

COVID-19 EMERGENCY FUND

A way to help Seattle Colleges students weather the crisis, stay healthy and stay in school

Public contributions will support one-time grants for students with acute needs; \$500K campaign goal

Current as of March 17, 2020

OVERVIEW

The Seattle Colleges are a bridge to a better life for thousands of our city's people — many of whom are fighting their way through poverty, historical oppression and other adversity. Our 44,015 students — average age 28 — are often the first in their family to attend college. Many must simultaneously manage school, parenting and work (often more than one job).

The balance can be precarious. And the COVID-19 emergency threatens to tip many students into crisis, potentially derailing their education.

The concern is not a short-term shift to online instruction, which we've opted for at least through the end of March (along with other Seattle-area higher-ed institutions). Rather, the concern is that our students' lives could be destabilized by a scenario like one of those below (not an exhaustive set):

Many public health experts now fear a potentially dire situation: If the novel coronavirus becomes an epidemic in the United States, it could exacerbate the vulnerabilities of resource-strapped minorities and cause devastating consequences. —
[The New York Times, 7-Mar-2020](#)

1. Slashed hours & layoffs

Many of our students have jobs in restaurants, hotels and convention spaces. All of these businesses went into freefall as people initially changed behavior in response to the coronavirus. Employees lost hours; some were laid off. Some restaurants failed. Then matters worsened as the Governor ordered all the state's [bars and restaurants to close](#) at least until the end of March, possibly longer. This threw thousands out of work, including, we estimate, hundreds of Seattle Colleges students. Our students who work in the gig economy — for example, driving for Uber or Lyft — are also in trouble. [Fares have evaporated](#) in the wake of employers, major and minor, asking their employees to work from home until the crisis lifts.

2. Child-care complications and expense

The Seattle Public Schools have been closed, at minimum, through April 27. At least a fifth of our students are parents. At present the Colleges are operating virtually, so the challenge isn't that a parent won't be able to attend school. Instead, the issue could be making it to work with a child at home. Many lower-income workers have scant or no paid time off. Not working can mean lost wages — or even a lost job — pushing a vulnerable family to the financial edge.

Making matters worse: many low-income parents [rely on a school to provide their child's breakfast and lunch](#), saving money. Going to a food bank may be no answer; distributor [Food Lifeline reports](#) fewer donations and fewer volunteers since the COVID-19 outbreak.

3. Student illness

So far, one student of the Seattle Colleges has tested positive for COVID-19. But given emerging knowledge about transmission, there could be more. Indeed, our students may be at elevated risk — not because of attending the Colleges, but because of the nature of their jobs. Many area professionals easily telecommute, but that's not possible for people who make their living working in hospitals, preparing food for delivery by DoorDash, stocking shelves at a drugstore, or drawing

espressos at a coffee shop. Fortunately, most people recover from a COVID-19 infection. But they

still face a period of quarantine and — possibly — lost wages or worse. Also worth considering: people without sick time, health insurance, or some other financial buffer may feel they have no choice but to work, even if they don't feel well, with grave public health consequences.

BACKDROP: THE ECONOMIC REALITIES OF OUR STUDENTS

Even in normal times, many Seattle Colleges students are in a tenuous state financially. In a city where the median rent has [increased 71%](#) over the last decade, and living costs in general rose from 35th highest nationally in 2012 to [sixth highest in 2018](#), a late 2019 survey of Seattle Colleges students found that:

- 44% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days
- 53% of respondents experienced housing insecurity in the previous year
- 21% of respondents experienced homelessness in the previous year

Students with these challenges can be easily upended by an unexpected car repair, job loss, or rent hike. [48 percent](#) of our students say that a lack of finances is likely or very likely to cause them to withdraw from school.

That's why the Colleges have long provided **one-time emergency grants** to students with demonstrated need. Such grants typically range from \$750 to \$1,000. These small amounts make a huge difference, with the vast majority of recipients persevering through the immediate adversity and ultimately completing their course of study.

Unfortunately, **at this point in the school year, monies for such grants are two-thirds or more depleted.**

THE SEATTLE COLLEGES' COVID-19 EMERGENCY FUND

Many parts of the community are rallying to support people affected directly and indirectly by COVID-19. These include a consortia of area companies and philanthropies that's organized an initial \$2.5 million Response Fund to support community organizations helping at-risk populations, like workers who can't take sick leave, people without health insurance, and healthcare workers.

These are valuable efforts that will likely benefit many of our students. We feel that more is needed, however, if the aim is both to meet students' basic needs and fortify their resolve to remain in school. The Response Fund may not reach far, given the scale of the crisis. And it may not provide the sort of direct financial support so successful in our regular emergency grants program.

Our hope is to raise enough money to give **at least 500 grants averaging \$1,000 — or \$500,000 in total.**

HOW TO HELP

The COVID-19 crisis could fall heaviest on the people so often pushed to the margins: lower-income people, people of color, immigrant communities — in other words, many of those working to better their lives at the Seattle Colleges. The dreams of these students are at risk unless we act swiftly, decisively and generously as a community. To contribute, contact us:

Online: <https://foundation.seattlecolleges.edu/covid-19-emergency-fund>

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