



Annual Report

AY 2021-2022



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

WE FLY

Guardian Scholars

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Executive Summary

The Guardian Scholars program is a University-sponsored student support service for students who experienced foster care. The program is housed in the Division of Student Affairs at Ball State University. The mission of the program is to provide a place of belonging and support for students who have experienced foster care. Within the Guardian Scholars, students are connected to peers who shared similar childhood experiences and a network of professionals trained to support their unique needs on campus. Through this program underrepresented, at-risk students experience equity and access to higher education at Ball State University.

The Guardian Scholars program provides a variety of support for program participants including regularly scheduled coaching meetings for academic, financial and intercampus interventions. Program seminars and events also provide learning, leadership and community building opportunities to students.

The following is a summary of program outcomes for the 2021 academic year:

- 30 students served, including 16 full program participants
- 182 coaching meetings and 13 programmatic events were held
- Students averaged a cumulative GPA of 2.85
- Six program graduates earned their diplomas
- \$90,383 raised in monetary donations, in-kind giving, grants, and awards
- \$9,500 in scholarships awarded to four scholars

Section I: Impact

The Guardian Scholars program served 16 program participants this year, with an additional 14 students receiving onboarding or miscellaneous support. Program participants included 8 returning students and 9 students new to the program. Onboarding support saw exponential increases this year due to the addition of a self-identifying mechanism added to the university admissions process.

Our students universally face maximum financial need with zero expected family contributions (EFC) and have a large overlap with 21st Century Scholars and Pell Grant recipients. The Guardian Scholars program serves underrepresented students with 38% of program participants this academic year identifying as students of color. Guardian Scholars students are among the Universities highest-risk because each student is overcoming traumatic life experiences and/or the ongoing effects of instability in their families of origin while they are pursuing their post-secondary degrees.

Student Wellbeing, Health, and Safety

- Program Coordinator held 182 personal coaching meetings used to assess current student wellbeing and make appropriate referrals to intercampus and community support agencies
- Student health related referral agencies utilized by the program included: BSU Health Center, BSU Counseling Center, BSU UPD, Open Door Health Services, IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital, Rector Orthodontics
- Program seminars were held on Healthy Relationships (Counseling Center) and Cooking/Nutrition (University Chef)

Student Success (Retention, Persistence, Completion)

- 70% of returning Guardian Scholars program participants improved their cumulative GPA's this academic year. Cumulative program GPA's averaged 2.853 for the year. Term GPA's averaged at 2.841 for the fall, and 2.614 for the spring semester.
- In AY 2021 the Guardian Scholars program retained 1st year students from AY 2020 at a rate of 50% (1 of 2). We anticipate retention of 1st year students for AY 2021 to be at 67% with 4 out of 6 students who plan to return to BSU for the fall 2021 term. (see Table 1)

- The Guardian Scholars program anticipates recognizing 6 graduates during the 2021 academic year, including 2 pending summer graduates. The average graduation rate for the last four program cohorts (AY 2015-2018) is 57%. Since its inception in 2004, the program has currently celebrated 37 Ball State University graduates. (see Table 2)
- Program scholarship awards totaling \$9,500 were awarded between four students in the 2021 academic year.

	AY 2017 (7)	AY 2018 (4)	AY 2019 (8)	AY 2020(2)	AY 2021 (8)	AVE.
1st Year Retention Rate	71%	50%	83%	50%	67%	64%

Table 1

	AY 2015 (4)	AY 2016 (5)	AY 2017 (7)	AY 2018 (4)	AVE.
Graduation Rate	75%	100%	29%	25%*	57%

*denotes student(s) in degree progress

Table 2

Inclusive Excellence (Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

The Guardian Scholars program is comprised entirely of marginalized, at-risk students. Not only has every student experienced foster care, but there is intersectionality with low-income, 1st generation students who disproportionately represent marginalized identities, including race and sexual orientation. Services provided through the program are a direct reflection of the University's commitment to Inclusive Excellence and high impact Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices.

Sense of Belonging & Community Building

The Guardian Scholars program is, at its core, a place of belonging for students who experienced foster care. Students who participate in the program build and share community with peers who have had similar life experiences. Attending program seminars and events allows students to build community with one another for a stronger sense of belonging on campus, actively combatting belongingness uncertainty among this demographic.

- Between program seminars and events, program participants had 13 programmatic opportunities for community building with their peers during the 2021 academic year.

Student Learning & Development

Program coaching meetings and seminars are fertile ground for student learning and development to take place.

Learning objectives in coaching meetings included:

- Self-advocacy
- Academic advocacy- communication skills
- Mental health advocacy- self-awareness
- Medical advocacy
- Financial aid advocacy- appeals and scholarships
- Study skills
- Time management
- Accountability
- Boundary setting/prioritizing
- Higher Ed system navigation
- Navigating social services

Learning objectives in seminars included:

- Campus skills
- Study skills
- Writing skills
- Life skills
- Cooking/Nutrition skills
- Budgeting/Banking skills
- Self-awareness- personality type
- Healthy relationships
- Career Preparation
- Graduate school prep
- Career exploration

Professional Discovery and Career Readiness

Students in the Guardian Scholars program are often working part or full time while taking full time classes in order to prepare for their future careers.

- Students explore their professional preferences through dialoging about their work experiences in their coaching meetings.
- Students receive periodic information regarding job/internship opportunities on campus and in the Muncie community.
- Interested students toured a Muncie employer's facility and gained an insider connection to quality, flexible student employment.
- Seminars were held on Graduate School preparation and Career Exploration

Section II: Student Impact/Success Stories

I believe that every student who participates in the Guardian Scholars program could be featured in this section, even the ones who end up taking a path that leads them away from Ball State. The program, by nature, leaves every participant in a better place, with new tools, experiences, and beliefs about themselves. Here are snippets of some of the more inspiring Guardian Scholars stories from AY 2021.

Profile 1: Female, Graduate- December 2021

This student joined the Guardian Scholars as a first-year student in AY 2017. Her academic progress in her first couple of years was solid, but as she hit her upperclassmen years she also experienced ongoing disruption in her most significant relationships and was in persistent monetary crisis forcing her to prioritize her basic needs over her school work. She had stopped out after failing to resolve an incomplete in order to meet her program requirements for an internship placement. She believed her degree prospect to be over and was making ends meet through couch hopping in various, unstable housing situations and working in jobs where she was being mistreated. I spent some time trying to identify whether she still had degree options, and identified a way for her to graduate with a General Studies degree in one semester. We also upheld her unused program scholarship from the previous year and worked to ensure her financial aid was intact for the last semester. I received these written words from this student at her Commencement:

"Words cannot describe how grateful I am to have had you walk into my life when you did. I had completely given up on myself. I had succumbed to the idea that school was no longer an option. I began looking for jobs that I knew would not make me happy and I would not get treated right. You motivated me to go back to school. Thank you for helping me see that a degree was possible. I appreciate all that you have done to help me."



Profile 2: Male, Senior- Pending July graduation

This student joined the program in October of this year, as a senior. When he was introduced to our office, he shared a history of physical and emotional abuse and neglect from his family of origin that lacked any respect for human dignity. This student was McKinney-Vento certified in high school as an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. He survived that period by bouncing between a few friends' couches and off the generosity of their families. He came to Ball State because he had the aid to do so and knew it would buy him at least a year to have a roof over his head and a reliable source of food. He found that he liked Psychology so he kept moving ahead in his degree but expressed that he had barely scraped by for the last 3.5 years at Ball State. He took every penny of aid and loan eligibility that he was offered each semester in order to meet his basic needs. In spite of that he still had to skip meals because he had no food and had never been taught to cook anything. He hadn't received medical care since elementary school. He hadn't seen a dentist. He realized that he has developed significantly impaired vision but had never seen an optometrist for corrective lenses. He desperately needed a job but struggled to find a viable solution since he had never gotten his driver's license. He relied on public transportation, which proved to be unreliable and caused many disruptions to his ability to be on time for classes, when buses failed to stop, or routes were changed without notice. This student verbalized how badly he needed life skills. He realized how little he was modeled or taught in his childhood. He had made it to his senior year without prior support from any other social or state agency but had gained awareness of his own severe deficits. In his own words he shared, "I am suffering."

It would be a prettier story if I could tell you that, once he got connected with the Guardian Scholars, we tackled each issue one at a time and now he is thriving. However, things got harder for this student in the Spring 2022 semester, as he faced compounding and atypical medical crises throughout the semester which were debilitating and required multiple hospitalizations and even surgery. The success of this story lies in the fact that for the first time this student had caring support from a committed adult and had someone walking alongside him as he faced incredibly hard things. He received collaborative care across many University supports including the Health Center, Counseling Center, University Police Department, Dean of Students office, and many faculty interventions on his behalf. He didn't have to experience these barriers completely alone, because I was in frequent communication with him, helping him to interpret and process the situation he found himself in and navigate the academic implications of his condition.



I consider it a huge win that this student is poised to resolve a few incomplete classes and graduate in July. He is also now insured through Medicaid and has made tremendous strides in medical self-advocacy. He even attended a program seminar on cooking and had his first kitchen experience with a chef present to help him gain confidence. He will have a long road ahead of him in overcoming the traumas and deficits he is bringing into adulthood, but I couldn't be more proud of what he has accomplished this year and the efforts our program exerted into supporting him. He recently shared, "Thank you for being there for me and helping me through these times. I don't even know where I'd be without your help and I am just expressing that I am really grateful. Thank you so much."

Profile 3: Female, Senior- Pending July graduation

This student exhibited academic and programmatic excellence throughout her time at Ball State. She was a first-year student in AY 2019 and is on pace to graduate nearly a year ahead of schedule. Research shows that students exiting foster care average graduation paces 2/3 slower than their first-generation, low-income peers, so the fact that she is graduating early is a huge testament to her work ethic and academic abilities. She was a program scholarship recipient and Dean's List honoree every semester, currently including three 4.0 terms. She hopes to begin a Master's program at Ball State in Business Administration next year.



Profile 4: Female, Graduate- May 2022

This student exhibited academic and programmatic excellence throughout her time at Ball State. She was a first-year student in AY 2018 and was a standout leader among her peers. She was a program scholarship recipient and Dean's List honoree every semester, including two 4.0 terms her senior year. This student accomplished all of this while living independently, having aged out of foster care as a ward of the state. She will begin a Master's program at Ball State in Clinical Psychology this fall.

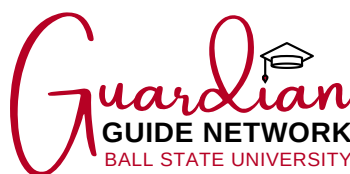
Section III: Promising Practices

In AY 2021 the Guardian Scholars program manager united program support staff and offices across campus under a unified name with the development of the newly founded Guardian Guide Network. The purpose of the Guardian Guide Network is to provide students with direct-linkages to area experts who are familiar with the barriers to success experienced by Guardian Scholars students, and are able to provide compassionate and competent support to students utilizing their department or office. This is nothing new and has been happening across campus since the inception of the program in 2004. What IS new is the **name, visual designation** (digitally and on-site), **training** and increased **communication** being provided by the Guardian Scholars to those who are acting as program contacts in their area.

The intent is to make a thriving and critical part of the Guardian Scholars experience a more robust service for both students and guides. What are the benefits to adding these components?

- The **name** (Guardian Guide Network) helps provide structure to our supportive network and gives students added confidence that their needs will be received by program trusted professionals.
- The **visual designation** of points-of-contact on an interactive campus map in Canvas will help students develop self-advocacy skills and on-site signage will provide students with comfort by association with the program.
- Network guides will receive introductory and annual **training** on current research and best practices for working with at-risk student populations that minimize trauma and promote personal agency for students.
- Network guides will receive **communication** on current program demographics/trends and updates that will aid them in staying abreast of student needs and allow for personalized care for students and streamlined data collection on support services being utilized within the program.

We believe this promising practice will increase student utilization of campus support structures while better equipping staff to understand and respond to the unique needs of this student population, resulting in positive retention and graduation outcomes for students.



Section IV: Trending

The most notable trend that we are seeing in the Guardian Scholars is the increased number of students anticipated to be qualified for and desiring program engagement in future years. The AY 2021 program cohort was 4 times bigger than the previous year, though not an unprecedented size. However, we served almost identical numbers of students in onboarding and miscellaneous support, which nearly doubled our overall number of students served. We believe this growth can be attributed the changes made to the program structure and marketing at the time of program transition to the Division of Student Affairs last year. With the addition of the self-identifying mechanism in the University admissions process, we anticipate this trend to continue for several years before stabilization occurs. This will present challenges as the program must scale services based on program staffing limitations. Additional program structure changes are being implemented in AY 2022 to both maximize the number of students able to be effectively served through the program and mitigate the demands on program staff in serving increased student caseloads.

Section V: Staff Development

Guardian Scholars program manager, Bria Zolman, engaged in the following staff development activities in AY 2021.

Professional Organization Service

- Muncie Fellows, Board of Directors, Spring 2018-current

Service to the University

- Community Engagement Council member, Muncie Community Schools, Fall 2021-current
- TeenWorks@BSU Search Committee, Spring 2022

Professional Development trainings

- Expanding Promise: Depicting Ecosystems of Support and Financial Sustainability for Student in Care, National Research Collaboration for Foster Alumni and Higher Education (NRC-FAHE) webinar, August 2021*
- Humanizing and Healing Centered Practices to Support Foster Care Alumni in Higher Education, NRC-FAHE webinar, October 2021*
- Using Games for Teambuilding, Dillon Waggoner, Ball State University, December 2021
- Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) training, January 2022*
- FERPA: Protecting Student Privacy certification, January 2022*
- Intergroup Dialog Facilitator (IGD) training, Spring 2022*
- Healing Centered Engagement Facilitator, in progress Summer 2022**

Section VI: Collaborations & Partnerships

The success of the Guardian Scholars program is intricately linked to the strength of program partnerships. Program collaborations occurred both within the Division of Student Affairs and in the broader campus community. Additionally, the program has several key collaborations with community organizations and a passionate group of program donors who fund both scholarship and programmatic expense accounts.

Inside the Division, the program collaborated with:

- **Career Center** – Provided seminar instruction, arranged employer site visit, staff member served on Scholarship Review Committee
- **Health Center** – Provided coordinated care efforts for students with serious medical concerns
- **University Police Department** – Provided coordinated support efforts for students needing wellness checks
- **Counseling Center** – Served students mental health needs, provided seminar instruction
- **Dean of Students** – Coordinated care efforts for students with BIT referrals
- **Title IX** – Coordinated support of a student who reported being sexually assaulted
- **Student Life** – provided games to be utilized at a program event
- **Housing and Residential Life**- collaborating on break housing accommodations for students lacking safe and reliable break housing, staff member served on our Scholarship Review Committee.

Outside of the Division, the Guardian Scholars collaborated with:

- **Learning Center; University College, Academic Affairs** - intercampus referrals to online resources and tutoring services, in addition to seminar instruction.
- **Retention and Graduation; Enrollment Planning and Management**- provided student support with regards to 21st Century Scholars and
- **Writing Center; English Department, College of Science and Humanities**- provided seminar instruction and student writing support
- **Academic Advising; University College, Academic Affairs**- collaborated on student scheduling needs and major changes, staff member on the Scholarship Review Committee
- **Office of Financial Aid; Enrollment Planning and Management**- Provided frequent consultation on student financial aid packages and cost of attendance threshold, processed scholarship awards, staff member served on our Scholarship Review Committee

- **Office of Admissions; Enrollment Planning and Management-** collaborated to add a self-identifying question to the university admissions application, coordinated on-boarding support for incoming students who were identified during the admissions process
- **Faculty; Colleges/Academic Affairs-** collaborated on student wellness, attendance status and academic policies when grades were being impacted by extra-curricular barriers

Community Partnerships included:

- Prevent Child Abuse of Delaware County- In-kind donors and provided kick-off event support
- Tri Kappa sorority- funded \$1,000 grant for program needs; members include in-kind donors
- Open Door Health Services- provided coordinated care efforts for scholars utilizing their services, including support of Navigators for social service applications
- Exchange Club of Muncie- monetary and in-kind giving
- Aging Out Institute- awarded our program the Flame Award including a \$30,000 prize.
- Monetary donations to the program totaled \$81,348, and the program received an estimated \$8,035 in in-kind contributions.
- The total value of combined monetary donations, in-kind giving, grants, and awards for the 2021 academic year was \$90,383.

Contributions AY 2021	Amount
Monetary donations	\$51,343
In-kind gifts	\$8,035
Grants	\$1,000
Awards	\$30,000
Total	\$90,378

Section VII: Impact Assessment Report

Department: Student Affairs, Guardian Scholars Program

Project Title: Program Participation & Graduation Analysis

What learning or service outcomes were measured?

1. Comprehensive, historical data on program participation
2. Comprehensive, historical data on program graduates

What are the Key Findings?

1. The Guardian Scholars program has currently had 156 students participate in the program, which included 48 Ivy Tech students and 108 Ball State students (12 in degree progress).
2. The Guardian Scholars has currently recognized 37 Ball State graduates (39% all time, Ball State graduation rate- does not include those in degree progress).
3. Current program graduation rate average is 57% when accounting for the last four academic years.

What are the resulting actions?

1. The program is now maintaining comprehensive digital records which document all program participants and graduates.
2. Practices which led to significant increases in positive graduation outcomes in recent years are being assessed and improved as needed.
3. A database of program alumni has been established and could be utilized for additional outcome assessments, mentorship programming, or donor purposes.

Learning or Service Outcomes

This program analysis required the consolidation of paper and digital records dating back 18 years to program inception in 2004. Once all the records had been combined into one database and redundancies were eliminated, data analysis was elevated to Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS) to identify which students attended Ball State and which attended Ivy Tech (or both schools). Additionally, graduation data was retrieved by IRDS. Data regarding Ivy Tech program graduates was not pursued.

This time-consuming analysis was prioritized in order to provide the program with baseline program information and metrics. Historical instability in program leadership was determined to be the likely cause of the deficit in reliable record keeping under previous program coordinators. This program analysis has helped the program establish the most basic service outcomes from the program inception; namely, who has participated in the program and did they earn their college degree from Ball State?

Summary of key findings

- One-hundred and fifty-six students have participated in Guardian Scholars programming at Ball State since 2004.
 - Ivy Tech only- 48 students
 - Ball State only- 98 students
 - Both schools- 10 students
 - Twelve students are still in degree progress at Ball State
- The program has recognized 37 Ball State program graduates
 - This is a 39% all time graduation rate for Ball State program participants (37/96)
 - Students currently in degree progress were not counted against this percentage
 - Program graduation rates increase to 57% when compared to the graduating classes of the previous four academic years.
 - There are two anticipated Summer 2022 graduates
 - Data pertaining to Ivy Tech graduates has not been pursued

Conclusions and resulting actions

The program is now maintaining comprehensive digital records which document all program participants and graduates. This record-keeping can now be easily maintained in order to report accurately on program outcomes.

It is concerning that the graduation rate of program participants across time averages to the same rate as research suggest students in this demographic matriculate without intervention (40%). We learned that graduation outcomes significantly improved under the consistent oversight of the former program coordinator who held the position for six years. This indicates that program outcomes are dramatically impacted by the consistency and caliber of the professional leading the program. Practices which led to significant increases in positive graduation outcomes in recent years are being assessed and improved as needed.

Now that a database of program alumni has been established, evaluation of how that information could be utilized is underway. One possible action could be surveying program alumni for additional outcome assessments beyond graduation (i.e., employment rates, housing stability, advanced degree work, etc.). We are also considering whether there could be an avenue for connecting current program participants with mentorship opportunities with program alumni. Additionally, we recognize program alumni as possible donor connections for current program support.