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Undergraduate Scholar: Ready, set, graduate

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Ready, set, graduate

Program prepares first-generation students for graduation and beyond

By Taylor Provine

Jessie Carr and Karina Moncayo-Michel are both first-generation students — the first in their families to pursue or receive bachelor's degrees.

Carr, junior in human development and family science, and Moncayo-Michel, May 2018 graduate in communication sciences and disorders, have both benefitted from the First Scholars program at Kansas State University. The university is part of a national research-based project to increase graduation rates among first-generation students.

"I am beyond grateful for the First Scholars program," Carr said. "I've gotten a lot of resources and advantages that I would not have had without it."

In 2014, the university was selected to host First Scholars, a program of The Suder Foundation that supports first-generation students through graduation by focusing on holistic development. The program offers academic, social and personal development along with financial support at five other participating public universities.

Twenty students started in the first K-State cohort, and an additional cohort has been added each year. The scholars receive a \$5,000 scholarship each year for a total of \$20,000.

But First Scholars is more than a scholarship program because it offers student support based on research to address the unique challenges first-generation students face, said Rebeca Paz, assistant director of the K-State Office of First-Generation Students. Each program year focuses on a different area, such as helping scholars connect to campus, optimizing the college experience, expanding career and community opportunities, and transitioning to the future.

By partnering with The Suder Foundation, K-State is collecting data, researching student success characteristics and supporting students during college. What K-State coordinators learn could help first-generation students nationwide.

"Through our work with K-State, we want to show that if we applied evidence-based practices consistently, First Scholars can work at any four-year, public state university," said Diane Schorr, executive director of The Suder Foundation.

The startup funds for the program covered four years, and K-State has added a university-funded cohort for the 2018-2109 academic year. With additional funding from The Suder Foundation, K-State established the Office of First-Generation Students to provide leadership and strategic coordination.

When the student scholars are seniors, they can give back to the community through a Legacy Project in which they create something meaningful to them.

Moncayo-Michel wanted to help potential future students see a college campus. For her project, she coordinated K-State campus visits for students from her

hometown of Liberal — a predominately Hispanic/Latino community in southwest Kansas — and other schools in the area.

"One of my favorite things to do is talk to future students," Moncayo-Michel said. "My goal was to let them know there are a lot of resources on campus to help them." **K**

Marks of success

K-State's inaugural First Scholars cohort just completed the fourth year with remarkable statistics.

- 76 percent of the students are on course to graduate between three and a half to five years.
- 3.26 cumulative GPA.
- 3 magna cum laude graduates.
- 69 percent of the graduates have joined or plan to join the workforce.
- 31 percent of the graduates will attend graduate school.

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Learn more about the First Scholars program and how to support it.

k-state.edu/seek