



Wraparound Support Is Key to Promoting Equity and Access for Low-Income Students

ENHANCED SUPPORT SERVICES ARE PROVEN TO INCREASE DEGREE COMPLETION

As income disparities in our nation increase, so does the number of low-income college students. The percentage of students receiving Pell or other federal grants reserved for those with exceptional financial need [has nearly doubled in the last few decades](#). Yet, as shown in the section Affluence and Inequity, wealthier students outpace low-income students in degree attainment by a staggering amount.

Low-income students typically arrive on campus with a host of unique challenges. Aside from socioeconomic status, many are unfamiliar with how to navigate higher education. They also struggle to access institutional support services due to fear of stigma or not feeling worthy of help. However, effective support services are proven to [positively impact college access and degree completion rates for low-income students](#).

For example, evaluations of the Student Support Services program (SSS) — one of eight federal TRIO programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-income students — found that SSS participants entering four-year institutions [were 23% more likely to attain a bachelor's degree within six years](#) than those in the nonparticipants' matched comparison group.

Affluence and Inequity

“In 2020, estimated bachelor’s degree attainment rates were almost four times higher for dependent family members in the highest income quartile than those in the lowest.”

— [The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, “Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2022 Historical Trend Report”](#)

Other protective factors, including parental support, belief in the value of education, and the ability to balance multiple responsibilities, such as work, school, and family, also are [positive factors contributing to degree completion for low-income students](#).

Improving Access and Equity

Higher education is an engine of economic and social mobility — and all students, regardless of family income, deserve a quality learning experience. Huron’s social alliance program supports institutions that demonstrate this commitment to improving access and equity for low-income students.

We recognize that understanding low-income students' challenges and positive protective factors is the first step in developing tailored, evidence-based strategies to improve retention and graduation rates, including:

- Easing the college transition through summer bridge programs.
- Encouraging student engagement on campus
- Gathering stakeholder feedback early and often
- Empowering students to help develop and assess programming.

Traditionally, marginalized students feel even more at the margins among tens of thousands of their majority peers. That said, various programmatic commitments can help these students thrive and build community, including affinity groups; targeted professional development opportunities; and access to scholarship funding.

Organization Policy Review

Every institution is unique, and Huron's social alliance is committed to helping colleges and universities enhance the success of their low-income students. One way this is accomplished is through the design of integrated student support services using an iterative evaluation and assessment process to facilitate institutional partners' creation of a road map for transformative change.

With a focus on nurturing sustainable support practices at institutions with a strong and proven commitment to equality of opportunity and institutional access regardless of student background, Huron helps identify additional opportunities to improve outcomes for low-income students.

Low-Income Student Demographics

- Majority female
- Black, Hispanic, and Asian
- First-generation college students
- First- or second-generation immigrants
- English as a second language (ESL)

Ninety percent of low-income students have a zero estimated family contribution. Many are funded through scholarships, federal Pell Grants, and other need-based financial aid.

— [The National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\), "Profile of Very Low and Low-Income Undergraduates in 2015-16."](#)

About Huron's Social Alliance

Started as a social entrepreneurship project, Huron's social alliance supports higher education institutions committed to equity and access, helping them sustain their mission and attain their goals by working together to solve strategic, structural, and financial challenges. Offering discounted advisory services to resource-constrained colleges and universities, the social alliance aims to enhance student success, especially for low-income students, through improved institutional performance and shared learnings across the higher education sector.



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