organizations and events reveals that some scholars enjoy strong leadership skills and are willing to assume social responsibility, especially when their efforts are tied to shared interests and identifications. One MCCCD scholar, for example, is the Vice President of the Black Student Union and Business Club and actively organized Women’s Day at her church. Another MCCCD scholar actively participates in Disabilities Students Against Destructive Decisions, a campus community service organization. A third is on the celebrity basketball committee. Finally, several scholars are active in their churches or religious organizations. These leadership opportunities and activities have taught the scholars skills, are “very rewarding,” and “gave [their] self-confidence a boost.” These experiences suggest that creating a strong sense of cohort identity and mutual commitment may motivate some scholars towards greater participation and leadership in their scholar group.

Enhancing Scholar Development

Review of program implementation reveals a continuing need for scholar growth in self-awareness and self-reliance. Many Nina Scholars are aware of both their strengths and their weaknesses. Not all are learning
to communicate this awareness and take a proactive stance, however.

In Indiana, some scholars conceal their needs, although the Ivy Tech program manager saw the 2002 cohort as more willing to “share information with me prior to real difficulties.” Others seem to expect that the program manager will take care of them; some of the praise for coordinators quoted earlier contains an implicit attitude of entitlement to special help. While Cohort 1 scholars have become more independent in their second year and members of Cohort 2 seemed more independent from the outset, there remains room for growth in scholars learning to assert needs and seek resources across the college campus, and the programs need to take a developmental approach to this goal. Some of the 2002 cohort could have been more assertive in responding to personal challenges. One had to be closely supervised in improving academic performance. A couple of others apparently did not communicate issues of concern to the coordinator.

This is not to minimize the importance of the program personnel monitoring and responding to student financial and academic needs. Scholars at all institutions reported unmet financial needs, and some seemed unaware of all the program resources that were available. Greater solicitude by program staff is not the long-term answer, however. The scholars should be coached in moving from a reactive to a proactive stance with regard to services both at the program level and at higher levels. In particular, scholars may benefit from greater assertiveness with professors when they are having trouble in a course.

The importance of developing assertiveness is illustrated by the contrasting experiences of the two Cohort 1 scholars at Ivy Tech who were on probation at the end of their first year. One held back from contact with the program manager during the first year while problems multiplied, but took on more responsibility after the coordinator confronted her and required that she work with a mentor during the summer of 2002. The other probationary scholar remained avoidant throughout both years and did not cooperate with an assigned mentor or follow through on referrals to professional help with psychological problems. In all her interviews, this scholar plainly seemed to be looking for someone to nurture her rather than recognizing her need to take control of her situation and assert specific needs with helping professionals.

The joint retreat in Fall 2002 addressed becoming more assertive; a speaker led the scholar participants in an intense and extended exploration of their own personal attitudes and interpersonal styles, focused on taking a more proactive stance towards realizing one’s goals. This seemed to have a galvanizing effect on some scholars. Another example of assertiveness development is Ivy Tech’s Student Leadership Academy; it sponsored an activity that helped a scholar get over an academic setback: “we got together and gave a PowerPoint presentation for over 2 hours. All of us met and outlined our goals and utilized everybody’s strengths and bonded together as a team.”

A specific area in which scholars may need to become more proactive is in requesting services to compensate for physical disabilities. At both Ivy Tech and IUPUI, some scholars said they needed more assistance in coping with the challenge of physical disability than they were receiving. Although staff augmentation will help programs monitor scholar needs, ultimately the scholars need to assert their needs, such as better equipment to deal with vi-
sual disabilities, in the larger institutional environment.

Arizona scholars also would benefit from an increased proactive approach to interactions with professors and mentors. Scholars expressed difficulty in approaching instructors to speak about grades and coursework. They also consistently reported little or no contact with their mentors. Developing assertiveness skills in interpersonal interaction likely would benefit these scholars academically and professionally.

Another area that calls for enhanced scholar development is multicultural awareness and communication skills for dialogue among people of diverse backgrounds. This can build on assertiveness training, but it needs a complementary focus on sensitivity, openness (resistance to stereotyping), and the communication of respect. In Indiana, diversity in ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds has created a challenge for program coordinators. They must develop mutually respectful relationships among scholars of different backgrounds. One Indiana scholar said, “I don’t feel like I have anything in common with other scholars,” and the lack of scholar contact outside program activities suggests that others may have similar beliefs. Lack of skills in dialogue across different backgrounds may also be involved in the prolonged effect of a negative interaction between scholars at an Ivy Tech cohort meeting.

Cultural differences among scholars can stem from gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, and family structure. Some of these cultural differences were addressed directly by a speaker at the joint retreat in Fall 2002. The speaker’s style was confrontational, inspirational, and even evangelical, and she was very positively received by many of the participants, but some left in the middle of the day and later let it be known that they had not felt comfortable with the speaker’s style of presentation.

Some students also reported feeling discounted as persons in other program interactions, although they had apparently not spoken directly to the program coordinator about it because of uncertainty about how the coordinator would respond. Program coordinators must be especially sensitive to cultural differences among scholars in ensuring that all feel that they are treated fairly in programming, advising, and distribution of resources. Likewise, while it is important to respect the positive role that belief systems play in the lives of many scholars, it is inappropriate for scholar activities to promote a specific religion.

In the Arizona programs, tensions among scholars have not centered on racial or ethnic differences, but the need to acknowledge and resolve conflicts is also evident. For example, MCCCD scholars have experienced tensions related to perceptions of the level of commitment to the scholarship program, and the program director has taken deliberate steps to address the concerns and promote mutual support and respect among scholars. At ASU, a few scholars have expressed feelings of exclusion from campus life because of the seemingly ubiquitous emphasis on physical attractiveness. These feelings have created a degree of tension between scholars, and the students and their program coordinator have used informal social opportunities to highlight common interests and overcome apparent differences.

Summary

In sum, the programs continue to refine their administrative, counseling, mentoring, and cohort development activities. All four
programs are implemented more fully than they were at the end of the first year. Scholar academic advising and personal counseling have been effective. Student mentors have begun to assist students in academic difficulty. Tutoring for introductory courses has been effective. Remaining problems include scholar knowledge and attitudes about program benefits and responsibilities, especially with regard to transferring from community college to university, increasing staff to meet the needs of larger numbers of scholars.

Of all the basic program components, the scholar community is the one most needing strengthening. Experiences of the second year suggest that programs require scholar participation in team-building activities in order to lay a foundation of trust among scholars and follow up with more opportunities for scholar social interaction. The programs also need to emphasize the progressive development of scholar independence. Finally, as the scholar community grows in diversity, it is important that the staff and scholars grow in multicultural sensitivity and communication skills.

It is important for each program to develop strategies and a framework for encouraging expression of differences and appreciation of diversity, as well as to address and resolve tensions that may result from a lack of familiarity or understanding of the backgrounds and perspectives of other scholars. Explicit strategies may include the creation of guided discussions, a grievance process and identification of neutral parties skilled in negotiations and conflict resolution.
Part III. Quantitative Analysis of Academic Progress and Financial Support of Nina Scholars and Comparison Groups

In this section of the report, we examine the academic progress and achievement of the Nina Scholars in comparison to a select group of students who were eligible applicants but were not selected for the scholarship. More specifically, the analysis is organized around four research questions:

1. What was the level of academic progress for Nina Scholars and comparison groups?
2. How does scholar progress compare across the four institutions?
3. Did Cohort 2 scholars take and complete precollege-level courses at a rate commensurate with the comparison group?
4. Did Cohort 2 scholars take and successfully complete core required courses in writing and math?

Students in the comparison group were selected from among applicants to the Nina Scholarship Program. Specifically, unselected scholar applicants were included in the comparison group if they were judged to be feasible candidates for the scholarship (eligible by all criteria, with no notable characteristics that would have precluded consideration) but not selected as final scholar recipients. Given the nature of the Nina Scholarship Program—providing support to students who may not otherwise be able to attend college—it is virtually impossible to select a perfectly matched comparison group. The current method ensures that the peers have at least the basic background characteristics of the scholars. However, because of the approximate nature of the match, we did not employ statistical tests (i.e., repeated measures analysis) that assume precise matches. In previous evaluation reports, the comparison group was referred to as a matched sample. In this and future reports we will use the term “comparison group” to clarify that the evaluation design is based on comparison among independent groups and does not employ matched samples or dependent measure analyses.

For the 2001 evaluation, the comparison group included only those eligible, unselected students from the scholarship applicant pool who enrolled for the Fall 2001 semester. The selection of the initial 2002 comparison groups did not include this requirement so that we could explicitly test the impact of the scholarship offer on the enrollment. The Year 2 Interim Report demonstrated that the impact was highly significant—fewer than two-thirds (64%) of the initial comparison groups enrolled compared to all (100%) of the scholars. This analysis examines the academic progress of all scholars, the initial Cohort 1 comparison groups, and those from the Cohort 2 comparison groups who enrolled for Fall 2002.

This analysis supplements the quantitative analysis included in the Year 2 Interim Report, which focused more extensively on the demographic and academic background characteristics of Cohort 2 and touched briefly on the academic progress of Cohort 1. The scholar cohorts and comparison groups for 2001 and 2002 are similar demographically on all but one characteristic. Specifically, the groups were all dominated by students seeking eligibility as “Adults with Dependents” (2 out of 3 students) with the remainder equally split between the “Foster-care Youths” and “Physical
Disability” criteria. In addition the average age for all groups is about 30 years, with three-quarters of the students being over 25 years old. Approximately three-quarters of all scholar and comparison group students are female and three-quarters are single (i.e., not married, divorced, or separated). The one notable difference was in racial/ethnic composition: one-third of the Cohorts 1 and 2 scholars are from racial and ethnic minorities compared to three-fifths of the students in the comparison groups. No differences were found between the scholar cohorts and comparison groups in academic background (type of high school completion; high school rank; college entrance exam scores) and enrollment status (class level and new vs. continuing).

Table 1 displays the number of scholars and comparison group members included in the current analysis. Whereas much of the Year 2 Interim Report included the non-enrolled Fall 2002 comparison students, this analysis begins with only those who enrolled for the Fall 2002 semester.

### Table 1. Number of Students in the Nina Scholar Cohorts and Comparison Groups Included in the Analysis of Academic Progress and Financial Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>All Campuses</th>
<th>MCCCD</th>
<th>Ivy Tech</th>
<th>ASU</th>
<th>IUPUI</th>
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<td>41 44</td>
<td>15 15</td>
<td>12 16</td>
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<td>29 33</td>
<td>24 27</td>
<td>17 10</td>
<td>10 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*Includes one alternate who had enrolled, but not as a scholar for Fall 2001, and then joined the scholar cohort in Spring 2002.

In addition, the Interim Report analysis showed that Cohort 2 scholars performed significantly better than the comparison students, but Cohort 1 scholars were performing at similar levels.

Table 2 updates the academic performance for the scholars and comparison groups for the entire 2002–2003 academic year. The trends established in the Interim Report continue. Cohort 2 scholars outperformed their comparative peers along every dimension. They were retained through the spring semester at a significantly higher rate, attempted more credit hours, completed a higher percentage of those credit hours and attained better grades. The performance differences for Cohort 1 were not statistically significant, although for three of the four measures the scholars had nominally higher values.

### Scholar Progress Across Four Institutions

Table 2 shows scholar academic progress for each of the four participating institutions. Comparisons are further highlighted in Figures 4 through 6. Overall for the two-year period, the Nina Scholars were retained at higher rates than the comparison groups in six of the eight comparisons. The exceptions are both found for the smaller university cohorts. For the IUPUI Cohort 1, one scholar was not retained, while all seven comparison students are...
still enrolled. For the ASU Cohort 2 and comparison group, all students remained enrolled through the year.

Figure 5 shows that the scholars are attempting more hours than the comparison group students at the Arizona institutions, but less so at the Indiana Institutions. Moreover, the average credit loads appear relatively similar at both MCCCD and ASU, whereas the credit loads are generally lower at Ivy Tech compared to IUPUI.

Table 2. Academic Progress and Performance of Nina Scholars and Comparison Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>All Campuses</th>
<th>MCDDC</th>
<th>Ivy Tech</th>
<th>ASU</th>
<th>IUPUI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retained or graduated through Spring 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average credit hours attempted, academic year 2002–2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of credit hours successfully completed, academic year 2002–2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-point average for academic year 2002–2003 courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For the retention indicator, statistical significance was determined using a chi-square test for independence; Univariate analysis of variance was used for all other statistical tests. The sample sizes at the four institutions are too small to enable reliable statistical tests.

aOne scholar from each of the 2001 MCCCD and Ivy Tech cohorts transferred to ASU and IUPUI, respectively. These scholars are represented as “retained” at their originating institution but their academic progress is not reflected in the remaining panels of the table (credits attempted, completed, and GPA) for either their originating or destination institution.

bIncludes 2 students who obtained their associate’s degrees and one who completed Licensed Nurse Practitioner (LPN) certification.

cIncludes one student who completed an associate’s degree.
Sharon Layton, Cohort 1 — Advocating for Change

Sharon Layton, a working mother whose income is necessary to support her family, believes that the major purpose of the Nina program is to help people who “cannot afford to go to college ... realize their dreams.” As an older student who received her GED over twenty years ago, Sharon had “looked into” college in the past but couldn’t afford to take time off from work to go to school. She was “just making a living, taking care of children, wanting to do more, knowing I could do more, but not able to.” When Sharon heard about the ASU program she thought, “Wow, this is a chance. This is like God is talking to me.” She returned to college as a member of the first ASU cohort in 2001. This required taking a risk.

Sharon works for a foundation for women. She has always been the breadwinner and returning to school meant reducing her work hours (and earned income) as a result.

Unlike high school, Sharon recognizes college as “a choice that we make” and has committed herself to succeeding in school. Her biggest challenge has been balancing school, work, and family demands. Although her return to school has been a challenge, she believes her children have benefitted because they “see me study so that’s going to rub off on them.” She returned to college as a member of the first ASU cohort in 2001. This required taking a risk.

Sharon has received a lot of support from the Nina program, Adult Re-entry, and the Learning Center (which provides tutoring and a tutoring lab). She appreciates the scholarship’s financial and social support: “I feel like I have a place, I have a little niche carved right inside the campus and so I have felt comfortable being here.” The program has given her “all the help I could imagine settling in and getting used to college life.” She joked that the only thing missing was “maybe some selfish support, a cook or a maid!”

Sharon initially elected to pursue a Justice Studies major because “I need to know what’s been going on so that I can go forward with my eyes open.” However, towards the end of the second year Sharon was contemplating getting a second job “to fill that void [of the decreased income] ’cause it’s getting rough.” A series of setbacks stressed Sharon and disrupted her balance between work, school, and home. She began studying at the library or late at night when her family didn’t “need my attention.” She worked with a peer coach to organize and prioritize her time more effectively.

By the end of the second year Sharon also seemed to lose some of her initial enthusiasm and joy in attending school. Recognizing this, she began attending to the beauty in life around her again:

“I was walking to campus and I reminded myself of how beautiful the campus was when I first came here and the birds were chirping and it was so beautiful and so I have started paying closer attention to that now. I just walk and I just enjoy it. I’m still kind of lonely because I don’t have a friend that I could walk and talk with. It’s still just as great but life gets in the way and you kind of take a back seat to it and you shouldn’t.”

Sharon initially elected to pursue a Justice Studies major because “I need to know what’s been going on so that I can go forward with my eyes open.” However, she eventually settled on a major in public administration so that she could apply her knowledge to the nonprofit where she currently works. During the course of her two years in college, Sharon moved from being the Executive Director’s assistant to a business manager who does the books.

Sharon doesn’t know for certain what she will do once she finishes college. She may remain at the foundation. She likes her job, the people she works with, and the “great things” they do for people. Her degree would allow her to move into a full time position, a position where she can contribute to program research, and funding and policy decisions. In any event, Sharon believes that she “will be some type of advocate for somebody. I’ll be out there fighting the cause for somebody. I know I will.”
This difference is less pronounced among Cohort 2.

Scholar and comparison group grades for academic year 2002–2003 are more variable across cohorts and campuses, as shown in Figure 6 (page 26). Cohort 1 scholars in Indiana earned higher average grades than did students in the comparison groups, but the Arizona comparison groups earned higher average grades than the scholars. For Cohort 2, the scholars earned higher average grades than the comparison groups for all institutions except ASU. Moreover, the average grades among the Arizona scholars are hovering in the “B-” range (2.70), whereas the Indiana cohorts are maintaining grades around or above the “B+” range (3.70).

The small sample sizes make it difficult to draw strong conclusions about scholar performance between the institutions. At this point, we can note the overall trends in performance differences between scholars and comparison groups, as described in the previous section, and refer to the institutional differences cautiously as we correlate the quantitative results with the qualitative analyses.

Precollege-Level Courses and Required Math and Writing

An analysis of introductory core courses is most appropriate for scholars and comparison groups who are first-year students. The vast majority of the community college scholar and comparison group students entered as first-year students for the Fall 2002 semester. The majority of Cohort 2 scholars at the universities were at sophomore standing for Fall 2002. More importantly, the comparison groups at the universities included junior-level students. Since some of these students take freshman-level math and writing courses, they are included in the current analysis. However, the higher class standing of these students should be kept in mind while reviewing the results shown in Table 3.

Across all institutions, the scholars and comparison groups were equally likely to take remedial-level courses in math and writing, but the scholars are far more likely to take the freshman-level courses that count toward fulfilling the institutions’ general education requirements. As expected, taking remedial courses is much more prevalent at the community colleges: ASU does not offer any precollege-level courses.
Stephen Planck, Cohort 1 — Enthusiastic Learner and Leader

Stephen Planck is a thoughtful, articulate, and personable young man who emerged as a student leader during his two years as a Nina Scholar at Ivy Tech. He has done well in a wide variety of courses, sometimes achieving a 4.0 semester GPA. His main field is computer science but he also is attracted to the social sciences. His enthusiasm for learning may be gauged from excerpts from several interviews over the two years: "I enjoyed Psychology more than I thought I would....I love the Economics course ...I like American History best....My Government class this semester is most enjoyable."

This excitement about learning and his personal warmth make Stephen a model scholar for the Nina Scholars Program. Stephen credits the program with helping him make the most of his potential. He has taken an active role in making the program work for other scholars as well.

Stephen is the 4th of 11 children. Visually impaired since birth, he and his siblings were home-schooled after his parents became dissatisfied with the public schools. He received his GED when he was 19, but he did not consider college a possibility at the time:

"I am considered legally blind. This fact led me to believe in my late teen years that I would be unable to attend college because I couldn’t see the board and take tests. I was unaware of all the opportunities that were available to everyone seeking higher education, including those with physical disabilities."

Stephen went to work instead but a couple of unfulfilling experiences left him discouraged. Looking back, he says, “I needed something else to accomplish, goals more to my liking.” He learned from his Vocational Rehabilitation counselor that Ivy Tech had the resources to help him undertake college and so he took an admissions test. The results were encouraging and brought about “a quick change” in his prospects.

When he entered Ivy Tech in 2001, Stephen brought a lot of computer savvy: “I was given my first computer when I was 4 and I started learning computer programming when I was 7. I’ve had a computer ever since.” His initial goals were modest, just to complete an associate’s degree in Computer Information Systems. In the beginning, he says, “I was nervous and studied hard because I didn’t think I could do well.” His first marks were high, however, and “gave me lot of confidence”:

"I changed my mind about going on to a bachelor’s degree and decided to transfer to IUPUI after Ivy Tech. Also, I had wanted to go to law school but didn’t think I could achieve it. Now I decided to go to the IU law school in Indianapolis. I enjoy arguing and debating. All the barriers seemed to crumble at once. [Emphasis added.]"

Stephen continued to develop his computer skills during his time as a Nina Scholar at Ivy Tech. He created and maintained spreadsheets, databases, and PowerPoint presentations for the school. He now is working to generate reports based on current enrollment through the school’s mainframe system. In Spring 2003, Stephen graduated from Ivy Tech and was accepted at IUPUI to pursue a bachelor’s degree in computer technology. He still plans to go to law school afterwards and will clearly contribute to society.

Stephen especially appreciates Ivy Tech’s resources for the physically disabled, especially students with visual impairment: “It’s amazing what they can do in the special needs lab. I listed my concerns and they were met.” The Nina Scholars Program has helped to augment his resources:

"I use the flipper port device, which includes camera and glasses, to read the chalkboard and projections. I can point it at the board and zoom in and out. I could not succeed in college without it. I use CCTV to read printed material; the services of a reader and books on tape also help me avoid eye strain from long periods of studying."

Stephen has done very well academically as a Nina Scholar at Ivy Tech. He credits his academic success to the program because the scholarship and living allowance, supplemented by what he earns by working with special needs students, “allows me to concentrate exclusively on my studies and other academic activities; I can do a better job in school than I would otherwise.” His academic success has encouraged others in his family to take classes at Ivy Tech and his mother will be a Nina Tech Cohort 3 scholar.

Stephen came to college with good reading and writing skills but, like many other Nina Scholars, found math a “struggle.” He is thankful that one particular math instructor at Ivy Tech “opened up the world of algebra” for him. When Stephen overcomes a challenge, he is quick to help others do the same; he works as a math tutor in the Special Needs Office for students taking courses he has successfully completed. Stephen also has participated in the ICARE club for special needs students.

Stephen’s experience with the program has been extremely positive. He has had daily contact with the program coordinator because the Special Needs Office is across the hall from her office. His contact with the coordinator, together with the guidance of his supervisor in the Special Needs Office (who also is a member of the Nina Scholars Program Advisory Council), led to his increased involvement in student activities, including the Student Leadership Academy.

The program coordinator hired Stephen as a student mentor during the 2002–2003 school year and he has helped several scholars improve their academic performance. Stephen emerged as a student leader and was elected vice-president of the Ivy Tech Student Government Association during the 2002–2003 school year.

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and IUPUI has decreased its offerings, doing so only in mathematics.

It is interesting to note that students in the MCCCD comparison group took few remedial-level math courses. But it appears that they may not have been as well placed, since their grade performance in math was poor as a group. At ASU, the vast majority of students also performed poorly in their math courses.

Across all institutions, the scholar cohorts had notably and significantly higher grades in their math courses than did students in the comparison groups. The grade differences in writing courses was significant across all institutions, but this was largely due to the large difference between groups at Ivy Tech.

Figure 7 illustrates the marked grade-performance differences between scholars and comparison groups in math courses and the more variable differences in writing course grades.

**Summary of the Quantitative Results**

The *Interim Report* established a clear impact of the Nina Scholarship Program on
Aleshia Michaels, Cohort 1 — Embracing a Future of Rich Possibilities

Aleshia Michaels, a mother of two who works full-time at a school for the mentally and physically challenged, began college in her mid-thirties. After working for 13 years in a paint and body shop, Aleshia received her GED and became an administrative assistant at the school. When asked what her goals were upon entering college, Aleshia revealed how educational opportunities can transform the goals and aspirations of poor scholars:

"That’s easy. I believe I am going to be somebody one day, but until the last year and a half I’ve never felt that way. I just figured my life would be blah, blah, blah like everyone else’s. You live, grow old, die, and never get nothing. Well, that’s how my family way, they were just poor. When I got the scholarship and started coming here and I started getting my books and getting all of my class assignments it became a realization that it was going to happen and the more I looked forward to it the more I really wondered what I could be and if the possibility is there to be whatever I want to become."

Aleshia sees Nina Mason Pulliam as a role model who “realized what it was to have something better and gave back to those people that needed it.” She hopes to “turn around and do the same thing” one day.

Aleshia’s creativity, open-mindedness and dedication are strengths that have made her a successful scholar. Combining parenting, studying and working demands a delicate balance but Aleshia views her education as her first priority and accepts the temporary sacrifices it requires. She overcame obstacles at home by helping her children understand the importance of going back to school (she showed them the movie Erin Brokovich so they could see how a good education can improve their lives) and scheduling specific blocks of time with her children in her day planner (so that she would keep her “appointments” with them).

Despite competing demands, Aleshia consistently maintains a GPA well-above average. Her first semester English class “taught me that I can write” and her public speaking class has increased her self-confidence both personally and professionally:

"The reason I got my promotion was because I went out and applied for jobs and I was offered a job and I took it."

I gave my notice and the CEO called me and asked me what was going on and I told him. I’m able now to quickly think and articulate in a way that is impressive as well as creative and to the point without belittling other people or without stumbling over my words. I feel like if I can stand up in front of that classroom of people,...I can certainly talk to the CEO and tell him what I think and how much I could be if I was given a better position. And so they offered me $100 more, I got a parking place, I’m supposed to be getting a cell phone, I got my office, and they’re going to let me do some grant research.

Aleshia also has been invited to speak to the Fresh Start program (where she formerly was a client and employee) and for a number of other nonprofit organizations. She is proud of her newfound ability: “I was told that I helped to double the donations for one company’s United Way drive. I know that I can talk to people and I know that the passion I have is worth something and it brings out the good in other people and people listen.”

In her third semester Aleshia chose business administration as her program of study. She intends to pursue a B.A. and eventual M.B.A. after completing her community college courses: “I’m smart enough to do it,... the financial end of it is well worth it and I don’t see any point in only going half-way.”

Aleshia enjoys support from her family, her MCCCD mentor, another mentor, the program coordinator, certain instructors, and her boss. She feels that her position is somewhat unique because “My job is really understanding. My boss is really proud of me and very encouraging. He’s awesome.” She has not experienced any obstacles with the MCCCD program and has received the help and support she needs. She is “grateful for everything the Trust has given me for my classes as well as for my stipend.”

Aleshia identifies her greatest improvement as “believing in my abilities now. I don’t know if it’s because of my past experiences with my grades or a combination of that and my instructors.” With her increased self-confidence, her passion for wanting to help others, and her dedication to academic excellence, Aleshia Michaels is well on her way to carrying on Nina’s legacy.
the ability of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend college.

The current analysis also raises two notable points of concern: poor grades among a number of ASU scholars. ASU’s Cohort 1 had a group average GPA of just 2.01 for academic year 2002–2003. Examining the cumulative GPAs for these students shows that three of the seven continuing scholars are maintaining GPAs below 2.00, putting their academic progress in jeopardy. Two of ASU’s Cohort 2 scholars also have cumulative GPAs below 2.00. Thus one-third of the active ASU scholars (5 of 15) are in danger of being dismissed for poor academic performance.

ASU students appear to have a particular problem with math classes. Of the five freshman-level math classes taken by Cohort 2 scholars, one student received a grade of “B,” two scholars failed the one course they took, and one failed two math courses. In comparison, none of the scholars at the other institutions have GPAs below 2.00, although one Ivy Tech Cohort 2 scholar has exactly a 2.00 cumulative GPA and one MCCCD Cohort 2 scholar has a 2.11 cumulative GPA.

In sum, the majority of Nina Scholars are successfully progressing through college in comparison to other students from similar backgrounds. The combination of financial and academic support appears to give these students an advantage.
Ashlee Adkins, Cohort 1 — Finding New Direction in College

Ashlee Adkins began college strongly motivated by the desire to help other young people like herself. Paralyzed from the waist down by an accident in high school, this warm and vivacious young woman initially pursued pre-med courses that would lead to becoming a pediatric orthopedist. She entered IUPUI in fall 2001 as a member of the first cohort of Nina scholars. Dependent on student financial assistance to attend college, Ashlee is grateful for the Nina Scholarship: “All my needs are taken care of. I am pretty fortunate.” At first “curious” about Nina Mason Pulliam, Ashlee discovered “a wonderful woman who had a lot to give and share with other people.” As her story reveals, this description suits Ashlee Adkins as well.

Ashlee’s first semester at IUPUI, with courses in math, English, biology, and chemistry, was daunting. Strong in English and math, she found the sciences demanding because of the amount of information to be learned. The large impersonal college classes were much different than her small high school courses with their more personal focus, though her instructors responded quickly when she had questions. The pre-med courses also required more focused study. “I wish I was doing better,” she said near the end of the first semester. “My first tests were awful; I found that my study skills were not what they needed to be. In high school, I didn’t have to study as much. Now I have to be totally by myself and not distracted, and I have to follow a routine of reading the study guidebook and going over my notes.”

Ashlee worked hard her first semester to fulfill course requirements. She was greatly encouraged when her English professor praised, and shared with department colleagues, a paper she had written about her accident. She also found her IUPUI first-year seminar (a special section for pre-med students) a “big help” in her transition to college. Ashlee’s second semester remained academically challenging as she continued her biology, chemistry, and math courses. She worked weekly with a biology mentor, met twice weekly with a study group of biology majors, and joined the biology club. Problems understanding her math instructor were resolved when he was replaced but not soon enough to help her grade in the class. She was disappointed with her cumulative GPA of 2.53 at the end of the first year.

Nonetheless, during her first year Ashlee met “a lot of new friends, neat people on campus.” She grew closer to the other Nina scholars through informal program activities in the spring. She also became heavily involved in the Student Organization for Alumni Relations (SOAR) and was elected the group’s campus president for fall 2002. According to Ashlee, “The SOAR group has been wonderful; I have met a lot of people….I love [the experience]. I am glad that I got into it. It is good to be involved in something.” She wished that the Nina Scholars would coalesce into a real group that met regularly as well.

Ashlee expressed great appreciation for the Nina program coordinator. During her first year, as she began to rethink her academic and professional goals, she communicated weekly with the program coordinator. The coordinator offered helpful information and advice “about what I wanted to do, what major I would need.” She said, “I was unhappy with my studies in general … and I tried to get core of that. It’s not just that it was hard, but that I didn’t enjoy what I was studying. I asked myself, ‘What are my goals?’ I want to help people and work in an environment where I can.” Studying the Americans with Disabilities Act helped her realize that “I wanted to work for the rights of peoples with disabilities … [and] that I could do more in the public health field of law.”

By the end of her first year, Ashlee decided to change her major from Biology to Civic Leadership in the School for Public and Environmental Affairs, also changing her long-term goal from medical school to law school. “It reduced a huge amount of stress,” she said. Her second year was much more successful academically. Her second year course load had a very different emphasis: public affairs, political science, psychology, and statistics. Of her fall courses, Ashlee said, “[My] study skills improved greatly … [and] I enjoyed them better than the previous semester.” Her grades were much higher, ranging from A– to A+. Her semester GPAs were 3.82 in Fall 2002 and 3.94 in Spring 2003.
Part IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Since its inception, the Nina Scholars Program has been characterized by open and wide-ranging discussion of the program’s fundamental goals and the most effective means for achieving them. During this third year of implementation, it is timely for purposive discussions between the Trust and Nina program personnel, as well as within and among the partner institutions, regarding program purposes and methods. This dialogue will, of necessity, relate to both the immediate and long-term contexts.

As discussed in the executive summary, it is appropriate at this juncture to require that each Nina partner institution meet specific expectations. These include:

- recruitment of individuals from all three program emphases;
- thorough eligibility screening of applicants prior to interviews;
- clarification of transfer and probationary policies;
- completion of student handbooks;
- intensified attention to scholars in academic difficulty;
- improved grade performance of probationary-status scholars;
- concerted efforts to enhance scholar mutual understanding, respect and interdependence;
- specific strategies to enhance sensitivity to cultural differences and openness to dialogue;
- establishment of specific procedures for acknowledging and addressing scholar conflicts;
- increased advisory council and administrative support of program coordinators; and
- heightened accountability for responding to evaluation recommendations.

If a program is unable to meet these basic standards, it is essential that the advisory council and administrative support staff review the program’s day-to-day operation and assess the efficacy of institutional resources allocated to it. If fundamental program components are not in place, concerted efforts must be made to correct the inadequacies and redesign the infrastructure and communication network through which the scholarship goals will be accomplished.

The Nina Scholars Program has flourished within its first two years due to the vital partnership between the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust and the four Nina institutions. In their pursuit of change through educational opportunity, the Nina Scholars have clearly demonstrated the indispensable role that need-based scholarships play in contemporary society.
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