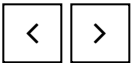




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TruWest donates \$30,600 to program for first-generation students

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The donation provides scholarships for one class per semester for First Year Experience program participants like these. (Photo courtesy of Melissa Carpenter)

TruWest Credit Union donated \$30,600 to Mesa Community College’s (MCC) First Year Experience (FYE) program, which supports first-generation and first-year students transitioning from high school.

The donation, part of a multi-year long commitment to FYE by TruWest, provides course and textbook scholarships for program participants and a stipend for student ambassadors. TruWest also teaches financial literacy workshops to participants and their parents.

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The Mesa Legend hopes everyone had a safe #Halloween2020! Published today, read @jjspooky review of “The Craft: Legacy” a promising film that suffered from too many plot holes.



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Happy Halloween to @mesacc faculty and students!

Read about this year’s virtual Halloween costume contest in which two people entered and won in their categories. Article by @acripe2 #HappyHalloween2020



Oct 31, 2020

“It’s amazing to have, you know, an outside entity like TruWest be interested and committed to a community college,” said MCC’s Director of Foundations for Student Success Melissa Carpenter. “It provides that stability where, instead of trying to worry about, ‘Where will we get this scholarship money for our students?’ Because we truly believe it’s important to support students financially, and these are students who may not qualify for other supports.”

FYE, created three year ago by Carpenter and her colleagues, is geared towards first-generation and academically under-prepared students without an existing support system. The scholarship pays for one class for summer, fall and spring semesters, as well some textbook support, as long as students participate consistently.

Karen Bejarano, TruWest’s vice president over branch operations, said: “We decided to donate because we really are very much into education, higher education... And we just want to be able to help out and reach out to those, the less deserved that wouldn’t be able to go to college unless there were these types of scholarships...”

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@acripe2

My newest for [@LegendNewspaper](#)

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The multi-year long commitment is part of the credit union's mission to build community partnerships and provide financial education. Bejarano, herself an alumna of Mesa Community College, explained the donation increases by \$5,000 every year.

"It's about our philosophy. In credit unions we have a saying: People helping people. So we definitely hone in on that and want to reach out and help in our community."

Freshly graduated from the Mesa Public Schools district, students transition to college with a cohort experience, going to class with other program members. They attend student success and financial literacy workshops and, most importantly, the summer bridge, a five week experience taking a summer class and—traditionally—coming to campus four days a week for activities.

"...I think they're able to meet peers and kind of feel a sense of connection. They learn a lot about how to relate to, you know, faculty and staff, especially when they're looking for resources or if they need help navigating something," said Carpenter.



The program also offers tutoring support. Student ambassadors, who lead current participants after completing from the program themselves, hold weekly study groups, provide announcements and support and present workshops.

First Year Experience program participants attend class with a cohort and learn about finances through TruWest Credit Union's workshops. (Photo courtesy of Melissa Carpenter)

Student ambassador Michelle Marquez explained: "Well, you get support as in, like, guidance through scholarships or even just how to send an email, or learning how to transfer into a university from a community college, things like that."

The program helped Marquez reach out to faculty and resources, manage study habits and become involved with her community. As a student ambassador, she holds study groups with students put together in one class and presents workshops like improving study habits and self care. She explained that without the help from TruWest Credit Union, she wouldn't have learned how to



manage money or the difference between a credit union and a bank.

“...Our last year during the pandemic crisis, it started like around March. The students I’ve been with have started losing their jobs, so they started applying for scholarships, mostly by TruWest,” said student ambassador Ivan Duran, who discovered the program through an MCC adviser at his high school. “I was also part of that group who needed the money to help with my classes.”

Along with the donation and financial literacy workshops for FYE participants, TruWest held three financial literacy courses last year and helps with the Mesa Market. This year, the credit union has also hired a graduate of the program. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he was set up to be a representative for the FYE program, teaching about financial literacy, and now he works as a part-time TruWest employee. TruWest is looking to hire and sponsor another program participant after campus reopens.

This year, the program went virtual. Where the summer bridge traditionally ran four days a week on campus, now it’s boiled down to the essentials online while still retaining quality. The



cohort meets one-on-one with a member of staff each month for customized support and workshops are held over Webex.

In the future, Carpenter hopes to scale the program from niche to widespread, expanding to non-Mesa Public Schools graduates and even returning adult students who would also benefit from a cohort opportunity and extra support.

“It’s really easy to reach out to people and get help, because that’s always one of the hardest things,” said Marquez about what she’s learned. “It takes a lot of courage to ask for help, and FYE gives you that guidance you need in your first year of college.”

About Author



Nienke Onneweer

Nienke Onneweer is the Managing Editor and Copy Editor for the Mesa Legend. She joined in August 2019 and has been publishing articles since January 2019. She has been writing since childhood, and her favorite punctuation is the em dash. Find her on Twitter @thenienke.

