

# Community Collaboration

Central Florida College Access Network (CFCAN) Helps Students in Need Stay in College Through Emergency Support



## Today, Students Face Unique Challenges

We often picture an 18-year-old with parental support as the “traditional” college student, but this student only comprises a quarter of today’s postsecondary population. Three-quarters of undergraduate students juggle a combination of work, family, and academic responsibilities<sup>1</sup>, making it particularly challenging for low-income and first generation students to graduate.

## Reducing “Stop-Outs”

Many of today’s students struggle financially, and those struggles extend beyond the classroom. While scholarships and grants help cover tuition and books, life emergencies like a car breaking down can lead to a student stopping out of college. As reported in “Still Hungry and Homeless in College,”<sup>2</sup> nationally 36% of university students and over 40% of community college students were food and housing insecure.

To keep students on track, the Central Florida College Access Network (CFCAN) brought partners together. These partners sought to develop a program that assists college students with life emergencies so they could stay in college and complete their degree.



“Community partnerships support students in a way that’s difficult for colleges to provide on their own.”

**Jessica Kleinberger, MA**  
Program Manager  
Heart of Florida United Way

## Launching a Pilot Program

CFCAN partnered with Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) and Seminole State College of Florida to create a pilot program called Destination Graduation, leveraging HFUW’s 2-1-1 services to meet students’ nonacademic needs. HFUW placed 2-1-1 specialists on two Seminole State campuses. Financial aid officers and academic advisors identified students at risk of stopping out and referred them to the 2-1-1 specialists who provided resources and assistance. Where necessary, a case manager supported students with emergency financial assistance.

**2-1-1:** A free informational service to connect individuals who need financial, housing or other assistance with available community resources.

## System Changes to Better Serve Students

Seminole State College recognized that certain institutional practices were hindering student completion. To support student success through this program, Seminole State:

- Updated their medical withdrawal procedure
- Improved emergency aid practices in various departments across campus to better inform students of available support
- Is in the process of reinstituting a campus food pantry

### References

1. Complete College America. Time is the Enemy: The Surprising Truth About Why Today’s College Students Aren’t Graduating ... and What Needs to Change. Washington DC: Complete College America, 2011
2. .Still Hungry and Homeless in College, by Sara Goldrick-Rab, Jed Richardson, Joel Schneider, Anthony Hernandez and Clare Cady, Wisconsin Hope Lab, April 2018.

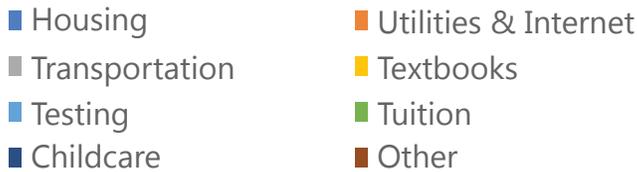
# Persistence Improves 25%

On average, 76% of Destination Graduation recipients enrolled in the following semester after receiving support, which is 25% higher than for low-income students in crisis who did not receive assistance.

## Program Successes

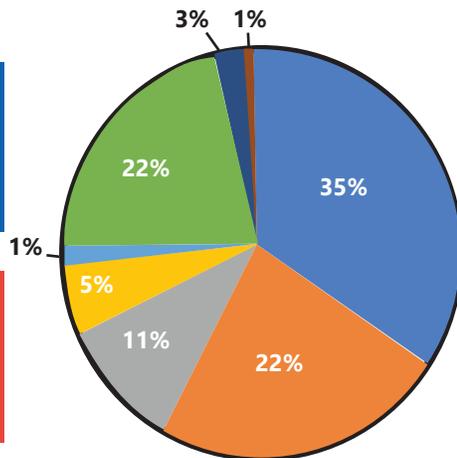
From 2015-2018, Destination Graduation assisted 905 students, 119 of whom received emergency funds, most often with housing and utilities. Other support areas included transportation, textbook assistance, childcare, and disability testing.

## Funding Breakdown



Emergency Funds  
Disbursed:  
**\$107,000**

Average Award  
to 119 Students:  
**\$775**



## Lessons Learned

Since the program's launch in 2015, CFCAN has made several changes to improve their model:

- They moved from a fixed funding approach to a more flexible one to meet the varying emergency needs of students
- They targeted promotion of the service to the campus counseling, advising and financial aid offices where employees are more apt to encounter a student in need
- They embedded 2-1-1 service personnel in the academic advising office to make the service more accessible for students

## Want to Learn More?

You can find more resources about how communities across Florida are increasing postsecondary attainment at [www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org)

## Bring the Service to Your Campus

From the beginning, CFCAN's goal was to create a framework other colleges could adopt. To ensure success, colleges should consider:

### Champions

It was crucial to have senior level champions at each participating organization who carried the authority to work through systems change at their institution and who could generate support from departments that were necessary parts of the implementation.

### Funding

A successful persistence program will require a consistent source of funds to cover student emergency expenses. The guidelines for disbursing these funds must be flexible enough to account for diverse student needs. Funding restrictions can limit the program's ability to meet needs that can range from \$100 for a textbook to \$1500 to avoid eviction. Funding is also needed to cover staff hours for the case managers who work directly with at-risk students and campus representatives.

### Embed Services on Campus

Transportation challenges prevented students from accessing services off campus. After trying several models including phone referrals to 2-1-1 specialists, CFCAN embedded services on campus. This helped students become familiar with the resources available and feel more comfortable accessing support when they needed it.

### Relationship with the Financial Aid Office

Financial aid officers are often one of the first campus employees to know a student is having financial trouble. Building a relationship with these professionals accomplishes two goals: 1) it ensures aid given to students is reported to the financial aid office in accordance with institutional, statewide and federal regulations; and 2) the financial aid office receives referrals from Destination Graduation staff and is able to disburse additional tuition grants and textbook vouchers to students assessed by Destination Graduation.

### Data Sharing Agreement

It's important to measure impact for all participating partners. A data sharing agreement was established to ensure all partners could track the program's success.