

# Scholarships for Students

For the inaugural season in 1984, it was the Colorado College Conservatory for gifted Young Musicians. Gifted Young Musicians dropped in the early 90's and Summer Music Festival added. By 1999, it became simply the Colorado College Summer Music Festival. The Festival Chamber Orchestra became the Festival Orchestra in 2004. In these cases, just different names for the same thing, but another name change signified a major achievement.

They always had been known as the students, the musicians that had their sights set on Colorado Springs in June to receive instruction by seasoned professionals to optimize their chamber ensemble and orchestra performances at the festival. Most students had to pay for this opportunity, a reality that caused financial difficulty for some. A significant change came in 2007, when every student was given a full scholarship, and, since 2014, these talented young professionals and aspiring students have been known as festival fellows rather than simply students.

“The first five or six years I worked at the festival, we'd be calling up students and calling up teachers and saying, 'Please, send your kids.' We had to do a lot of recruiting,” remembered Virginia Barron, a festival artist on viola who became associate director of the festival in 1994.

Over time, word spread across colleges, universities, and conservatories that this festival at 6,000 feet was a gem. The unusually low student-to-faculty ratio was a big selling point. The multi-week festival initially ended in mid-July. Gradually, the start dates moved closer to the beginning of June and, by 2009, the festival ended in late June rather than in mid-summer. The music festival's 2019 dates are June 2 through June 22. A June festival allows the fellows to attend as many as two other programs during the summer. “And then, of course, being able to offer scholarships changed things even more,” said Barron. “Last year, I think we had some 450 applicants for 50 spots.”

“As soon as we went full-scholarship, we became more competitive with the larger festivals,” recalled Music Director Susan Grace. “It put us on the map. At the time, few festivals were offering this, and our application pool shot way up.”

Achieving full-scholarship status required a leap of faith. Colorado College always had provided a reasonable level of financial and institutional support for the festival. Offering scholarships to all meant that it was time to translate the passion and loyalty of the community to a higher level of financial support. “Concertgoers were willing to step up and support a fellow,” said Grace. “The scholarship sponsorship has grown to be very popular. Some of our donors support more than one student; others share a scholarship with one of their friends.”

Asking the community to pay a greater part of the festival's expenses proved to be a vital step, for, two years later, there would be a financial crisis that could have ended the Colorado College Summer Music Festival permanently.