

## Student Satisfaction of the U's Scholarship Search System

SCI 3900/HONOR 3900 — Being Human in STEM — Spring 2024 Student Project

One of the most challenging aspects of navigating an undergraduate education are finances. One of the main obstacles that our team encountered in our quest to make college affordable was navigating the U's scholarship portal: AcademicWorks. The AcademicWorks portal does not have a functioning filter feature, as it often highlights scholarship opportunities for which the students do not qualify. For example, a student majoring in physics would be recommended opportunities exclusively for Honors Students in the Business School. Furthermore, the filter feature would often crash, leading to students losing the progress they had made in narrowing down their scholarship opportunities. From our team's test runs, the time it takes for a student to fully complete the filter form is anywhere between 30 minutes to multiple hours, meaning a crash would cost students time as well as progress. The crashes coupled with the general difficulty of finding relevant scholarship opportunities led to frustration among members of our team, and undoubtedly countless students around the campus as a whole.

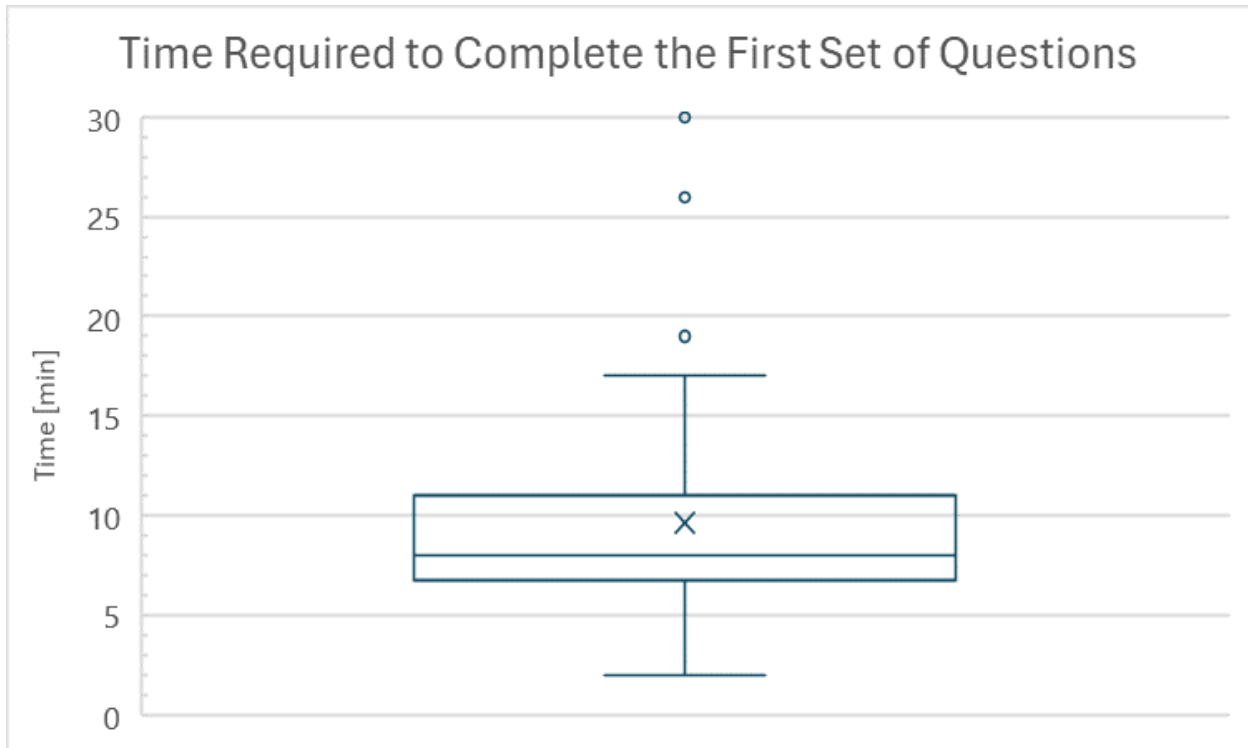
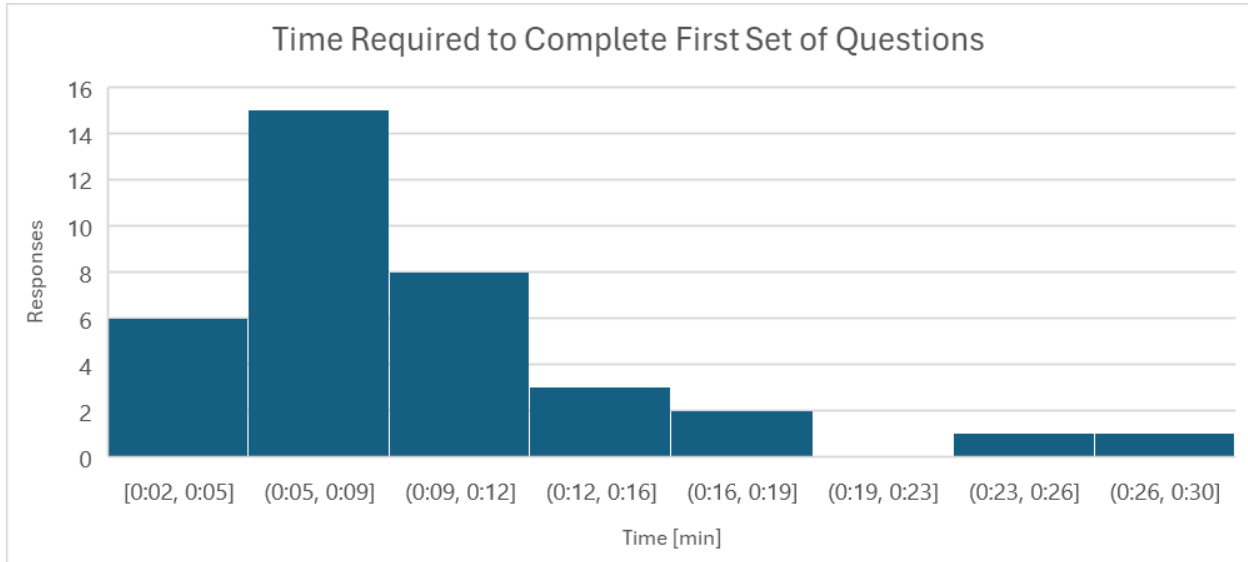
How the survey/event was organized:

Our team first met with Anthony Jones, the head of the central financial aid department at the University of Utah. We addressed the concerns we stated above with him and discussed the possibility of the school fixing the platform or moving to a new one. He said that the University will be working with a new platform starting in fall 2025—Scholarship Universe—and that the financial aid department was in need of student feedback on the new platform before it is officially rolled out.

Our team decided that we would host an event for students to test out the new scholarship portal and provide feedback through a survey. Participants could elect to be entered into a drawing for Amazon gift cards. We completed the first steps of the filtering process and created a Google Form assessing the effectiveness, timeliness, and clarity of the filtering tool based on our experience using the portal. We met with Anthony a second time to address the feedback we had on the new portal and follow up on the creation of the advisory committee.

After finalizing the feedback form with Anthony, we asked the other members of Being Human in STEM (SCI 3900/HONOR 3900) to evaluate the portal and complete the survey. We hosted an event on April 11, 2024 inviting students from across the student body to also evaluate the portal and complete the survey. We had 32 students attend the event, and these are our findings:

## Findings:

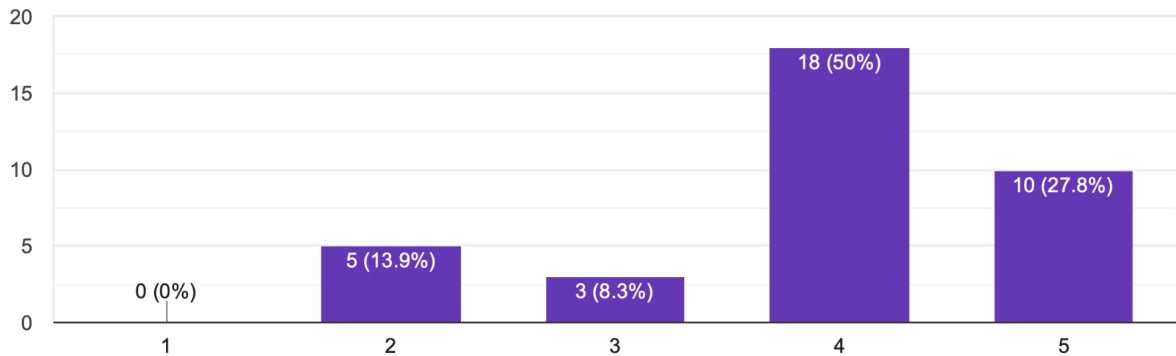


Our survey got a total of 36 unique responses. Of these responses, 34 of them had never used Scholarship Universe before while 2 had. The distribution of time required to complete the first set of scholarship matching questions is skewed right. The median time required was 8 minutes. There were three outliers: 19, 26, and 30 minutes. This is a significant reduction in time over the old scholarship portal. 11 respondents were not asked redundant questions while 25 were. Of the 25 who had redundant questions, 20 of them had redundant questions about their residency, 3 were asked redundant questions about their need status or extracurriculars, and 2 did not specify.

Multiple respondents stated that they were unhappy with the drop down menus being long, or the awkward alphabetized ordering of massive lists that would reorganize whenever a selection was clicked. Multiple students also expressed being overwhelmed by the length of the filter lists, too. However, most students also felt that it was much easier to navigate than the previous portal.

The user interface was easy to navigate.

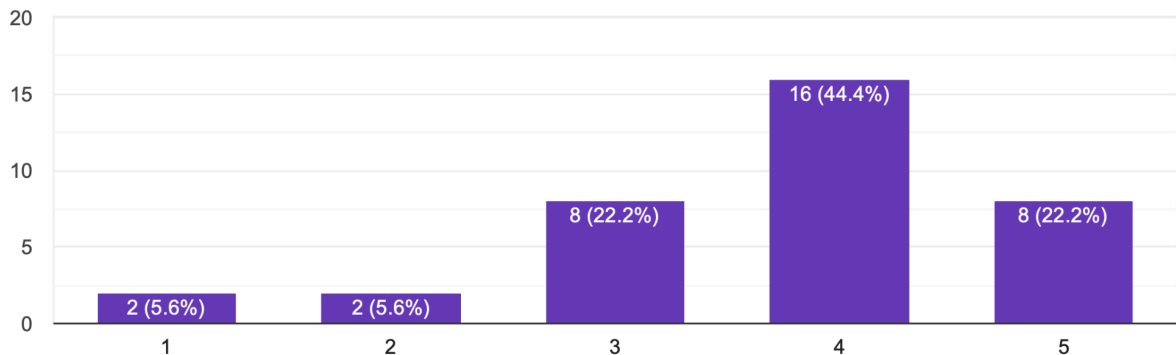
36 responses



77.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that the user interface was easy to navigate, 8.3% of respondents did not have an opinion one way or another, and 13.9% of respondents disagreed.

The flow of the questions seemed logical.

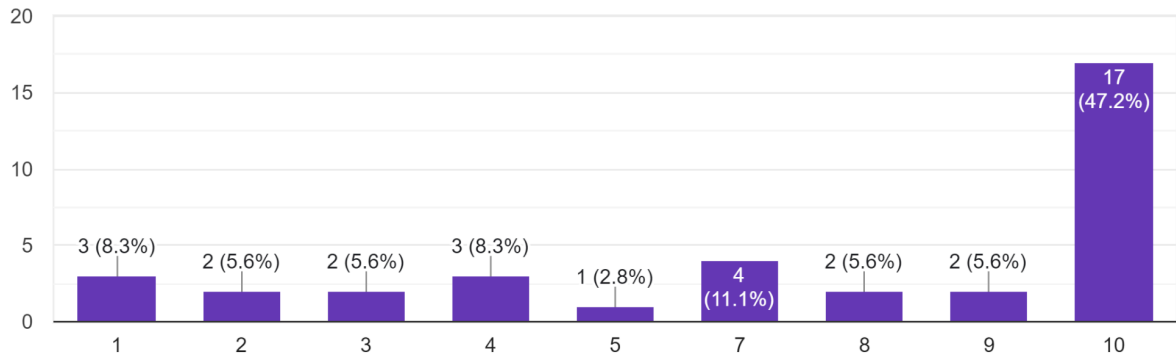
36 responses



66.6% of respondents agreed with the statement that the flow of questions was logical, 22.2% of respondents did not have an opinion, and 11.2% of respondents disagreed. This was a sentiment reflected in some of the feedback—that there are some logical deductions that could be made. For example, if one is living in Salt Lake City, it can be deduced that they live in Utah.

Briefly look at the first 10 matches shown. How many of them are you eligible for?

36 responses



A commonly reflected sentiment was that a lot of scholarships being suggested were ones that did not apply to them- such as scholarships for high school seniors, or law scholarships being suggested for engineering students, etc. However, it was also stated that this filter was preferred to the old one.

### Suggestions:

A commonly reported suggestion was revising the “Select from list” questions. Respondents requested that selected options gray out rather than disappear entirely, effectively shuffling the list in the process. Respondents also requested that rather than list format, there should be a more obvious search feature, allowing students to type rather than parse through all of the available options. We recognize that the matching feature is never going to be foolproof, however, our survey indicates that students would prefer to be matched to scholarships fitted for their prospective careers.

Students also suggested that the description of the scholarships should be visible without opening the application. One student had a specific instance where some scholarships seemed “irrelevant upon first glance”, but found that they could potentially apply to the scholarship after further investigation. Scholarship Universe does have an in-website page for all scholarships in the portal, however, students felt that all the relevant information about these scholarships were not displayed on the in-website page.

A student had a suggestion asking for an option to add their own information to the portal to help further refine their search for relevant scholarships. We acknowledge that Scholarship Universe does contain a fair amount of responses for students to select from in order to help match them to scholarships. However, we also acknowledge that each student has unique challenges about their academic and personal lives that are usually not included in a general scholarship portal such as

Scholarship Universe. Adding an option for students to add their own information can aid and possibly expedite the matching process.

Some of the responses asked for fewer scholarships to be recommended from questions regarding interests. As they said, having broad interests introduces poor matches in the recommendation page, because even though a student may have an interest in a field, they may not necessarily be a good candidate for that scholarship. Asking more questions to gauge interest or specialize into more niche fields could reduce this effect and more accurately guide students towards opportunities that they have higher odds of securing. For example, rather than asking if students are interested in the legal field, they can further clarify by asking about personal injury, criminal defense, or intellectual property law. This would simultaneously guide qualified students towards better matches and stop unqualified students from receiving poor recommendations.