



A Story of Covid, Emergency Grants and what a Financial Aid Director Learned about his College and his Students

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Wait, we really have to close everything down?

- CARES Act funds arrive
- How do we get these funds to students?
 - Needs?
 - Application?
 - Amount?
- Changing requirements – Title IV eligible, US Citizenship, etc.
- We got the funds to needy students, but process was a mess



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Wait, we really have to close everything down?

I am currently having difficulties paying my rent with risk of eviction. I am worried my internet connection will then be cut off making it impossible to attend online classes. I have a 2-year-old daughter so it is not ideal to go to other places so it fluctuating schedule of hours making it not possible to file for unemployment for reduced hours as some weeks I work regular hours and other weeks I do not. I am asking for assistance to cover rent for this month. It would help me and my daughter greatly. I have maintained satisfactory grades, and I don't want to ruin my GPA.

I am a single mom who is now out of work due to this pandemic and it has been really hard to keep up with the bills, assignments, and trying to find different food banks. I'm already late on my rent and have been really trying to keep myself in high spirits as we near the end of the semester but find it really hard with the current situation.



Before the pandemic I had 2 jobs. I was working while going to school as well. I am now down to only 1 job right now and limited hours which is taking a toll on me and even my family. While I found myself trying to help get my things paid, I noticed my family needed some help as well. I feel obligated to help them as much as I'm not planning on taking 2 college courses this summer which are now on hold at the moment and I feel so upset by this as I planned to enter into a program this coming fall. They only accept people in the fall, so not getting to take these 2 classes this summer would put me a year behind my future beginning. I would love to get a grant just to be able to take these classes so that I could still be on track towards my goals! Thank you.



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We're open again, and they just sent us more money?



- CRSSA funds
 - Refined the process
 - Allowed students to apply to their bill
 - Priority given to Pell eligible students
 - If no FAFSA, used amount requested to determine EFC equivalent
 - Started thinking about how to do this really well...
 - What are the opportunities here?

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Okay, this time I have a plan...



- ARP funds
 - City and County give us money too!
 - Made me think even more about program creation
 - Block Grants
 - Pilot Program Goals
 - Help the students who need it
 - Professional development for advisors
 - Persistence and retention

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Okay, this time I have a plan...



- Training
 - Staff were given training to help them with the holistic advising needed to determine student needs and make good decisions regarding the awarding of the grants
 - Four steps to the training
 - Connecting with the student
 - Evaluating the student's situation
 - Suggesting resources
 - Making the decision on the emergency grant
 - This project was almost as much about staff development with an eye toward Guided Pathways as it was about assisting students

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Okay, this time I have a plan...

- We awarded \$95,835 to 127 students
- There was a lot of hesitation at first from staff
- Awarding increased as the semester went on and staff became more comfortable with it
- Feedback from staff was very positive
 - "I feel like I can really make a difference in student success."
 - "This helped me create connections with students."






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...and we got results

Student survey

- 95% of the students who received an emergency grant said they intended to return for spring 2022.
- 44% said they likely would have dropped out of Kirkwood if not for the emergency grant
- 49% said that without a spring emergency grant, they might not be able continue at Kirkwood



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...and we got results

In answer to the question, "I used the emergency grant for...", here are the percentages for the four highest categories

Food - 20%
 Housing - 19%
 Class materials - 17%
 Transportation - 10%

Less than 1% said tuition

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...and we got results

We compared three groups:

- Students who received a block grant
- Students who received an Advisor Awarded Grant
- Students who did not receive an Emergency Grant

Using three measures:

- GPA
- SAP
- Persistence






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...and we got results

GPA

- No Emergency Grant: 72% of students were 2.0 or above
 - can't determine EFC as this includes non-FAFSA filers
- Block Grant: 70% of students were 2.0 or above
 - average EFC: 2508
- Advisor Awarded Grant: 76% of students were 2.0 or above
 - average EFC: 5591
- Average % over last three fall terms: 76% were 2.0 or above
 - can't determine EFC as this includes non-FAFSA filers






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...and we got results

SAP

- No Emergency Grant: 67% made SAP
- Block Grant: 77% made SAP
- Advisor Awarded Grant: 78% made SAP
- Average % over last three fall terms: 77% made SAP





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...and we got results

Persistence

- No Emergency Grant: 68% returned for 2022SP
- Block Grant: 75% returned for 2022SP
- Advisor Awarded Grant: 82% returned for 2022SP
- Average fall rate for last 3 years: 74%



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...and we got results

We also asked students what the emergency grant meant to them. Over 1500 students wrote a reply to that question. Three responses:

"Everything!!!! Thank you so much. Going to Kirkwood has allowed me to see that I do have a future. I am so excited to pursue it."

"It saved my life - an opportunity to become a better person and self was only possible with proper funds."


"It means everything to me. My mom being a single mom paying for my education, housing and food are hard for her. To be able to give her that relief was great. She wants me to focus on school without having a job to worry about."



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Now what?


- Using all that I learned from 2020-2022, I created the Student Success Grant program
- The request:
 - Expand to 31 academic advisors, 12 Financial Aid staff, 9 Student Assistance staff (52 staff total)
 - \$15,000 budget for each staff member
 - \$780,000 commitment from the college to fund the program



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Now what?


- The financial rationale:
 - 8300 students in the term
 - 7% increase in persistence
 - 581 students increase
 - 10 credits/average
 - \$54.63 value of 1 credit
 - $581 \times 10 \times \$54.63 = \$317,400$
 - Average persistence for spring is 54%
 - $314 \times 10 \times 54.63 = \$171,538$
 - Total additional revenue for one year: \$488,938



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Now what?

- The response:
 - \$250,000 from Kirkwood's general fund and \$70,000 from the Kirkwood Foundation
- Four groups: Financial Aid, Academic Advisors, Student Assistance, and Student Equity Inclusion and Support
- First year of the program, we awarded 374 students for a total of \$305,605



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Student Success Grant Application

Completed forms are submitted to the Financial Aid Office, which will evaluate the request and determine if the grant can be awarded.

*Required required fields.

Name:

Number:

Student Name:


Student Number:

Area of Need:


- Food
- Housing
- Class Materials
- Technology
- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Childcare
- Other

Current Student Situation:

Amount:





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Did it all work out?

- Positive responses from many advisors – they felt like they could really help students who needed it
- Retention of students who got an SSG is 3% higher than those who did not
- Still a work in progress – not all staff are excited about this and some just give the maximum without considering the student’s individual circumstances



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What I learned

- Flexibility in program creation
- Our students need more financial assistance
- Our staff need help with difficult conversations
- This is hard work – try not to take it home with you
- But in the end, this is why we’re here

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