

IFF Fellows Program



Program Summary Report 2022-2023 Academic Year



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What our Fellows Tell us.....

“I’ve never received this much help in my life and I truly appreciate it because I don’t know what I could do without the Fellows Program.”

“...the leadership skills and camaraderie that I’ve been able to develop in the program have been a great help.”

“...really grateful to be in this program and have both the social and financial support. I **would have not graduated without the program**. Not only did it assist me to develop essential skills for the classroom and the workplace but also assisted me to get opportunity to exercise my knowledge in real world applications... The assistance was also a large catalyst to my graduation.”

“Our coordinators are very attentive and helpful with our needs and always have a welcoming energy when we speak with them.”

“The Fellows has been such a great resource and opportunity for me. It’s helped me land the internship of my dreams, and I’m working as a research assistant under my favorite professor’s leadership. The staff have truly helped me get to a point where I **feel truly safe and content for the first time since coming to college, and maybe ever.**”

“The Fellows program helps me connect with other students on campus who could be going through the same things as me. **The summer housing is definitely a relief because without it I would have nowhere to go.**”

“Being a part of the Fellows was truly a great experience from start to finish. I always felt so supported and cared about by my peers and leaders. I am so grateful to have been in this program.”

“**I literally couldn’t have gotten through college without this program.** It was so helpful and my support coaches did everything in their power to make sure I succeeded and I will forever be grateful to them.”

“I have had a great time with the Fellows program and I am very thankful to the staff and sponsors for being like a family for us Fellows. I have felt very supported throughout my time with the program, and I cannot express how thankful I am.”

“I love this program so much and the people in it are amazing! I’m very grateful for the experiences...”

“I think **the program as a whole has been indeed helpful throughout my transition** and I think the counselors have gone above and beyond to try and accommodate to every need or want I had.”

“Overall, my experience with the program has been incredibly rewarding. I’m continuously improving and learning from the vast amount of things provided to me... This program aids in **various endeavors, whether it be in mental health, educational strengthening, and financial insecurities**, as well as providing information and insights on a wide range of topics.”

Introduction

The Institute for Families (IFF) Fellows Program is composed of two programs—the Price Family Fellows Program—which serves students on Rutgers’ New Brunswick campus, and the Camden Fellows Program, serving students on Rutgers’ Camden Campus. Both programs exist to support undergraduate students who have had lived experience in the child welfare system and/or are at-risk for immediate homelessness. **While only five percent of youth with backgrounds in foster care graduate from college nationally, the IFF Fellows Program participants have experienced a graduation rate of 70%.** Our Fellows represent some of the most vulnerable students attending Rutgers, due to a lack of familial and financial support, and many face challenges in balancing school commitments and providing for themselves. Participating students take part in life skills workshops, academic and personal coaching, and other special events and activities. Each Fellow selected for the program receives personalized assistance in maximizing their academic, career, financial, and personal goals. This includes, but is not limited to:

- A nurturing environment where Fellows receive quality, supportive coaching on a one-to-one basis
- Educational workshops that enable Fellows to realize and take action toward educational, career, and personal goals
- Housing (if needed) and food stipends for each Fellow during school break periods
- A textbook stipend to assist with the purchasing of textbooks and related academic materials at the start of each semester
- Assistance locating a fellowship or career internship allowing Fellows to engage in hands-on experience under the mentorship of a Rutgers University faculty member, professional, or local community-based business leader
- Specialized support and connections that build resiliency and address academic, physical, and social-emotional needs
- Transition planning for graduating seniors
- Opportunities to grow their overall leadership competencies

We are proud that this year’s cohort of **11 IFF Fellows Graduates** received degrees in:

- B.S. in Environmental Policy, Institutions, and Behavior
- B.A. in Women’s Studies
- B.S. in Civil Engineering
- B.F.A. in Visual Arts
- B.A. in Psychology
- B.A. in Criminal Justice and Communications
- BA in Political Science
- B.A. in Social Work
- B.A. in Musical Theater
- B.A. in Childhood Studies
- B.S. in Nursing

2022-2023 Program Overview

Experiencing a reduction in resources, the Price Family Fellow Program reduced the size of its average cohort from 25 to serve 18 students during the 2022-2023 academic year. The Camden Fellows Program served 22 students and celebrated its third year of operations. These talented young people included eleven seniors, thirteen juniors, twelve sophomores and four freshmen. The programs welcomed these students to campus in the fall through a series of in-person activities but continued to offer concurrent virtual learning opportunities given the changed preferences and communication channels practiced regularly by young people after the pandemic. Many Fellows enjoyed the flexibility of online courses and performed extremely well during them, challenging them to be increasingly self-driven with the benefit of self-paced learning. Some earned their highest academic marks to date.

Fellows staff focused efforts on mentoring students along a track toward academic goals, supporting access to financial aid, fostering connections to the larger Rutgers community, and addressing their social interests and connections to mental health resources to balance their wellness and decrease their isolation. Ongoing activities included working with Fellows to develop study and assignment completion strategies, making referrals to Rutgers' Office of Counseling, offering in-person and virtual programming and check-in sessions to stay connected with staff and other participants, and learning about the campus resources, including the Wellness Center. These supplemental resources were offered in addition to the ongoing, focused programmatic activities which are a fundamental component of the IFF Fellows Program.

The 2022-2023 Fellows participated in an array of enrichment activities that included coaching to guide students toward their individual goals. Several students participated in a Leadership Academy, where they learned and practiced effective communication and teamwork skills and focused on specific leadership competencies. A series of special events and celebrations built connections between students with similar life experiences, promoted inclusivity, and modelled the development of critical life skills. The program also provided emergency funding that supported unexpected and emergent needs for food, clothing, supplies, housing, utilities, and transportation. Students received stipends to support textbooks and supplies at the beginning of the semester to ensure they had the academic tools needed for success. Fellows participated in shopping experiences that met immediate needs for clothing while allowing discussion about career preparation and readiness. They attended cooking events where they learned food preparation and budget-wise meal choices, and they were invited to holiday dinners that enabled them to celebrate with like-minded peers and ended the year with celebrations to honor those completing the academic year and recognize those who were graduating.

Description of activities: Fellows were welcomed during a program orientation on September 16 and 17, 2022 where they participated in a series of icebreakers and team-building activities, reviewed the program requirements, and completed program documentation. Returning students shared reflections of their experiences and new students were able to ask questions and receive counsel and guidance from upperclassmen. Topics included offering helpful on-campus resources, academic planning, and other opportunities through the university. Program staff met with Fellows throughout the year for individual coaching sessions to support their diverse on and off-campus needs related to academic planning/progress, study strategies, housing, financial aid, course registration, employment, connections to on-campus resources, and mental health. Hundreds of coaching sessions were completed, and staff maintained daily connections with students via phone, text message, and a social media platform (e.g. “GroupMe”).

Monthly workshop sessions were offered to program participants—all hosted via virtual platforms offering full engagement. Students participated in a clothes shopping trip at Westfield Service League, where they practiced budgeting and were guided in the selection of personal and professional clothing. Multiple cooking classes with Elijah’s Promise (a New Brunswick based non-profit) were also offered, as well as a Thanksgiving Holiday dinner, semester-end celebrations hosted prior to winter break, a casual pizza meet up at a local pizzeria, and special dinner graduation celebrations in May to recognize those completing their degrees and honor the hard work and resiliency demonstrated by all Fellows this year.

Our Fellows program staff continued to support students as they managed responsibilities around term bills and financial aid packages. These efforts assisted students in completing required financial aid documentation, applying for state grants and private scholarships, and helping students navigate and overcome challenges with Rutgers complex systems, critical given that most students had no other support system. Program staff negotiated with Student Support Services to secure extra meals for students in need that ensured access to food and proper nutrition.

To ensure there is a community of coordinated support for the IFF Fellows, program staff bring together a community of student serving professionals from throughout the university network. These “Campus Champions” meet formally at least twice a year and work with staff daily, representing a number of key university departments. These partnerships included the School of Social Work, Educational Opportunity Fund programs, TRIO programs, the Office of Academic Services, Learning Centers, Rutgers Against Hunger, Residence Life, Financial Aid, the Office of Student Conduct, the Office of Off-Campus and Community Partnerships, the Office of Student Legal Services, and the Office of Undergraduate Enrollment. These supporters have been critical in meeting the needs of our students, building connections to other campus-based resources, and mentoring them to overcome barriers to their personal and academic success. The IFF Fellows Program also continued to experience a positive relationship with many other on-campus resources, especially the on-campus counseling office—Counseling and other Psychiatric Services (CAPS).

Partnerships with other Student Support Programs

The IFF Fellows Program works with a variety of student support organizations at Rutgers University e.g., Learning/Tutoring Center and Counseling Services. Many participating students also receive support through the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, which offers academic and financial assistance to low-income students. Staff has continued to work closely with other student support programs to assist in issues related to financial aid, housing, academic challenges, and student conduct. These connections, along with meetings with Rutgers Deans of Students, form the basis of “support teams” for Fellows that are at high-risk for academic underperformance and other factors that negatively influence retention.

Special Events & Activities

- **Fellows Orientation:** On September 16th & 17th 2022, The Fellows Program officially welcomed students for a program orientation, in which they participated in a series of icebreakers and team-building activities, reviewed program requirements, and completed program documentation. Returning students also reflected on their experiences in the program, while new students were able to ask questions and receive advice from upperclassmen regarding helpful on-campus resources, academic planning, and other opportunities available through the university. Furthermore, staff held an orientation seminar on January 25th & 26th, 2023, due to new students joining the cohort.
- **Elijah’s Promise Cooking Events:** On October 6th & 7th 2022, Fellows were welcomed by staff at Elijah’s Promise who facilitated a workshop focused on how to cook low-budget healthy meals. Kitchen hygiene and safety were discussed, and students enjoyed working together and learning new recipes that can be easily made anywhere. The recipes provided were tailored to preferred food preferences and/or allergies. Fellows returned to the kitchen on December 12th to make holiday cookies for this year’s Holiday celebration event. Students participated in an additional cooking class on March 16th, for another evening of new recipes and fun!
- **Westfield Service League Shopping:** On November 6, 2022, Fellows were welcomed by the Westfield Service League, a thrift/consignment store, to shop for clothing and accessories. Sponsored by private donors, Fellows were able to make choices about cost and budgeting and obtain all items for free.
- **Holiday Gift Drive and Celebration:** In December 2022, the IFF Fellows Program was fortunate to receive holiday gifts for all 40 of our students through a private donor. All Fellows received holiday care packages containing small gifts, holiday snacks and gift cards. IFF staff also raised \$700 for

additional gifts. Fellows attended in-person special Holiday Celebrations in December to celebrate their hard work and perseverance during the fall semester.

- **Nutrition and Cooking Event:** On March 10th, 2023, Fellows participated in a special cooking event on the Camden campus. Facilitated by a Rutgers Nutritionist, students cooked stir fry and learned about healthy eating, meal prep, and kitchen safety.
- **Year-End Graduation Celebration:** IFF Fellows, School of Social Work staff and Campus Champions were invited to special in-person graduation dinners in May. The outstanding achievements of all Fellows were recognized, and eleven graduates were honored by their adult supporters and peers.

Leadership Academy

Four Fellows participated in the IFF Fellows Leadership Academy this year. Leadership Academy members were selected based on exemplary participation in the program while displaying leadership qualities. Members' responsibilities included outreaching to other Fellows to share information regarding on-campus resources through a social media application (e.g. "Group Me"), as well as assisting in facilitation of workshops for staff and Fellows. During the semester, the Leadership Academy read part 1 of Simon Sinek's book, "Leaders Eat Last." Over the course of the semester, each Fellow presented their chapters to staff and their fellow Leadership Academy members. In culmination, the Fellows took their 4 presentations and created one that they facilitated to other Fellows in May. The presentation topics included communication, productivity and time management, leadership styles and motivation, personality types, team building, creating a supportive environment, and problem solving.

Senior Transition Planning

Most Fellows do not have the option to return home after graduation, and it may take a few months to land their first career-related job and transition into the workforce. In order for our students to successfully navigate this transition, we recognize the need to proactively plan with them throughout their final year of college to ensure they develop and are able to apply a full range of career-related and independent living skills. Staff consistently met with seniors to plan for post-graduation options, including:

- Identifying and/or Applying for Career-Related Internships or Employment
- Applying for Graduate Education Programs
- Creating a Professional Resume
- Developing Professional Interviewing Skills

- Exploring Post-Graduation Housing Options
- Creating Budgets and/or Savings Plans
- Opening a LinkedIn Account

Supportive Coaching

At the heart of the IFF Fellows Program is the one-on-one supportive coaching provided by staff. Most of our Fellows are considered independent students, receiving little to no support from their parents or extended family members, and coaching sessions fill a critical void of support, guidance and attention.

Sessions typically addressed the following topics:

- Academic planning
- Financial aid issues
- Health related challenges
- Time management and study skills
- Goal setting
- Accessing community supports and networking
- Social skill development
- Career development
- Personal development and stress management
- Accessing tutoring and mental health resources
- Other personal issues impacting academic progress

The primary focus of supportive coaching is to provide students with opportunities and resources needed to achieve the goal of college graduation while also developing job readiness and career opportunities. A second important objective is to help each student develop and successfully use advocacy skills when dealing with Rutgers University systems and external community agencies. Staff assist Fellows in the development of a network of supports both within and outside of the university. This involves collateral contacts such as the New Jersey Foster Care (NJFC) Scholarship Advisors and Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) counselors. Additionally, staff refer students to other Rutgers departments, such as the Office of Violence Prevention and Victim's Assistance, Deans of Students, Financial Aid and Student Accounting Offices, as well as health and counseling services.

Enrichment Workshop Summaries

A total of 12 virtual workshops were offered during the 2022-2023 academic year. To ensure flexibility that met student schedules and supported full participation for the Fellows, most workshops were offered twice.

Topic: FAFSA and Financial Aid

Dates: 10/26/22 & 10/27/22

Summary: This workshop enabled students to receive live support completing their 2023-FAFSA applications. Students received individualized guidance reflecting their person situations on application process changes so they could complete it relative to their dependency status and financial disclosures.

Topic: Money Management

Dates: 11/9/22 & 11/10/22

Summary: Participating students received information on budgeting, strategies for saving money, banking accounts, goal setting and money management, and using technology to monitor and manage spending habits.

Topic: Life After RU

Dates: 12/7/22 & 12/8/22

Summary: Students were introduced to an alumni Fellow who is now an employee of the University. The dialogue offered inspiration and guidance on how to succeed while at Rutgers and planning for the future.

Topic: Virtual Team Building Exercises

Dates: 2/8/23 & 2/9/23

Summary: Students participated in guided team building exercises, learning how to work together, approach problem-solving and interact with and depend on others to solve challenges and achieve a goal.

Topic: Mind, Body, and Spirit

Dates: 3/22/23 & 3/24/23

Summary: This workshop was facilitated by physicians and health care professionals from the Wellness Centers on the New Brunswick and Camden campuses and offered resources and access points for accessing health and mental health services to support them on each campus.

Topic: Career Preparation Workshop

Dates: 4/10/2023

Summary: Students gained knowledge of the types of online professional platforms (e.g., LinkedIn) and how to impactfully use them for creating a professional image, scouting potential job opportunities, and building career connections. Additionally, students learned the basics of composing a cover letter and resume and received sample templates for future use. Students were also offered one-to-one resume review sessions.

Topic: Leadership Academy Presentation

Date: 4/19/2023

Summary: Facilitated by members of Price Family Fellows and Camden Fellows Leadership Academy, participating students received information on communication, leadership skills, problem solving strategies, and team building.