Freshman Adam Sommer, 18, who has a Jonathan Baldwin Turner scholarship, would not be at the University of Illinois without scholarship help from the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. With an older brother in college and a younger sister on her way in a few years, Sommer, who is studying agricultural and consumer economics, said the financial support from his parents is limited.

But thanks to the scholarship money he received from ACES, Sommer is able to attend the U of I and is debt-free so far.

“I appreciate those who help us out,” Sommer said about ACES donors. Sommer said someday he would like to give back to ACES to help hard-working students like himself with a little extra financial assistance.

Sommer is one of more than 600 ACES students who received scholarships this school year.

ACES students got nearly $2 million in scholarships this year, said Jason Emmert, assistant dean in ACES academic programs.

“We’ve just become more aggressive at utilizing our scholarship resources,” Emmert said. “With the help of the Office of Advancement, we have brought new scholarship donors on board and increased our scholarship allocations to nearly $2 million for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 academic years,” he said.
ACES met its Brilliant Futures campaign goal of $178 million on May 31, 2011, said Margaret “Meg” Cline, associate dean of advancement for the College of ACES. That number continued to climb to more than $180 million as of late October.

The needs and wish list of the college range from faculty support to lab renovations and study abroad opportunities, but the highest priority for ACES and the U of I is scholarship support, said Stacey Cole, an ACES assistant director in development. “We are working to make a quality University of Illinois and College of ACES education affordable and accessible to remain competitive enough to attract and retain the most deserving students.”

The Brilliant Futures campaign began in July 2003 with four years of planning. On June 1, 2007, the campaign was announced to the public.

The Urbana campus has received $1.6 billion in private gifts, while Chicago and Springfield have received $597 million and $26 million respectively.

The College of Engineering carries the most weight, providing about 21.7 percent of the Urbana commitments followed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at 15.3 percent. ACES ranks third with 11.1 percent.

Cole said for money raised and total donors, ACES is a top performer on campus. She said ACES has a larger donor base, but individual gifts are smaller than those given to other units on campus.

Cole said engineering has a higher average than ACES because their donors make larger gifts. ACES relies on a larger, loyal donor base that gives less but gives consistently. The number of ACES donors and what they give continue to rise, Cole said.

“We have an extremely loyal group of alumni and friends who give year after year,” she said.
Krista Kimme, also an assistant director in development, said that when alums come back to campus they always speak highly of their “ACES family.”

“To many of our students, the College of ACES is their home away from home,” Kimme said. “Our welcoming and approachable faculty and staff help our students feel comfortable from day one, giving it a family feel.”

Corporate and business donations make up the largest percentage of contributions with 38.3 percent. Alums have contributed 29 percent of the ACES Brilliant Futures goal.

The donations ACES receives through Brilliant Futures help with the costs of new facilities, research, study abroad opportunities, faculty support and scholarships.

A quarter of total contributions to ACES have landed in the “ACES Annual Fund,” which allows for unrestricted support of the college. The money is used for student support, study abroad opportunities, internships and to assist departments with their immediate needs, Cole said.

Research and scholarships also get a large portion of donations, receiving 25.4 percent and 8.7 percent of the funding respectively.

“Student support is the No. 1 priority for the College of ACES and the U of I,” Cole said. “In order to recruit and retain the best and most talented students, we have to be competitive in terms of scholarships.”

By academic department, crop sciences has received the most financial support from the Brilliant Futures Campaign with 17.6 percent; followed by human and community development, 19.5 percent; and animal sciences, 9.4 percent.

Besides providing more funding for academic departments, student research and scholarships through the Brilliant Futures campaign, the College of ACES has been able to build
the McFarland Carillon Bell Tower, renovate the food labs in Bevier Hall and make improvements to Bevier Café with private money.

The Brilliant Futures campaign concludes at the end of this year.