USC’s Bovard Scholars program gives low-income high schoolers a chance at a top-tier university

Students come to campus for three weeks, then guidance counselors help them through the application and admission processes at any school, not just USC

By Ron Mackovich

Some of the nation’s strongest high school students who aren’t applying to highly selective universities have something in common — they’re from low-income families.

Research has shown low-income students are 75 percent less likely to apply to elite universities compared to peers whose families have higher incomes. Estimates vary with “undermatching,” but the top colleges in the U.S. could be missing out on 200,000 high-achieving, low-income students every year.

Bovard Scholars, a new USC program, aims to change that. It selects 50 top-performing students and brings them to campus for three weeks of intensive career and college choice education.

All expenses are paid by USC, but that’s just the start. The students continue to receive one-on-one admissions counseling throughout their senior year of high school until they’re securely in place at a top university with financial aid packages.

“The Bovard Scholars summer program is the latest in our university’s efforts to address the national issue of college access for underrepresented minority students from low-income families,” said Provost Michael Quick. “This program doesn’t just end after three weeks — it continues with guidance counselors to help students navigate their way through the college application and admission processes. We know this will lead these bright scholars to the most challenging and stimulating higher education institutions.”

A diverse group of high-achieving scholars

The first cohort of Bovard Scholars come from around the country, though most are from California. With an average GPA of 4.22 and a median annual household income of $25,000, almost all will be the first in their families to attend college.
“I wouldn’t be as competitive without this preparation,” said Kanyah Curd, a senior at Compton High School who plans to attend Stanford University. “It’s helped me with the application process and what to look for in terms of support.”

The daughter of a single mom, Curd has enjoyed reading on the shady grass of the University Park Campus. “I was so nervous to be on this campus, to have a roommate,” Curd said. “Now I feel at home — I feel at peace.”

Miguel Moran is a senior at South East High School in South Gate. “What’s great about Bovard Scholars is we get to stay here overnight,” Moran said. “If I’d have gone straight into college without this, it would have been a huge culture shock. Now I’m getting an idea of what it’s going to be like.”

**Confidence booster**

The Bovard Scholars program engages five top guidance counselors from Los Angeles, including Yvonne Hays of La Cañada High School. “A lot of the students have been overwhelmed with the information, tools and knowledge we’re giving them,” Hays said. “I think they’re falling in love with USC, and I think they’re feeling like their horizons are expanding. One student said, ‘We’re going somewhere.’ I think that’s great. We’re giving them confidence that they’re going to be able to achieve their dreams.”

For Moran, that dream goes beyond his current circumstances. “A lot of people where I’m from don’t go to college or they pick schools that are easy to get into,” Moran said. “They don’t know their full potential. I’m trying to change that because many people in my community don’t value a college education. I want to change that mindset by going to a prestigious, highly selective college that will match my achievements.”