

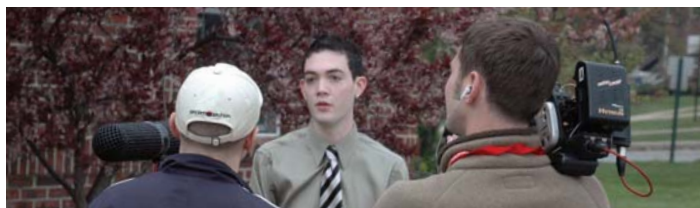
Scholarships

Scholarships Boost SRU's Academic Goals, Attract Top-Tier Students

The importance of scholarships cannot be overstated.

They shape universities, recruiting higher-quality classes and elevating regional and national reputation. Eighty academic standouts – some with grade-point averages above 4.0 – began their first year at Slippery Rock University this fall thanks to the University's new Merit Scholarship. To continue recruiting top-tier students, funding must be increased.

"We have more students who meet the scholarship criteria that we could make offers to if we had additional dollars," SRU's Patty Hladio, director of financial aid, said. "The most valuable giving alumni can do right now, if they're looking to give toward scholarships, is to give to the broad, general scholarship fund, as opposed to putting limitations on it. By giving to the general scholarship fund, what you're saying is, 'I value the type of education students can get here, and I value the leadership of the institution.'"



Scholarships attract top students, reduce expenses and advance careers. At SRU's spring graduation, scholarship recipient Matt Forrest, '05, (center) was interviewed for a new recruitment DVD. The dean's list graduate noted he received two printmaking scholarships from SRU's art department as a student. They helped him obtain a full tuition scholarship to the graduate school of fine arts at West Virginia University. Forrest recently started his own printmaking business and plans to teach art at the college level.

The Merit Scholarship is part of a strategic enrollment initiative aimed at boosting SRU's academics and reputation. The scholarship requires a 3.5 or higher grade-point average, 1125 or higher on the SAT and a high school class ranking in the top 25 percent.

Students receive \$1,250 a year applicable to tuition. The new freshman class is the first to receive the scholarship, managed by the SRU Foundation, Inc.

More Recognition

"High-achieving students tend to perform better. As a result, other important University indicators such as retention, graduation rates and national recognition go up," said Dr. Amanda Yale, associate provost of enrollment services.

"These factors influence funding and *U.S. News and World Report's* annual ranking of colleges and universities, considered a major recruiting dynamic. The goal is to position SRU for a move from Tier 3 to Tier 2 in the rankings," Yale said.

"\$1,250 for a public institution is something that's very attractive to our students," Yale said. "Overall, it has an impact when you recruit students. It impacts the entire class. Our freshman class (fall '05) is probably going to be the best prepared class that we've had, based on SAT rank and high school GPA."

The numbers are impressive. The incoming class posted an average high school grade-point average of 3.23, up from 2.99 since 2001. As of July, the class had an average SAT score of 1004, up from 958 in '01.

2008 Watershed

The U.S. Census predicts a decline in the pool of high school students, regionally and nationally, after 2008. "Merit scholarships will become even more critical to SRU as universities compete for these high-achievers," Yale said.

"We need to recruit beyond the 15 counties of western Pennsylvania," she said. "We're heavily in eastern Pennsylvania, and the new non-resident tuition program will help attract more students from Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, D.C., New Jersey and New York."

Real Need

Because SRU's tuition is lower than other schools, many graduates and supporters mistakenly believe students don't need financial aid or scholarships.

"The reality is that many of our students are first in the family to attend college, coming from families with household income of \$45,000 or less," Yale said. "They need scholarships, especially when factoring in room and board."

Importance of No Restrictions

Many scholarships limit recipients to a certain high school or major. SRU's Merit Scholarship requires only that students meet the academic requirements.

"One of the critical pieces, with these scholarships, is when the foundation provided this funding to us, it did not put any restriction on it," Hladio said. "When you have to be from a certain high school or entering a certain major, it ties the hand of enrollment management because you are actually giving the funds to a somebody who fits the bill, as opposed to saying this is the type of student we need. The new scholarship gives us the type of students we need."



Exercise science major Valerie Williams, who graduated in May with a 3.9 grade point average, received four Honors Program Scholarships, the Golden Key National Honor Society Senior Scholarship and the Meiping Cheng Memorial Scholarship stipend. Named SRU's Outstanding Senior Woman for 2005, Williams said "scholarships awarded based on merit and academic achievement made college more affordable for me. I also traveled to Mexico, Ireland and Costa Rica on SRU trips that were made less expensive through travel grants provided by SRU." Williams, of Beaver Falls, entered The Rock's Doctor of Physical Therapy program this fall.