

More aid for students in crisis



The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have caused many financial challenges for Clark College students. Some have lost jobs, while others have found themselves facing steep medical bills. With schools closed for months, many students with dependent children were scrambling to pay for child care.

That's where Clark College's emergency grants program comes in—and, starting in spring term, it's about to start helping even more students than before.

Soon after the college moved to remote operations in spring 2020, it set up a one-stop clearinghouse to manage all the different sources of emergency funding available to students experiencing a financial crisis. These sources include community organizations, Clark College Foundation,

state funding—and the largest source of all, federal funding distributed through the 2020 CARES Act.

By December, however, that CARES funding—about \$2.6 million dollars—was almost exhausted.

“We averaged awarding around \$96,000 a week over the last three terms,” said Sheri Terjeson, who manages the Emergency Grants program. “Our students have faced incredible challenges paying for basic needs like rent and food, not to mention school supplies and health care.”

By December, Terjeson and the rest of the Emergency Grants Committee were desperately trying to figure out how to stretch out the few remaining grant funds to help students in the coming winter term. Fortunately, just before the new year began, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), providing additional funding for students.

“That funding really came just in the nick of time,” said Terjeson. “We all breathed a sigh of relief when we heard the news—and then started running full-speed to get that funding ready for our students as quickly as possible.”

In winter term alone, the college disbursed more than \$635,000 in emergency grants to 668 students. Now, however, with the CRRSAA and the funds in President Biden’s COVID relief package that was signed into law in March, the college expects to award approximately \$1.1 million to students in need during spring term 2021.

Unfortunately, that federal funding excluded certain kinds of students from eligibility, including Dreamer (DACA and/or undocumented) students. But the Washington State Legislature also recently approved new funding for emergency grants to students, including Dreamers. The grants can be applied for through the same Emergency Grant Application as is used for all other emergency funds.

“Really, our message to students is that, if they are worried that financial hardship is going to derail their educations, they should fill out the Emergency Grant Application, and let us see if there’s a funding source that matches up with them,” said Terjeson. “There are a lot of different sources of funding—from the government, from generous donors through the Clark College Foundation, from funding sources dedicated to supporting a particular subset of students like veterans or students of color—and we will do our best to find a source that can be used for that particular student’s case.”

“What we don’t want is for students to stop their educational journeys because of a financial crisis,” added Dr. Michele Cruse, Interim Vice President of Student Affairs. “Once students drop out of college, it can be very difficult for them to come back. We know that a college education can have life-changing benefits for students, their families, and their communities. That is why we are working so hard to keep our students supported during these challenging times.”

And now, thanks to this increased funding from multiple sources, the college will be able to help more students than ever.

If you are a student experiencing financial hardship, please visit our Emergency Grants page to learn how to apply for emergency assistance.