

# Enhancing Scholarship Retention through Academic Advising: A Report on the 2024 Scholarship Risk Initiative at USC

## Executive Summary

The Scholarship Risk Initiative (SRI), implemented by the University Advising Center (UAC) at the University of South Carolina (USC) in collaboration with the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, has successfully identified and supported 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, 1,676 students were identified as at risk of losing their state lottery scholarships, with 86.6% receiving the LIFE Scholarship and 13.4% receiving the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship.
- **Diversity Breakdown:** 67.0% of these students identified as White, 18.2% as Black or African American, with smaller percentages identifying as other or multiple races.
- **Gender Breakdown:** 49.1% of the flagged students were female, while 49.9% were male.
- **Impact of Advisor Engagement:** 80% of students who discussed their risk and options with an advisor enrolled in summer/fall classes, 59% retained their scholarships, and 95% 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**

The Scholarship Risk Intervention (SRI) directly addresses challenges related to the cost of higher education, making a significant contribution to student success and retention—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.

## **Results**

A total of 1,676 students were flagged by the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships as being at risk of losing their state lottery scholarships in May 2024. These students were recipients of either the LIFE or Palmetto Fellows scholarships, with 86.6% (1,452 students) on the LIFE Scholarship and 13.4% (224 students) on the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship. The demographic breakdown of students flagged by the Scholarship Risk Initiative in 2024 reveals that the majority, 67%, identified as White, while 18.2% 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, 49.1% of the students were female, and 49.9% were male. These breakdowns highlight the diversity within the student population at USC.

**Table 1***Race/Ethnicity of Students in the SRI 2024*

	N	%
White	1123	67.0%
Black or African American	305	18.2%
Multiple	109	6.5%
Asian	91	5.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	0.4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	6	0.4%
Hispanic or Latino	18	1.1%
Unknown	18	1.1%

**Table 2***Gender of Students in the SRI 2024*

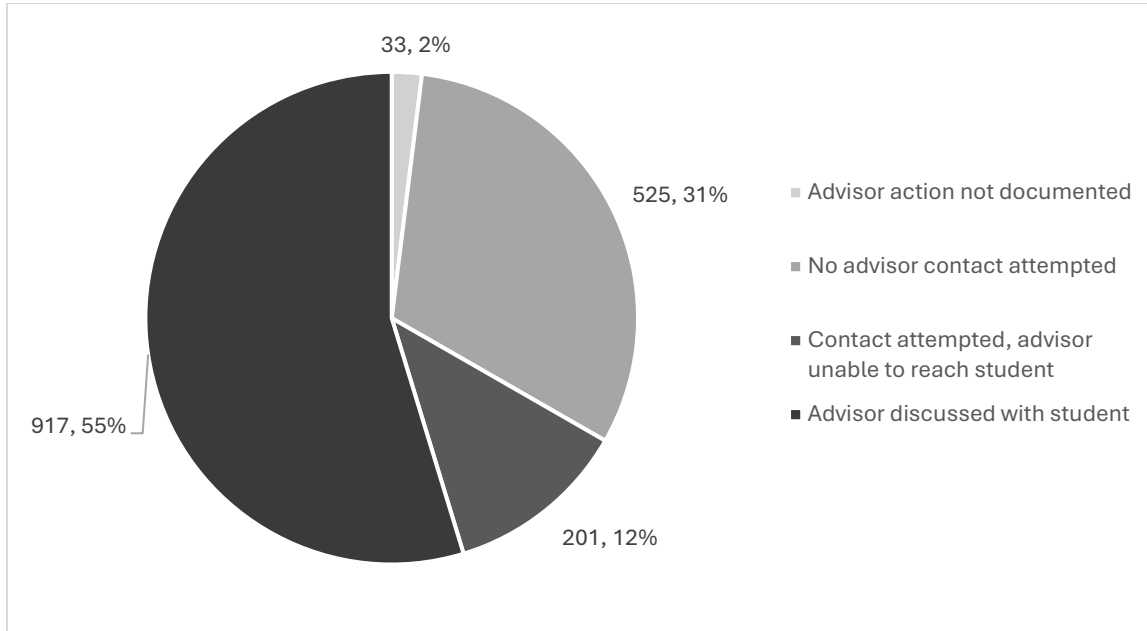
	N	%
Male	837	49.9%
Female	823	49.1%
Unknown	16	1.0%

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

- **Advisor discussed with student (917 students, 55%):** Academic advisors made successful contact with the majority of at-risk students, 51%.
- **No advisor contact attempted (525 students, 31%):** 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 (201 students, 12%):** 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 (33 students, 2%):** For a small percentage (2%) of the action was not documented. These cases represent a minor group with unclear outcomes due to the lack of documented engagement.

**Figure 1**

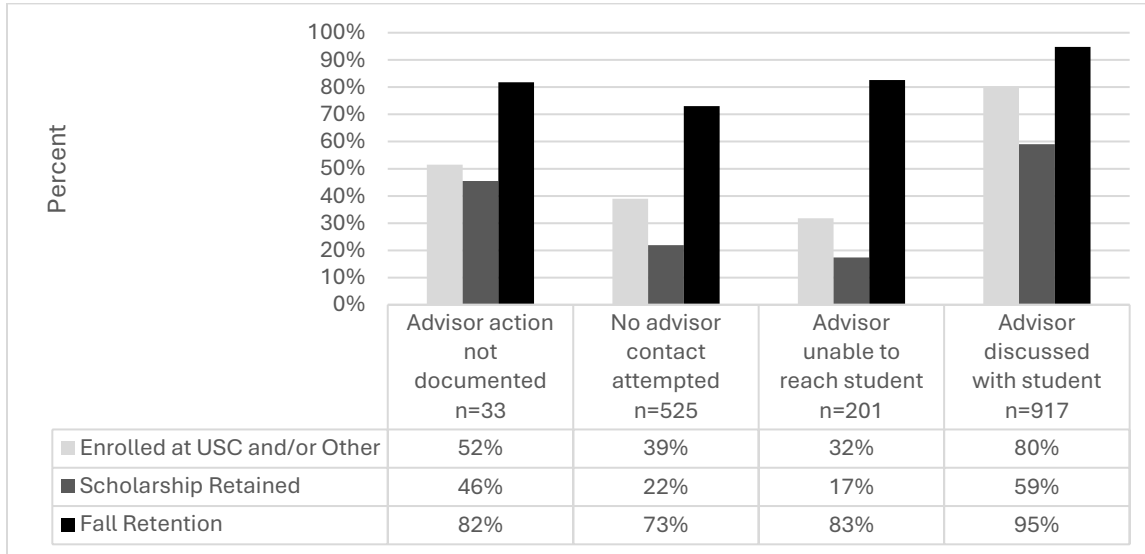
*Documented Advisor Outreach Attempt Outcomes*



The Scholarship Risk Initiative has demonstrated a significant impact on scholarship retention and overall student success. Of the 1,676 students flagged for potential lottery 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 take action to maintain their scholarship, with 80% continuing enrolling in summer coursework. Additionally, 59% of these students retained their scholarships, and 95% were retained into the fall semester.

**Figure 2**

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



A General Linear Model (GLM) was conducted to examine the impact of different advising interventions on student outcomes, including whether students re-enrolled, retained their financial aid, and continued into the fall semester. The analysis used the four categories of advising interventions: action not documented, no contact attempted, unable to reach students, and advisor discussed with student.

### Key Findings

- **Advising intervention had a significant impact** on whether students re-enrolled, retained their aid, and continued into the fall. The data showed that more engaged advising intervention (discussing with the student) led to better outcomes across all measures.
- **Enrollment Outcomes:** The advising intervention explained 19% of the variation in whether students enrolled in summer coursework. Students who had a discussion with their advisor were much more likely to enroll again compared to those where no action was documented or attempted.
- **Financial Aid Retention:** Advising also explained 14.7% of the variation in financial aid retention, showing that students who had active advising support were more likely to keep their aid.

- **Fall Retention:** Advising interventions accounted for 8.2% of the difference in students returning in the fall, with higher retention rates among students who had meaningful contact with their advisor.

When gender and race were also accounted for as independent variables, intervention outcome remained the most significant predictor.

### **Conclusion**

The SRI demonstrated a substantial impact on retaining students' state lottery scholarships and promoting student success. Through coordinated efforts between the UAC, academic advisors, and the Office of Financial Aid, the initiative supported at-risk students in addressing their academic challenges and meeting the necessary requirements for scholarship retention. The data highlights that students who engaged with academic advisors were significantly more likely to take proactive steps, such as enrolling in summer coursework, retaining their scholarships, and continuing their studies into the fall semester.

The findings further illustrate the critical role of advisors in guiding students through the complexities of financial aid requirements, encouraging retention, and improving academic performance. In cases where advisor intervention was successful, students experienced notably higher rates of scholarship retention and persistence. The SRI initiative serves as a model for academic institutions aiming to enhance student retention through targeted interventions and structured advisor outreach. Moving forward, continued refinement of advisor outreach and collaboration with financial aid services will be essential to sustaining the initiative's success and supporting at-risk students more effectively.