

The Boca Raton Tribune

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Applications Open for The Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program at Florida Atlantic University

Program provides first-generation, Pell-eligible students with financial, academic and social support services to increase collegiate and post-graduate success

BOCA Raton, FL - February 13, 2026 - Florida Atlantic University's Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program is welcoming applications for the Class of 2030. This year's application cycle opens ahead of First-Generation Week, which includes National First-Generation College Student Day on November 8, underscoring the program's commitment to helping these students succeed. Applications must be completed and submitted by Friday, February 27, 2026.



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Now in its ninth year, the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program provides academically talented, first-generation, Pell-eligible students in Florida with the opportunity to graduate debt-free from Florida Atlantic in four years or less. Selected scholars receive four-year financial aid packages that cover tuition, on-campus housing, books and a meal plan. In addition, each scholar follows a 17-step program, called the “The Path,” which encompasses wraparound services, including career planning, mentoring, and financial literacy, to support successful academic careers and professional lives.

“We are thrilled to open applications for another cohort of talented students who will benefit from this transformative opportunity,” said Aubrey Strul, program co-founder. “As our program continues to grow, we are able to reach more first-generation students across Florida and provide them with not just a debt-free education, but a comprehensive support system that includes mentorship, career preparation, and the tools they need to thrive in college and beyond.”

Founded in 2017, the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program has grown from just four students to more than 80 current scholars and 67 alumni, providing critical support to students and their families, who would otherwise be unable to afford college. The program’s graduates are flourishing in a variety of industries, including healthcare, communications, information technology, engineering and more.

“We’re proud to be in our students’ corner, providing a community that believes in their potential,” said Vanessa Kay Herrera, Ed.D., director of first-generation student success at Florida Atlantic. “Our role is to ensure that no obstacle stands in their way, whether it be financial, academic, or simply not knowing how to navigate college life.”

Prospective Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars must meet the following criteria:

- First-generation student (defined as someone whose parent or guardians did not complete a four-year bachelor’s degree);
- Pell Grant---eligible;
- Florida resident;
- 2026 high school graduate, and
- Accepted to Florida Atlantic for the Fall 2026 semester.



As part of the application process, future scholars must submit a completed FAFSA application to assess eligibility for Federal Pell Grant funds, commit to enrolling in 30 credits per academic year, and agree to live on Florida Atlantic's Boca Raton campus for all four years.

"The Kelly/Strul program is an uplifting community that encourages me to dream bigger and embrace challenges I once might have avoided," said Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholar Kei-myra Brooks. "It has strengthened my confidence and showed me I am capable of achieving my goals and making a meaningful impact in my field."

Boca Raton philanthropists Strul and his wife, Sally, developed the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program in partnership with Florida Atlantic President Emeritus John Kelly and his wife, Carolyn. Strul, a former first-generation student, provided the initial \$1 million investment to launch the program. He and his wife remain committed to working with the university to ensure the scholarship's continued success and steady growth. More than 120 donors have contributed to the program since its inception, including an anonymous philanthropist who made a multi-million-dollar donation in 2021.

For questions regarding the application, contact Vanessa Kay Herrera, Ed.D., director of first-generation student success, at firstgeneration@fau.edu. Visit kellystrulscholars.fau.edu to learn more.



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Emerging Scholars**

<https://www.bocaratontribune.com/bocaratonnews/2026/02/applications-open-for-the-kelly-strul-emerging-scholars-program-at-florida-atlantic-university/>



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