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CARES Act Helps Governors State Students Get Their Education in GEER



On the ladder of success, the difference between leveling up and languishing in the middle can be a small boost.

An innovative grant program implemented at [Governors State University](#) as part of the federal CARES act provides a leg up for students who need help continuing their dream of earning a college degree due to the pandemic.

The project, [Gaining Enrichment through Educational Readiness \(GEER\)](#), operates under a \$1.2 million federal grant aimed at easing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more than 200 undergraduate and graduate students pursuing a degree and are low-income, first-generation, or members of a minority group, the GEER Project office provides comprehensive support through financial resources and mentoring.

Kaylynn Woolfolk, a Project GEER coordinator, mentors students, and also helps track statistics within the department. Founded in January, Project GEER uses grant funds to help students get back on track with their courses and get equipped for virtual learning.

Sometimes relatively minor account balances prevent students from re-enrolling in the next trimester. One major point of assistance has come in the form of scholarship grants up to \$1,500 per student.

“We reached out to students who couldn’t re-enroll because of their balance,” Woolfolk said. “A lot of them were able to continue their education and stay in school given the resources we provided.”

With virtual classes for the Spring 2021 semester, many students had an immediate need to upgrade their personal technology.

For some, outdated laptops couldn’t keep up with their school demands. Many also come from households with one shared computer for the whole family—which might have been needed by others who were learning from home.

GEER used grant funding to hire two alumni Social Worker Angela Johnson ('15) and Student Success Coach Derrick Brown ('19), as well as to buy new laptops for students and provide subsidies for them to get more robust home WiFi service. According to Woolfolk, the GEER office partnered with GSU’s Information Technology department to provide students with a training session from GSU’s chief information officer, [Charles Pustz](#), on how to use their laptop before they take it home.

“Students are feeling more comfortable being in virtual learning because they have that additional support,” Woolfolk said. “And those laptops are theirs to keep.”

She said the laptops have motivated some students to apply for graduate programs. The security of owning a reliable computer provided a boost of confidence for them to believe a master’s degree lies in their future.

Project GEER staff continue to find multiple ways to help students “fill in the gaps” of their college needs. Among its services, Project GEER offers:

- One-on-one mentoring
- Case management
- Workshops on time management, study skills, and more
- Introductions to other student services (i.e., childcare service, food pantry, shuttle bus)

Woolfolk said she and her colleagues want students to know how much is available to them and how they can take advantage of GSU’s myriad resources.

“It’s heartwarming for me because I’m still pretty young and many of the students are older than me,” she said. “It’s very rewarding at the end of the day, and I’m proud that I’m doing something that helps lift some of the weight off their shoulders.”