



METRO STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOLARSHIP

ARP/HEERF Funding: Internship, Fieldwork and Job Training Initiative

Summary Report

March 2023

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The ARP/HEERF Funding Initiative provided compensation to Metro State University students who completed unpaid internships and job training experiences that contributed to pandemic recovery using a portion of the American Recovery Plan funds that were authorized for institutional use.

PROJECT GOALS

- Direct additional coronavirus relief funds to students
- Increase the relevance of students' experiential learning activities by connecting academic internships and other credit-bearing job training experiences to local pandemic recovery needs
- Create a financial incentive for students to participate in—and complete—a widely recognized high-impact learning practice that supports degree completion
- Mitigate the financial barrier that an unpaid internship or field experience represents for many students
- Align the institutional commitment to community engagement and strengthen partnerships with local communities by extending the university's contribution to pandemic recovery efforts beyond the campus
- Build on prior university experience making internships and job training accessible to underrepresented students through a paid internship student employment model

OBJECTIVES

To develop an end-to-end process to distribute funding. Project work included creating an application process, promoting the funding opportunity to targeted departments and students, developing eligibility guidelines, processing student employment, managing student tracking and completed hours, and developing, administering, and analyzing student evaluations.

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TIMELINE

The ARP funding initiative was approved in the Summer of 2021 and the project ran for three semesters: Fall 2021, Spring 2022, and Summer 2022.

LEADERSHIP

The ARP funding initiative was led by staff in the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship with support from Financial Management and academic departments.

BUDGET

The university authorized \$750,000 for this initiative. Of that, \$659,613 was disbursed to students.

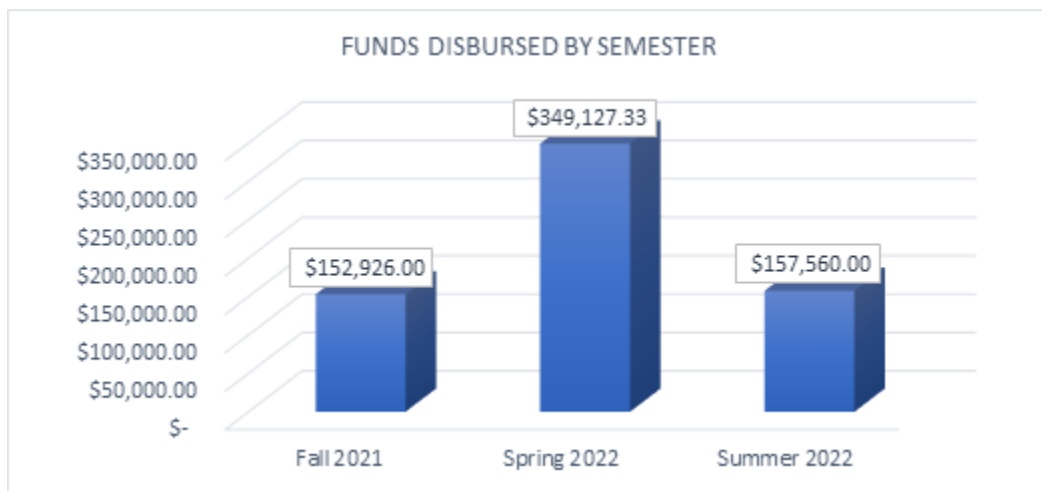


Fig. 1: Funds disbursed by semester

IMPACT

Research on the benefits of High Impact Practices (HIPs) is clear: students who participate in HIPs such as internships, particularly underserved students, have increased engagement and success. That said, for underserved students to take full advantage of HIPs, experiences must be designed with equitable outcomes in mind. The common practice of unpaid internships, practicums, and field experiences creates barriers to participation for low-income, post-traditional, BIPOC, and first-generation students.

National research on HIPs and their impact on students is largely focused on traditional learners, but analysis from the ARP student evaluations suggest that when designed with equity in mind, Metro's post-traditional students benefit from these experiences as well.

More than one hundred funding recipients completed an evaluation, and nearly all affirmed the program's benefits. The funding added financial stability, reduced stress and anxiety, allowed students to focus on their learning, and plan for

graduation and beyond. Analysis of the recipient evaluations revealed several key themes:

- The fieldwork responded to a great number of community needs in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Students gained important insights on challenges in their work and what made for a positive, effective work environment
- The fieldwork led students to meaningful connections with professionals in the field and within communities. They registered the essential value of human connections in their efforts to provide aid during the pandemic
- The fieldwork experience was validating of their vocation/professional aims
- The funding significantly enabled students to continue their education, complete graduation requirements, and finish their degrees
- The funding for the high impact internships enabled students to gain experience and skills in their professions
- The financial support was linked to important positive effects: it alleviated time pressures, led to less stress and a greater ability to give more focused attention to the fieldwork, making it in turn even more successful
- The personal benefits offered improved work/life balance
- ARP recipients voiced hope that funding would be continued

In total, the program dispersed \$659,613 to 509 students during the 2021-2022 school year. Some students received funding multiple semesters. The recipients were from a broad variety of majors, ranging from art to nursing.

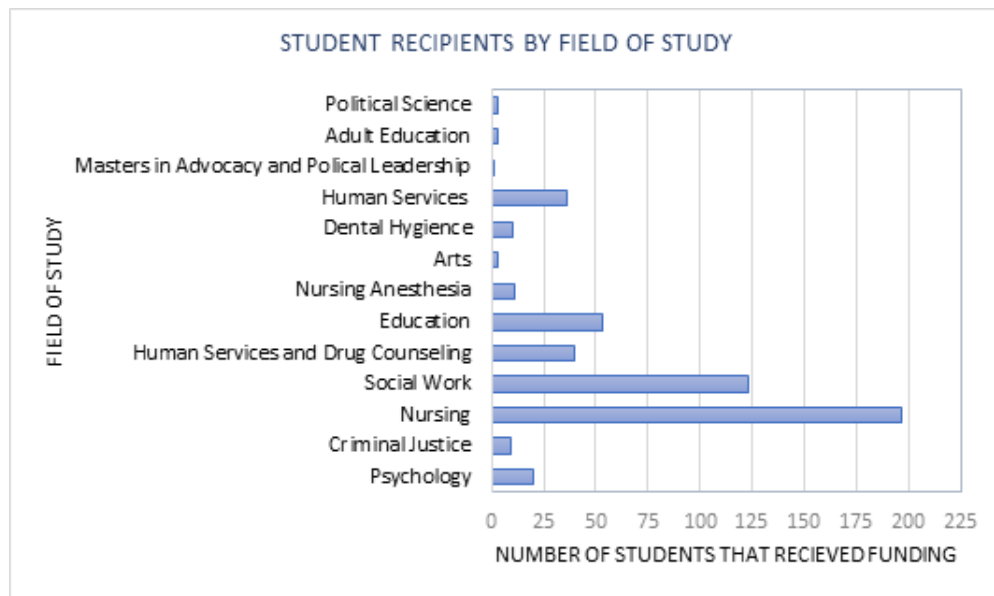


Fig. 2: Student recipients by field of study

The diversity of disciplines reflects the ways COVID impacted all sectors of our communities and the significant contributions Metro students made to support pandemic relief.

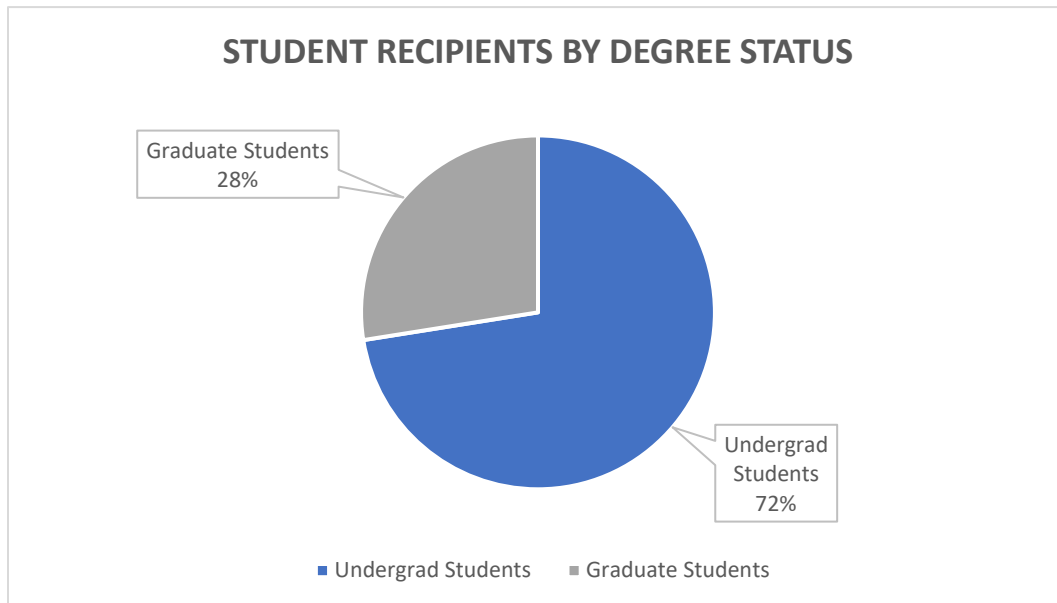


Fig. 3: Student recipients by degree status

ARP Funding Initiative Evaluation and Results

EVALUATION DESIGN

ARP funding recipients were invited to complete an online evaluation of the ARP funding initiative at the end of each semester. Staff in the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship sent three emails to invite students to participate in the evaluation. A total of 509 potential participants were contacted; of these, 108 students submitted an evaluation.

Institute staff, in collaboration with a faculty member on the Institute's Faculty Advisory Committee, developed these following evaluation questions:

- What have you learned about the local response to the pandemic recovery through your individual experience and contributions?
- How has the ARP internship/field placement funding contributed to your career goals?
- How has the ARP internship/field placement funding contributed to your academic journey?

- How has the ARP internship/field placement funding affected your personal life?
- Please share any other feedback/thoughts about this experience.

The Human Subjects Review Board of Metro State University reviewed the evaluation research project and assigned it exempt status.

METHODOLOGY

Two members of the Institute's Faculty Advisory Committee conducted analysis of the evaluations. One faculty member is a sociologist with extensive doctoral training in quantitative and qualitative analysis. The second faculty member is a cultural anthropologist with postdoctoral training in health research and over 20 years of experience in conducting and analyzing qualitative research.

The two faculty researchers followed the inductive approaches of qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994) in the content analysis of the evaluations. First, the two faculty researchers read the evaluations independently, without consultation, in their entirety to get a sense of the whole. Next, they identified descriptive themes and subthemes for each question. The researchers then met to come to an agreement on the coding of themes thus far. Next, the researchers reviewed the evaluations further in their entirety to gather support for each theme, subthemes, and supporting quotations. As part of this iterative process entailing constant comparison, the researchers met additional times to compare coding decisions and reach consensus over differences in applications of codes, and to assess where the data fit the existing codes or whether there was need for a new code to capture a different theme. Every response was accounted for and made part of the coded data set, including negative examples and disconfirming and discrepant responses. The researchers completed analysis only after accounting for all responses.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS

The fieldwork (internships, clinicals, student teaching and more) was a powerful experience for the 108 students who responded to the evaluation questionnaire. The real-world applications of their education through the fieldwork were profoundly high-impact experiences. The impact was even more meaningful given the context of COVID-19 and their roles in responding to it in a variety of community settings. The impact also seemed to be compounding and mutually reinforcing.

KEY THEMES

The fieldwork responded to a great number of community needs in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Students gained direct experience and knowledge of community needs. They reported learning about community needs for accurate information about the virus, barriers to health care, academic struggles, and lack of basic needs. They witnessed unprecedented death and the sadness of lives lost. They registered how deeply the pandemic affected the most vulnerable of our community members and how great the need was for health care providers, teachers, social service professionals, and therapists, and therefore how their contributions to the efforts were critical.

- “That throughout the pandemic, basic needs such as food, shelter and medical coverage became harder to access and social services were essential in helping to meet continued needs” (R3, Fall 2021)
- “That the pandemic has really stressed-out teachers and students in ways that were not imagined previous to the pandemic. I think that being able to student teach in person was really impactful because students got to see me every single day and able to have a real connection with me in person and not just over a computer screen.” (R13, Fall 2021)
- “The work that I completed was aligned with local coronavirus-related needs. I worked as a student nurse on a medical-surgical/oncology floor of a small hospital. The patients I encountered while working on this floor helped me understand how anyone could be impacted by the pandemic, and not just physical health-wise. Many patients were struggling financially, psychologically, and socially. ...I witnessed the raw impacts of the pandemic in real time. These observations were not made by watching a news-roll on the television. After this experience, I realized how the pandemic would forever impact the work of nurses and my nursing career in the future.” (R31, Spring 2022)
- “I have learned that the population struggling with substance abuse is more vulnerable to contracting the virus. At my internship site, we have provided counseling to help clients utilize their coping skills around mental health. My internship site also provided resources to get vaccinated and tested. I have provided counseling services to people who feel lonely, isolated, and more vulnerable to use during this pandemic. I have coordinated with providers to make sure patients received their methadone if they were positive for covid-19.” (R20, Spring 2022)

Students gained important insights on challenges in their work and what made for a positive, effective work environment.

Some respondents highlighted the pressures on service workers, the anxiety and stress they underwent, and the

problem of understaffing. Other respondents highlighted how much they learned about the importance of teamwork and communication among providers.

- “Through my experience I learned that the healthcare field is extremely short staffed from the turnover of staff during the pandemic. The staff who are left are fighting for better pay and working conditions, and it was an honor to be of assistance to them during this time.” (R54, Spring 2022)
- “I have my clinicals at [name redacted] hospital in the operating rooms as a nurse anesthesia student. I have seen COVID related issues and the toll it takes on the staff. I have also cared for COVID patients. I hope the small part I do helps relieving some of the stress COVID has caused.” (R58, Spring 2022)
- “I have learned that due to the pandemic, many people who have developed or relapsed into mental health and/or chemical dependency problems are in dire need of services to curb those problems, and that there is currently a shortage of clinicians providing services to these populations, which is causing many of them to burnout after providing care to their patients/clients.” (R24, Spring 2022)
- “My internship site, being a shelter where up to 120 people live, was hit very hard by the pandemic and had to change how they do all programming. I was really impressed with both the creativity and dedication to making things work in the new world we live in.” (R33, Spring 2022)

The fieldwork experience led students to have meaningful connections with professionals in the field and with communities. They registered the essential value of human connections in the efforts to provide aid during the pandemic.

- “I have learned any kind of human power to help our community deal with the coronavirus was valuable and necessary to do the job. I have learned that dealing with coronavirus and recovering from it takes a teamwork between the clients/patients, the community members, and the healthcare workers. (R6, Fall 2021)
- “What I've learned is that even when it's bad, people still come together for each other. There is so much negativity portrayed in the media, but what I see during my field experience is a community that's helping each other.” (R18, Fall 2021)
- “I learned that everyone in the school comes together to make sure that everyone is being covid safe by wearing masks, washing their hands, and keeping a safe distance. I also learned how crucial it is to have in-person learning for all the students. Being in-person keeps the students on task in their learning and gives them the social interaction they need versus distance learning.” (R9, Spring 2022)

The fieldwork experience was validating of their own vocation/professional aims.

A number of students reported that they felt validated by being able to apply their academic knowledge. The very fact of being funded for their internships—the fact that their academic work was rewarded as demonstrated by the funding—was validating. Several noted being motivated by the experience: it cemented their vocational/professional interests, and for a few students, to shift it to another field.

- “The ARP internship/field placement funding has contributed to my career goals as the funding has allowed me to attend clinical in which led me to discovering my dream job!” (R17, Spring 2022)
- “The ARP internship/field placement has contributed to my academic journey in learning more about what my passions are in nursing. I always thought that my passions were going to be limited to individualized patient or family care. However, I have learned that my passion for public health can also be shared in the nursing field. Through this internship, I have learned how to more accurately assess, diagnose, and intervene during a public health crisis or issue, as well as evaluate those implemented interventions. I have also learned how I can impact a community of individuals or organizations, rather than just one patient at a time.” (R16, Fall 2021)
- “It has truly helped me know that I do not want to work in non-profits at this time. The way they work currently feels like I am just putting band aids on a really big surgical wound.” (R9, Summer 2022)
- “Because I was being compensated for my internships, I was able to spend more time exploring career opportunities and working on my resume. I hope to be a competitive candidate and when I graduate, and this funding put me in a better position to focus on my career goals and future plans.” (R51, Spring 2022)
- “It helps to know that as a student, the work I do academically is recognized and rewarded.” (R4, Fall 2021)
- “The ARP funding endorsed all of the hard work and sacrifices, which made me feel accomplished.” (R29, 2021)

The funding significantly enabled students to continue their education, complete graduation requirements, and finish their degrees. For some, the funding made the internship possible; that is to say, some would otherwise not have been able to complete the required unpaid internships at that time.

- “The placement funding has allowed me to complete my field experience at a nonprofit that I am passionate about. As a single parent, it was not easy to look at unpaid internships, this took that stress away and allowed me to focus on my educational goals.” (R18, Fall 2021)

- “It helped me complete my student teaching and without it I would have had to wait to student teach because of my financial situation.” (R9, Fall 2021)
- “The funding has allowed me to find a field experience I'm excited about and aligns with my career goals instead of just finding one that's paid because I can't afford to work for free.” (R8, Summer 2022)

The funding for the high impact internships enabled students to gain experience and skills in their professions. Students registered the high value of direct experience outside the classroom.

- “This funding... allow[ed] me to strengthen my skill sets so I can participate in evidence-based practice and learn to interact with patient populations while expanding my knowledge about different health conditions.” (R22, Spring 2022)
- “I gained a lot of knowledge and insight through the experience, which helped me with my academic goals of growth and application of skills.” (R1, Spring 2022)
- “I learned so much during my practicum experience that I would never have been able to learn in a classroom. I was able to support my classroom learning with practical experience.” (R27, Fall 2021)

The financial resources extended through the program was itself fundamental.

Students reported using the funding to pay for tuition and/or other school related costs. The funding was also used to fulfill basic needs: groceries, bills for everyday living, car repairs, and transportation enabling students to get to their worksites. Also, importantly, many students reported that because of the funding they were able to scale back on their jobs; without the ARP funding their financial obligations would have required those hours at their current jobs.

- “Helped me get groceries so I could survive.” (R1, Fall 2021)
- “I'm very grateful to be a beneficiary of this grant. The response is very helpful to me as a student, single mother struggling to make enough income to pay for bills and provide food for my household.” (R24, Fall 2021)
- “This has helped with paying for school needs such as supplies, tuition, and gas to get to and from clinicals.” (R18, Spring 2022)
- “It provided me the funding needed to fix the brakes on my vehicle so that I will be able to return to in person classes next semester now that I have a safe vehicle” (R3, Fall 2021)

- “Again, the funding really helped me to fully pursue my academic journey and goals. I ended up choosing an internship that was 40+ minutes away from where I live, so the funding helped get me back and forth.” (R33, Spring 2022)
- “The ARP funding supported my progress through school and will help pay for my application for licensure testing.” (R29, Fall 2021)
- “The funding has helped me to pay for certification exam(s).” (R32, Fall 2021)
- “The amount I received was able to help me pay a portion of my monthly bills. To be honest, I wish I received a larger amount of ARP funding.” (R8, Fall 2021)
- “The ARP impacted my personal life positively, I was so stressed due to my income. The ARP funding helped me catch up on bills, school tuition and much more.” (R20, Fall 2021)
- “As a single Mom of two children, it has helped me provide financial stability.” (R31, Fall 2021)
- “Takes stress off of me due to life still going on even though you are not getting paid. I’m able to pay bills” (R14, Summer 2022)

The financial support was linked to important positive effects: it created more time, led to less stress, and a greater ability to give more focused attention to the internship experience, in turn making it even more successful. The ability to cover expenses meant less stress as it was itself linked, for many, to being able to work less and thus fully engage in the internship. The funding and the positive repercussions of stress reduction made students able to have the time and energy for greater focus on their studies and to optimize the experience.

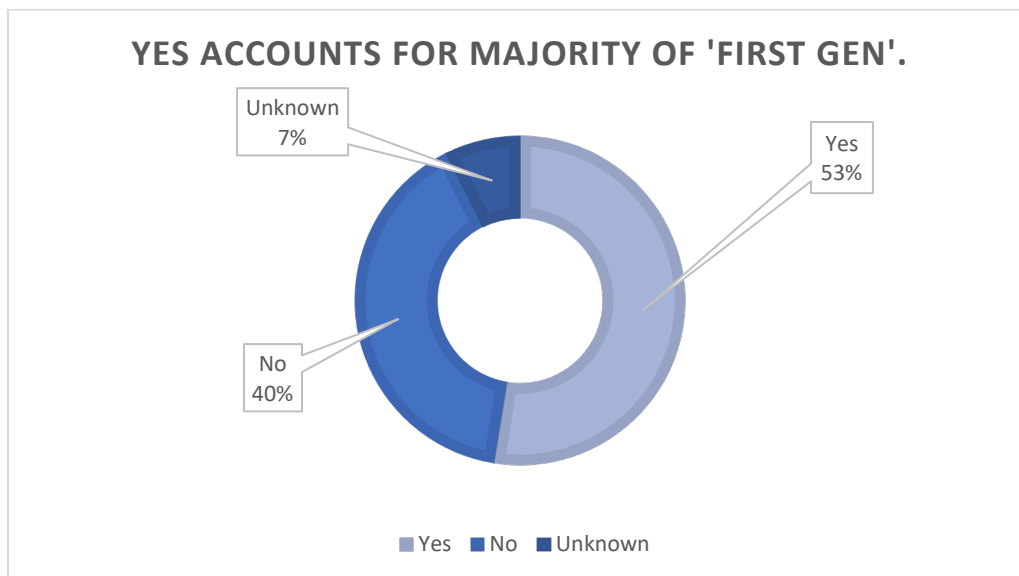


Fig. 4: Total student recipients identified as first-generation college students

- “I was able to focus on my internship instead of increasing my work hours. With this additional focus, I engaged far more deeply with the course content and connect with the patients in my care. I don’t think I would have had the mental or physical energy to do so without the scholarship. The connections I made may very well lead to an offer of employment after graduation.” (R30, Fall 2021)
- “The funding has taken some weight off my shoulders and allowed me to prioritize my education.” (R8, Summer 2022)
- “ARP internship funding has helped me a lot. My internship is unpaid and this does take time off of my work schedule decreasing my income. The funding has helped cover some of my expenses and allowed time for me to focus on my internship, family, school, and career goals.” (R4, Spring 2022)
- “The funding has allowed me to work less hours to concentrate on my studies and internships, which I feel has increased my success in this program.” (R16, Spring 2022)
- “The ARP internship/field placement funding contributed to my academic journey as I was able to focus my attention more on my education and earn better grades this semester compared to trying to balance school and a heavy work schedule.” (R17, Spring 2022)
- “It allowed me to focus more on the community and helping others while not worrying about loss of money from work.” (R1, Summer 2022)
- “It allowed me to depart my previous place of employment safely so I can focus fully on school, my internship, and finding a new, more advanced career.” (R11, Summer 2022)
- “The funding has allowed me to take out fewer student loans. This amount makes a huge difference to me by decreasing part of the financial stress I experience in my daily life.” (R39, Spring 2022)
- “I am very close to earning my BSN degree, and without this funding, I would have had to ask for financial support from other resources (e.g., family, financial aid). This funding has benefitted me beyond my education achievements; the benefits have been as far-reaching as to family and personal support.” (R30, Spring 2022)

The personal benefits offered improved work/life balance. Several students noted that the alleviation resulting from the funding and the extra time for the internship (and from not having to work as much at their regular jobs) also had a beneficial effect on their personal lives. Several noted being able to be with their families more and meet those needs or being able to engage in some amount of self-care. The personal effects were restorative, and this in turn had a positive impact on how the students engaged in the fieldwork.

- “I have had some margin in my schedule to spend time with my family and do some limited self-care due to the funding. It is so appreciated.” (R8, Spring 2022)
- “The ARP internship/field placement funding affected my personal life as I was able to work less this semester and spend more quality time completing self-care activities and spending time with family/friends.” (R17, Spring 2022)
- “This funding prevented me from burnout because I work a full-time job, attend college courses, being, an intern, and a mother. I didn't have to work more hours to pay for the things that the ARP placement funding has helped me with.” (R21, Spring 2022)
- “I had more time for self care and to spend with my family. I was physically healthier and more alert.” (R30, Fall 2021)

ARP recipients voiced hope that funding be continued. Several respondents noted they hope the funding for internships and field experiences continues.

- “Please continue to offer this for students. Unpaid internships are an incredible time commitment and a little extra financial support is so appreciated.” (R3, Spring 2022)
- “I pray you guys have this fund again in May.” (R34, Fall 2021)
- “This was a great opportunity. I hope ARP continues to fund student field internships.” (R4, Fall 2021)
- “I think more students should get the opportunity that I did this semester, if that is possible.” (R16, Fall 2021)

APPENDIX

Project Narrative

Like institutions of higher education across the country, Metro State received funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) III: The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021. These funds, appropriated by Congress, provided direct financial relief to students and assisted institutions to respond to the conditions of the pandemic. When reviewing the implementation guidelines, Metro State President Ginny Arthur noted a clause specifying that the institutional portion of funds (non-student relief) may "be used to pay students for internships and job training experiences that are aligned with local coronavirus-related recovery needs." The president tasked a small group convened by the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship to propose an application to employ funds in this way. To reach local communities with the university's pandemic recovery actions, the group recommended a program that would demonstrate our commitment to community engagement by investing funds in workforce trainees in critical, frontline fields most impacted by the pandemic, while providing further direct relief to students. To achieve this, the group proposed a project to identify, qualify, and compensate students performing unpaid, credit-bearing internships, clinicals, practicum, and field work.

The funding would provide greater stability and security to students whose continued enrollment had become increasingly precarious during the pandemic. The initiative was granted \$750,000 to fund students through job training experiences focused on pandemic relief in Fall 2021, Spring 2022, and Summer 2022. A team from the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship facilitated the application process and, with the support of Financial Management, continued to manage and support the program.

Consultation pursued by the Office of the President with the government relations staff at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) confirmed that funds could appropriately be applied this way and that "job training experiences" could reasonably be interpreted to include clinicals, practica, student teaching, and other field experiences.

The timing of the initiative was propitious, as the university's strategic plan calls for the expanded use of high-impact educational practices to support student learning, persistence and success. A cross-functional task force convened by the Provost met for two academic years and completed participation in an AAC&U Summer Institute on High Impact Practices. Based on the preliminary work of the task force, and an abundance of empirical evidence compiled across higher education, expanding participation in internships and other field-work learning experiences at Metro State features prominently among the task force recommendations.

The Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship administered the project. The collaboration of field placement coordinators, faculty and advisors was enlisted to identify and recruit eligible participants. Consultations with internship, practicum,

clinical, and field experience coordinators in several of the university's professional programs, combined with analysis performed of enrollment trends, suggest there would be approximately 500 students completing a relevant, credit bearing job training experience in each of fall and spring semesters. Existing practices for maintaining academic records of student activities and performance at field placements sites were used to document these for ARP-related recordkeeping.

The Institute adopted a student employment model to pay interns based on an effective practice that had been developed when the Institute secured a Great Lakes/Ascendium grant to support internship compensation. Student employment provided existing and clearly defined administrative procedures. Institute staff used the existing hourly wage for Metro State student employees to calculate the lump sum stipend distributed to students. Since the pool of potential student participants, multiplied by the number of clinical/field hours performed by those students—which can range from 40 to 800—would exceed the allocated funding, the Institute developed an application process and eligibility requirements to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources to the greatest number of students.

Student applications were reviewed by a 3-member team from the Institute and funding awards were based on application alignment with the following criteria:

- Students (undergraduate or graduate) must be registered for an unpaid, credit bearing internship, field experience, practicum, clinical, or job training experience
- The internship or job training experience must be aligned with local coronavirus-related recovery needs; the three-person core implementation team reviewed and determined whether a job training experience meets the standard of “aligned with local coronavirus-related recovery needs” in all instances where the relevance is not readily apparent
- Students must complete an application and agree to receive compensation as a student worker for their qualifying hours of field work
- Students must be able to furnish the necessary documentation to establish their eligibility for employment in the United States (forms I-9 and W-4)
- Students must submit timesheets to verify completion of hours

Based on the projected number of eligible students, funding was initially capped at 80 hours of work to offer funding to the greatest number of students while still offering a meaningful monetary amount. The total hours of eligible funding was increased to 120 hours in spring and summer 2022 based on application totals and funding availability.

Institute staff managed employment eligibility verification for all 509 student recipients and continued the use of virtual meetings to expedite student enrollment in the program and reduce administrative burden.