

https://www.themesatribune.com/news/city-mcc-expand-college-scholarships/article_e0ee6292-dd95-11ee-a0a7-bb4d69881e1f.html

TOP STORY

City, MCC expand college scholarships

By Scott Shumaker, Tribune Staff Writer

Mar 12, 2024



Mesa leaders who gathered last week to launch the expansion of the Mesa College Promise scholarship program to include adults over 24 were, from left: Dr. Kate Franco, Google regional head of data center public affairs; Mayor John Giles; Dr. Kimberly Britt, interim president of Mesa

Community College; City Council members Jenn Duff, Mark Freeman and Julie Spilsbury; Vice Mayor Francisco Heredia; and Ryan Nickel, CEO of Education Forward Arizona.

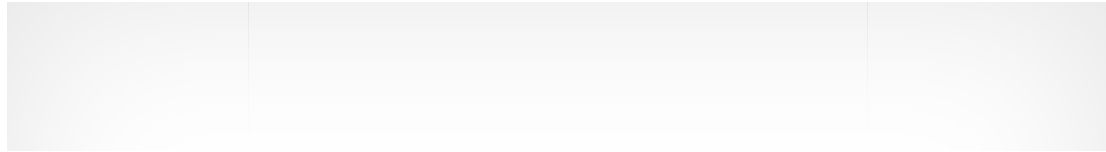
(Scott Shumaker/Tribune Staff)

Mesa Community College and the City of Mesa have officially expanded the Mesa College Promise scholarship program to cover adults over 24 who want to return to school to start a new career or boost their credentials in their current field.

Previously, the Mesa College Promise, a public-private partnership started in 2021, was open to recent Mesa high school graduates with demonstrated financial need.

So far, the program has raised over \$760,000 in private funds on top of \$300,000 (\$100,000 annually) from the City of Mesa. As of last October, the program had awarded \$271,000 in scholarships.

ADVERTISING



Mesa College Promise currently has 216 active participants, a college spokeswoman said.

Google is supporting the expansion to adults returning to school with a \$100,000 donation.

To qualify for the adult scholarships, Mesa residents must have a high school diploma or GED, demonstrate financial need by completing a FAFSA form and register for a minimum six credits as a degree or certificate-seeking student in an eligible program of study.

Adults with some college but no degree are eligible, but not those with a degree.

The first class of adult learners receiving the scholarship will be able to take classes beginning in the fall.

Mayor John Giles has prioritized educational attainment in Mesa during his tenure and views education as the key to Mesa staying an attractive destination for businesses and families.

In remarks at an event celebrating the Mesa College Promise expansion, he

said Mesa must be more of a “college town” to remain competitive with its neighbors.

Currently, education attainment in Mesa is low compared to other East Valley cities and towns.

U.S. Census data shared by the City of Mesa’s Economic Development Office shows Mesa’s attainment of four-year degrees among residents over 25 (30%) is the lowest among Tempe (50%), Gilbert (47%), Chandler (32%), Phoenix (32%) and Tucson (31%).

Mesa Community College “is the best tool in our toolbox” for driving up educational attainment, Giles said. Opening up Mesa College Promise program to adult learners “multiplies its potential.”

“Let’s wear this campus out,” he said. “We need to have every parking space filled. We need to have people bumping into each other in the halls. We need to elevate this institution.”

MCC’s Interim President Dr. Kimberly Britt told the Tribune that Mesa College Promise’s \$250 per semester stipend – in addition to the tuition and fee waivers for participants – would help a lot of adults to take a step back into education.

“Their needs are kind of doubled down, especially if they have families,” she said.

Britt said that in her own experience growing up in a foster home and attending college, she knows that small expenses can prove daunting.

“I needed help getting to my waitressing job or just buying basic necessities. I had about \$150 a month, but it made a huge difference. It relieved a lot of stress,” she said.

In addition to the financial assistance, the Mesa College Promise program also provides support services such as free tutoring, academic advising and access to an iPad loan program, Britt said.

Current Mesa College Promise scholar Jeremiah Underwood attended the event launching the expansion.

Underwood is currently working on an associates degree in psychology and said he has had a good experience at Mesa Community College.

Underwood is planning to transfer to a four-year university after graduating and eventually he wants to be a counselor.

“I know a lot of young adults, especially men of color, have a problem with expressing their emotions,” Underwood said. “We sometimes feel we’re alone as young adults, and I want to be that anchor for them.”

He said he was grateful for the Mesa College Promise scholarship.

“I’ve wanted to go to college since I was younger, but I’ve been told, ‘Oh, you’re going to have all these debts and loans, all that,’” he said. “Mesa College Promise made it possible for me to go to college.”