



Michigan offers free tuition to essential workers

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Essential workers have the opportunity to get free college tuition at MCCC for up to four years.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer first proposed the Futures for Frontliners Programs in April 2020 which would offer free post-secondary education to those who worked on the frontlines during the stay-at-home order.

This initiative was intended to be put in place several months ago, though various changes in state funding hindered its start.

Once the federal CARES ACT was passed by Congress, the state was able to use that federal funding and officially announced the program launch on Sept. 10, with applications opening that day.

The program allows free community college tuition to individuals who worked essential front-line jobs for at least 11 of 13 weeks from April 1 through June 30.

Through the Michigan Community College Association, the state reached out to MCCC and other state community colleges about being a part of the program.

President Kojo Quartey appointed Executive Director of the Foundation Josh Myers to lead the program for the college.

"This program is being designed to help those workers who were putting their lives on the line when all the rest of us were able to work from home," Myers said.

To get free tuition, eligible essential workers need to apply for the CARES ACT and have their FAFSA Financial Aid Form filled out and on file.

Students need to fill out the FAFSA to know what other federal financial aid options they might qualify for, which would be put in place before the Futures for Frontliners funds.

"The important thing to note for this is it's a last-dollar in program so if they qualify for the Pell Grant and they're already fully Pell eligible, this program wouldn't necessarily kick in," Myers said.

Private donor scholarships and ones put out



Photo by Jerry Meade

Randy Fultz serves a customer coffee at Tim Hortons. Fultz worked throughout the pandemic making him eligible for the Futures for Frontliners Program. The program offers free college tuition to those who worked essential jobs during the state's stay-at-home order.

by MCCC through the Foundation don't interfere with aid however.

"They're really nicely complimented," Myers said.

Whether someone receives a tuition-based scholarship through the foundation or an external organization, it doesn't affect the Futures for Frontliners eligibility and would go on top of the scholarship one already has.

"What we're trying to do is encourage students to make sure they fill out scholarship applications," Myers said. "Those applications don't affect their eligibility, it's only other government programs that this is a last dollar in."

Valerie Culler, director of Financial Aid, said the Financial Aid and Admissions offices have a coordinated effort for eligible appli-

cants once they receive reports from the state.

The Financial Aid Office will be recipients of the reports to see the eligible students and will work with the Admissions Office to contact applicants who still need to fill out an MCCC application or other information, Culler said.

As of now, no reports have been given to the college yet.

"One thing that I do like how they've developed this program is the program is going to allow students to come part time and receive funding," Culler said.

Futures for Frontliners is the first free tuition program of its kind compared to some programs from the state and federal government that require students to attend full-time.

"That can be really hard for students who

are working a pretty, you know, full-time or almost full-time work schedule," Culler said.

The Futures for Frontliners application can be found at Michigan.gov and the FAFSA form at studentaid.gov.

Myers said students can start getting free tuition from the program in the Winter 2020 Semester, with the latest that funding can start being the Fall 2021 Semester.

The eligibility period lasts four years, with future returning applicants needing to fill out a renewal and FAFSA form every year going forward.

"This is the state, the federal government, and of course us in the community college thanking those workers for keeping us going during that difficult time," Myers said. "Certainly giving them a thank you is the most important part of this program."

With criteria being met, a student could, for example, continue attending MCCC from the Winter 2020 to Fall 2024 Semesters and have tuition being covered throughout.

Monroe resident Randy Fultz applied for the Futures for Frontliners program with hopes of getting an Associates degree in Science to be a computer hardware technician.

Fultz has worked the night shift at the Tim Hortons on Telegraph Road for eight years, including the period during the stay-at-home order.

As soon as he saw the application link advertised on the first day it was available, Fultz immediately applied.

"I was excited but I found it hard to believe because I've tried so hard to get financial aid in the past."

Fultz said previous attempts to get financial aid from the college had resulted in funding that wouldn't pay for a full single class.

"I think it's a great opportunity for me to continue on with my education since I wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise," Fultz said. "I'm pretty excited about it and hope it works out for me."

Individuals have up until 11:59PM on Dec. 31st, 2020 to fill out the Futures for Frontliners application.