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*The Scholarship Foundation
of St. Louis*

Don Senti, Ed.D.
Education Plus

Randall Weller
Citi

Laura Winter
Project Manager
(314) 952-6561
laura@stlouisgraduates.org

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For more information, contact:
Laura Winter, Project Manager, St. Louis Graduates, (314) 952-6561
Kristina Tirloni, Media and Public Relations Manager, TG, (512) 219-4990

St. Louis Graduates to launch student-led advocacy coalition with three-year grant

St. Louis, MO – St. Louis Graduates is receiving a significant boost to its advocacy efforts on behalf of low-income and first-generation students thanks to a three-year, $240,000 grant from TG Philanthropy. The Texas-based nonprofit is supporting the creation and mobilization of a bi-state, student-led coalition to advocate for need-based financial aid and other public and institutional policies to support postsecondary success among first-generation and low-income students.

"Effective social change depends upon engaging students who are affected by public policy. Over the next three years, we intend to shift state and institutional policy to support the potential of our students," says **Faith Sandler**, Executive Director of The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis and Advocacy Chair for St. Louis Graduates.

The grant is the largest St. Louis Graduates has received to date.

TG is investing in St. Louis Graduates' advocacy work as part of its Epicenters of Collaboration initiative which focuses on strengthening community collaborations in support of students. "In order for low-income and first-generation students to succeed, the support and guidance of multiple systems and organizations must align with state and institutional policies. We believe that St. Louis Graduates is uniquely positioned to bring expertise and student voices together to inform policies and practices that can lead to greater affordability and success for students in postsecondary education," says **Kristin Boyer**, Director, Philanthropy at TG.

This is the third grant TG has made to St. Louis Graduates.

Student leadership sets coalition apart
The Active Advocacy Coalition will build upon the advocacy initiatives of The Scholarship Foundation's education policy internship program which focuses on authentic advocacy led by the students most impacted by the policies supported.

Funded by Deaconess Foundation, the education policy internship program trains undergraduate and graduate students in research and advocacy. Over the past two years, education policy interns have testified before the Missouri General Assembly, met with state legislators, provided public comment to the Missouri Department of Higher Education, and published research findings and commentary.

Formation of the Active Advocacy Coalition is a critical component of regional efforts to increase degree attainment as articulated in a regional plan created through a collaboration of St. Louis Graduates, St. Louis Regional Chamber and other partners.

The coalition will involve partner organizations in St. Louis Graduates, the college access and success nonprofit organizations whose work supports low-income and first-generation

students. The coalition will engage agency staff and board members involved in these organizations, along with the students who are pursuing a higher education degree.

Karissa Anderson, Manager of Advocacy and Policy Research at The Scholarship Foundation, will direct the growth of the new Active Advocacy Coalition. Anderson served as a Scholarship Foundation education policy intern and has extensive experience advocating throughout Missouri. A first-generation college student, Anderson is a recent graduate of Saint Louis University with a Master's degree in social work and a Bachelor's degree in communications from Southeast Missouri State University.

"Over the past two years, our advocacy work has gained momentum," says Anderson. "When we started as education policy interns, it was difficult to schedule appointments with legislators. Now they are asking to meet with us. With the support of TG, the momentum will continue to build."

St. Louis Graduates is a collaborative network of K-12 and higher education, college access and success non-profit organizations, business and philanthropy committed to increasing the proportion of low-income and first-generation students with a postsecondary degree.

The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis is based upon the conviction that an educated citizenry is essential to a healthy democracy. The Foundation sees higher education as a catalyst for positive change, a force that can transform the lives of individuals and families and advance the economic and civic health of societies.

TG promotes educational access and success so that students can realize their college and career dreams. As a nonprofit corporation, TG offers resources to help students and families plan and prepare for college, learn the basics of money management, and repay their federal student loans. The Board of Directors established TG Philanthropy in 2004, recognizing that the quality of life and the economic vibrancy of our communities, states and nation directly correlate with educational access, opportunity and attainment.

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