

Report on the 2024 Scholarship Risk Interventions Impact on First-Generation Students at USC

Executive Summary

The Scholarship Risk Initiative (SRI), implemented by the University Advising Center (UAC) at the University of South Carolina (USC), has successfully identified and supported first-generation students at risk of losing their scholarships. This report outlines the impact of the initiative, focusing on how targeted academic intervention has led to improved scholarship retention and overall student success. Key findings show that students who engaged with advisors were significantly more likely to retain their scholarships and continue their studies at USC.

- **Student Population:** In 2024, 513 first-generation students were identified as at risk of losing their scholarships, with 91.4% receiving the LIFE Scholarship and 8.6% receiving the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship.
- **Diversity Breakdown:** 54.4% of these students identified as White, 27.1% as Black or African American, with smaller percentages identifying as Multiple Races, Asian, or Native American.
- **Gender Breakdown:** 55.0% of the flagged students were female, while 45.0% were male.
- **Impact of Advisor Engagement:**
 - **Students Engaged with Advisors:** 77% of students who discussed their risk and options with an advisor enrolled in summer/fall classes, 51% retained their scholarships, and 94% continued into the fall semester.
- **Overall Impact:** Advisor intervention had a significant effect on scholarship retention and student success, with students who received meaningful advisor outreach experiencing higher rates of retention and success compared to those with no or limited contact

Introduction

First-generation students face unique challenges that make them more vulnerable to losing merit-based scholarships. These students may lack familial guidance in navigating university requirements and may struggle to balance academic demands with other responsibilities. The Scholarship Risk Intervention (SRI) directly addresses these challenges, making a significant contribution to the retention and success of this student population—an institutional priority aligned with USC’s Strategic Priorities to reimagine the student experience and advance post-graduate success by fostering access and belonging, empowering diverse students, and support student excellence. The intervention is designed to identify and support students who are at risk of losing their merit-based scholarships, such as the LIFE Scholarship and the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship.

Through the initiative, advisors play a critical role in helping students understand the academic requirements necessary to retain their scholarships, such as credit hour thresholds and GPA standards. The goal of this initiative is to leverage students' established relationship with an academic advisor to identify options to meet scholarship requirements with summer enrollment. Advisors work to connect with these students to offer guidance, help them understand the requirements for retaining their scholarships, and suggest academic and non-academic support resources that can improve their outcomes. Advisors have the curricular knowledge to assist students in identifying ways to meet credit hour and/or GPA requirements to retain scholarships. When successful, the initiative not only helps students retain their financial support but also fosters their long-term academic success, contributing to USC’s broader goals of increasing retention and graduation rates.

Data Summary

A total of 513 first-generation students were flagged by the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships as being at risk of losing their scholarships in May 2024. These students were recipients of either the LIFE or Palmetto Fellows scholarships, with 91.4% (469 students) on the LIFE Scholarship and 8.6% (44 students) on the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship. The demographic breakdown of first-generation students flagged by the Scholarship Risk Initiative in 2024 reveals that the majority, 54.4%, identified as White, while 27.1% identified as Black or African American. Smaller proportions included students who identified as Multiple Races, Asian, and American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander. In terms of gender, 55.0% of the students were female, and 45.0% were male. These breakdowns highlight the diversity within the first-generation student population at USC.

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity of First-Generation Students in the SRI 2024

	N	%
White	279	54.4%
Black or African American	139	27.1%
Multiple	39	7.6%
Asian	36	7.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	0.8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	4	0.8%

Table 2

Gender of First-Generation Students in the SRI 2024

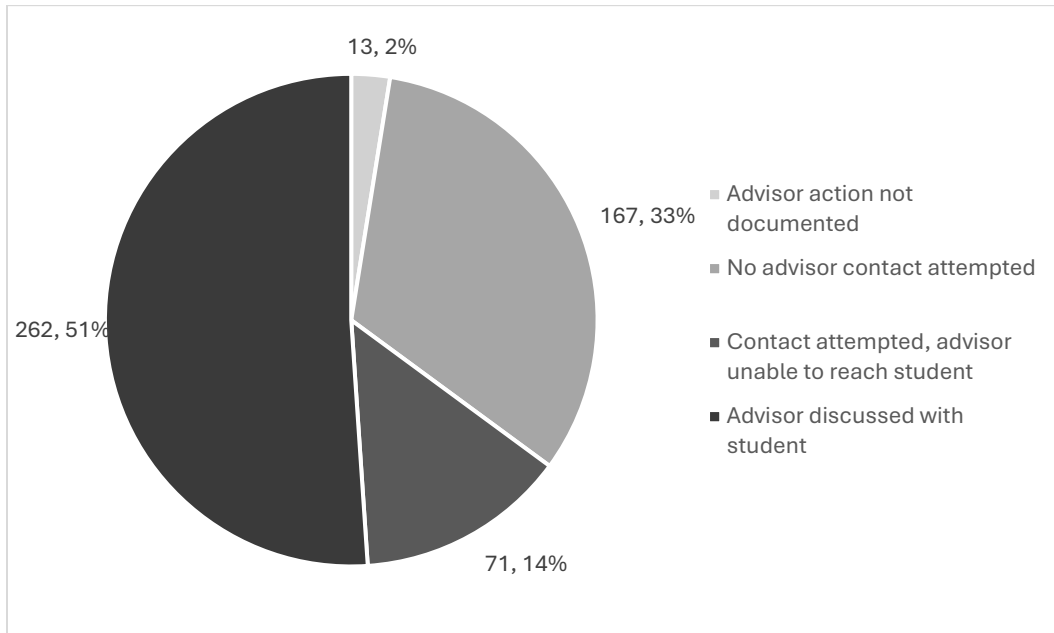
	N	%
Male	231	45.0%
Female	282	55.0%

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of advisor contact outcomes for the first-generation students flagged as at risk of losing their scholarships in 2024. The chart highlights four key categories of engagement with academic advisors:

- **Advisor discussed with student (262 students, 51%):** Academic advisors made successful contact with the majority of at-risk students, 51%.
- **No advisor contact attempted (167 students, 33%):** Approximately one-third of the students, 33%, had no contact attempted by an advisor. This group represents a portion of students whose GPA and/or credit hours were too low to retain their scholarships with summer enrollment and those who it was determined were mistakenly placed on the list of at-risk students.
- **Contact attempted, advisor unable to reach student (71 students, 14%):** In 14% of cases, advisors attempted contact but were unable to reach the student. These students remain at risk despite the advisor's efforts.
- **Advisor action not documented (13 students, 2%):** A small percentage (2%) of students either declined to meet with an advisor or the action was not documented. These cases represent a minor group with unclear outcomes due to the lack of documented engagement.

Figure 1

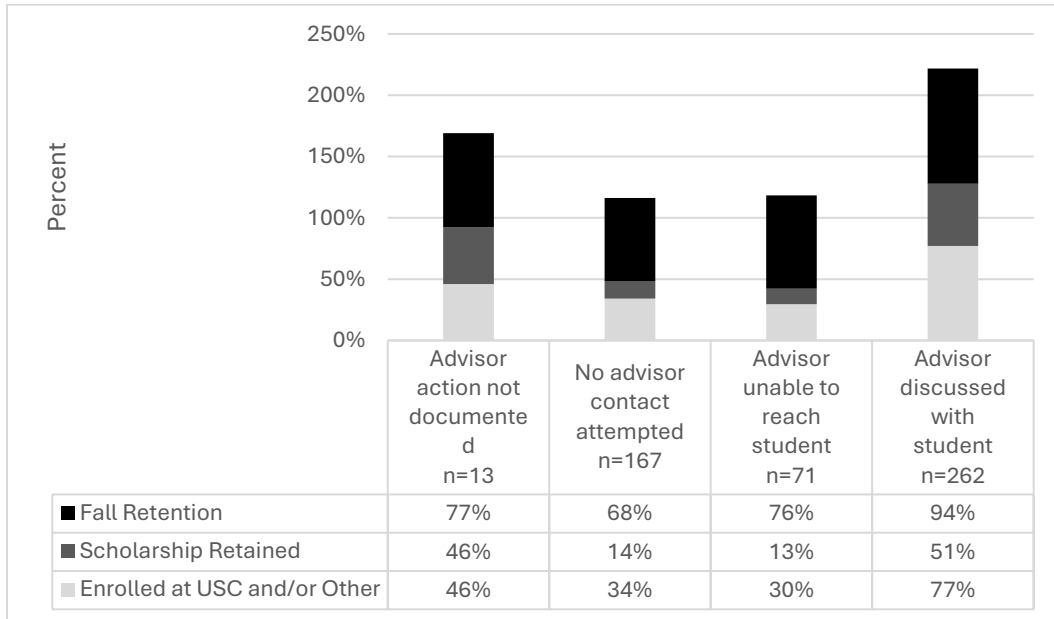
Documented Advisor Outreach Attempt Outcomes



The Scholarship Risk Initiative has demonstrated a significant impact on scholarship retention and overall student success, particularly among first-generation students. Of the 513 students flagged for potential scholarship loss, those who engaged with academic advisors experienced markedly better outcomes compared to their peers who did not receive or respond to advisor outreach. Students who discussed their situation with an academic advisor were substantially more likely to remain enrolled, with 77% continuing enrolling in summer coursework. Additionally, 51% of these students retained their scholarships, and 94% were retained into the fall semester.

Figure 1

Impact of Advisor Engagement on Summer Enrollment, Scholarship Retention, and Fall Retention Outcomes for First-Generation Students at Risk of Losing LIFE and PFELL Summer 2024



Quantitative Analysis of Advisor Interventions

The impact of advisor interventions on student outcomes was further analyzed using a multivariate general linear model (GLM). This analysis allowed us to examine the effect of different advisor contact outcomes on three key variables: summer/fall enrollment, scholarship retention, and fall retention. The independent variable, **recoded close reason**, represents different levels of advisor engagement and includes the following categories: no advisor contact, contact attempted but unable to reach, advisor declined, and advisor discussed with student.

Multivariate Test Results

The multivariate tests (Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace) all indicated a significant overall effect of advisor contact on student outcomes. Advisor intervention, as measured by recoded close reason, significantly influenced the combined outcome of enrollment, scholarship retention, and fall retention, $F(9,1527)=16.776, p<.001$.

Univariate Test Results

When analyzing the individual outcomes:

- **Summer Enrollment:** The type of advisor contact had a significant effect on whether students enrolled for the summer or fall semester, $F(3,509)=41.206, p<.001$. The model explained 19.5% of the variance in enrollment.
- **Scholarship Retention:** Advisor intervention significantly affected students' likelihood of retaining their merit-based scholarships, $F(3,509)=30.057, p<.001$, explaining 15% of the variance in aid retention.
- **Fall Retention:** Advisor contact had a significant, though smaller, impact on fall retention, $F(3,509)=18.825, p<.001$, explaining 10% of the variance in retention.

These findings underscore the importance of meaningful advisor interventions, particularly for students at risk of losing their scholarships. Students who had substantive discussions with their advisors were significantly more likely to enroll in summer coursework at USC or elsewhere, retain their scholarships, and continue into the fall semester. In contrast, students with limited or no advisor contact were at a higher risk of adverse outcomes.