



# IMPAC | 2020





# Robert Owens shares impact of donor support

IMPACT



No student in the world has experienced what Tennessee Tech students have experienced in 2020. We barely had time to regain our balance after the March 3 tornadoes — one of the most devastating natural disasters in Cookeville's history — before COVID-19 changed the way we work, learn and live. But I have been humbled by the resilience shown by students, faculty and staff, and I have been reminded of the generosity of Tech alumni and friends. Their support has been life-changing for students, many of whom are facing the toughest year of their lives.

Most recently, the issues affecting people of color in our nation have had an emotional impact on Tech students. The **Multicultural Affairs Office** organized a series of online forums where faculty, staff and students of color can come together to share experiences and express concerns.

Visits to the **food pantry** have increased. When COVID-19 forced most buildings on campus to close from March through May, the Volpe Library remained open, and students had access to the library's auxiliary pantry when they needed it the most.

The transition to online education has been especially challenging for students with disabilities and their professors. Tech's faculty have had to deliver content in new and creative ways, and the **Accessible Education Center** ensures students can access that content.

Requests for counseling and calls to the crisis line have increased as well. The **Counseling Center** has continued their 24-hour crisis hotline service and introduced a new online wellness program for mental health.

The university has seen an increase in applications for **emergency grants**. Several students lost a tremendous amount in the tornadoes, and students have lost employment due to COVID-19. Tech's emergency grants are 100% donor-funded, and these grants are awarded to students who have exhausted all other scholarship and financial aid opportunities. In short, they keep students enrolled.

While operations on Tech's campus have changed, the university's commitment to education has not. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has supported Tech and allowed us to serve students the way that we need to serve students. I love Tennessee Tech University. It's my alma mater, but I love it even more because of people like you.

Wings Up!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert L. Owens II".

Robert L. Owens II, Ph.D. ('98 B.S. industrial engineering, '00 M.B.A. business administration, '03 Ed.S. instructional leadership, '09 Ph.D. exceptional learning)  
Interim Vice President of Student Affairs

# Multicultural Affairs Office and Leona Lusk Black Cultural Center provide support for students of color



For 30 years, the Leona Lusk Black Cultural Center (BCC) has provided a place where students of color can network, study, access technology and enjoy a safe space where they feel supported.

The BCC opened its doors officially in August 1990 and in 1996, students and staff voted to name the Center after Leona Lusk Officer, Tech's first black graduate. The Multicultural Affairs Office (MAO), located in the BCC, provides support for the personal, cultural, social and academic growth and development of students from underrepresented ethnic populations. The office also provides opportunities for students to learn about their history, take pride in their heritage and explore their potential; an environment that embraces diversity; and a campus where students are able to perform at their highest potential, thanks to an atmosphere that invites and appreciates diversity of ethnicity.

"The BCC and the MAO have been integral in my own personal growth and development," said Robert Owens, interim vice president of Student Affairs. "I spent many, many, many hours in the BCC as an undergraduate and graduate student having fun, studying and participating in and leading student group meetings. The support I received, not only from other students of color but from the office staff as well, was an important part of my success at Tech as a student. I am glad to say that it has continued to be a great support for students and has been a prominent factor in their success, both while at Tech and in their careers."

The MAO offers academic counseling, scholarship information, an ambassador program and the Reaching Achievement and Committed to Excellence (RACE) program as well. The RACE program assists first-time students from underrepresented ethnic populations with

their transition to life at Tech. It was designed to provide social and intellectual support for students in an effort to help them become positively involved academically, culturally and socially.

“Our office continues to expand our reach across campus and the community by providing programs and events that celebrate and educate others about the various cultures, ethnicities and groups that are represented here at Tech,” said Charria Campbell, director of Multicultural Affairs.

In June 2020, a team of Tech faculty and staff came together to address issues facing people of color on campus and across the nation and established a series of online forums for black students and employees.

“These virtual meetings provide a safe space where students of color can unpack and share thoughts, feelings and experiences surrounding the current racial and political climate,” said Campbell. “This is a time to share any experiences they may have faced or someone they know may have faced and how they dealt with those experiences. The meetings are also a place for black faculty, staff and administrators to talk about their experiences and to provide support and encouragement for students.”

The first forum, held on June 11, allowed students and employees to express anything they felt comfortable sharing. While some students spoke about the protests and racial tensions in the news, others shared fears about COVID-19, anxieties about classes and concern for family members’ well-being.

“It was important to provide an avenue for students to express their feelings, share their experiences and to feel supported in these times and know that support is there in the future,” said Campbell.

Margo Dirkson, manager of Annual Giving Programs and chair of the Commission on the Status of Blacks, said one goal for the forum was to show faculty and staff how they can help students of color.

“We started out the first forum by simply asking, ‘How are

you doing?’” said Dirkson. “It’s important to be heard and acknowledged, and the biggest takeaway from forums like this is not to ignore what’s going on.”

Dirkson said approximately 35 faculty, staff and students attended the first forum. Attendees could log on for as long as their schedule allowed, and they had the option to share experiences or simply listen if they preferred.

“It was good for students to hear from faculty and staff as well to know that we are struggling with the same issues,” said Dirkson. “One professor said he needed it as much as the students. It gave him hope. It’s difficult and uncomfortable at times, but these things have to be talked about to move things forward. We must continue to find ways to support students as best we can and motivate them to lead the charge for change.”

Campbell and Dirkson said the MAO and the Commission on the Status of Blacks plan to host student forums each month, and they hope to feature guest speakers and focus on different topics of concern for students.

“The move towards healing, understanding and action to make a change was something we really wanted to achieve,” said Campbell. “The opportunity to bond and support each other is important and will continue to be a key force moving forward.”

In 2019, the BCC received its first estate gift and largest single gift ever from Tech alumna Ingra Conley. Conley, ’91 marketing, often said that the BCC made an impact on her education, and for 20 years, Conley loyally and consistently supported the BCC with an annual gift. When she passed away in October 2018 at the age of 49, she went one step further by including the BCC in her estate plans.

“Ingra had a very generous spirit and valued education, especially the importance of higher education,” said Flora Ector, Ingra’s mother. “She chose to give back in an effort to acknowledge the gift she received as a scholarship recipient. She wanted to pay it forward.”

Ector recalls that Conley took advantage of the numerous



opportunities offered by the BCC. It provided her not only with the opportunity to collaborate with other black students, but it also gave her the chance to join cultural student groups as well.

Campbell said the support her office receives — whether it be financial, volunteering time, assisting students in finding jobs or the donation of items — allows Tech to continue to provide a safe space with many resources to holistically support students during their time in college.

“Alumni and donor support has been invaluable and a tremendous support for our students,” said Campbell. “The work we do helps us all to grow and build a more inclusive environment for greater innovation to leave a lasting impact on the world. We strive to educate students in and out of the classroom so they leave Tech as good stewards of all they have gained in their experiences here.”



*“The opportunity to bond and support each other is important and will continue to be a key force moving forward.”*



# Food Pantry provides emergency relief for students and employees facing food insecurity



When Tennessee Tech's Food Pantry first opened in November 2012, no one could have predicted how it would evolve and just how critical it would become in 2020.

With a mission to raise awareness of hidden hunger on college campuses across the nation, the food pantry is a network for food acquisition, storage and distribution to alleviate hunger among the campus community. As the need for the pantry grew, so did the need for additional space. While the original food pantry was located in a closet in Foundation Hall, it is now located in Tech Village. In 2012, the food pantry served five people each week. This grew to 12 each week in 2015. Now, approximately 40 people are served each week, and many are returning visitors.

"The food pantry is for students and employees," said Michelle Huddleston, assistant director of Service Learning and Community Engagement. "They can come in once a

week to grocery shop."

The pantry is set up like a grocery store, so clients experience a regular shopping experience. They are given a basket and told how many items they can select, based on their household size.

In January, the food pantry expanded to open a second centralized location in the Volpe Library, and library employees Rose Black and Charlene McClain were instrumental in making it happen.

"Rose contacted me about it back in September or October and said it had been on their hearts over there," said Huddleston. "It's a very central location that is open nights and weekends and extended hours."

There had been instances, Black explained, where library staff came together to help someone in need. That was



when Black reached out to Huddleston to gauge the need for an auxiliary food pantry. When the auxiliary pantry opened in January, the Tech community didn't know that in just two months, more students and employees would be relying on this resource than ever before.

In the early morning hours of March 3, a tornado ripped through Middle Tennessee causing 19 fatalities, 88 injuries and damage to 500 buildings in the City of Cookeville alone. More than 100 families — including Tech faculty, staff and students — lost everything.

A few weeks later, COVID-19 forced the majority of buildings on campus to close, and Tech classes transitioned to an online format for the second half of the spring 2020 semester and the first term of the summer 2020 semester. This unfortunately affected the main food pantry as well, which closed from March 13 through May 30. But the Volpe Library remained open to provide students access to internet, computer labs and materials for their classes, and this meant students had access to the auxiliary pantry as well.

McClain kept the auxiliary pantry open from March through May, when most buildings on campus were closed, to provide emergency relief to students and employees affected by COVID-19.

When the spring 2020 semester concluded, many international students were not able to return home due to international travel restrictions. McClain said several international students visited the pantry each week and thanked her repeatedly each time.

"One late afternoon a person came in, and her tears gave me the sense that this was serious," McClain added. "Our pantry does not carry milk and that was the one item she needed. I never carry cash and didn't have any with me, but knowing President Oldham as I do, I knew if he was in town he would find a way to help. I sent an email to President Oldham, and he and Michelle [Huddleston] made arrangements for the family to get milk and other groceries. To think that there are people in this world who

don't have enough to eat makes me want to do more."

Huddleston said that since COVID-19 and the March 3 tornadoes that devastated Cookeville, she has noticed more Tech employees relying on the pantry. She anticipates a greater need for the pantry this fall, as students may have their employment affected by COVID-19. Donor support of the pantry has been critical during this time.

"Being able to stock what is needed and people responding the way they have has been amazing," said Huddleston. "Due to grocery store item limits, we are not able to buy in bulk. This makes it harder to buy items when we run out. During this time, food donations can sometimes be even more necessary than monetary donations."

Huddleston recently registered through Amazon so she can order items in bulk online, and she plans to create an Amazon wish list so donors can see what items are most in need. This also gives donors the ability to order items from Amazon and have them shipped directly to the pantry.

"We have helped single mothers get through college," Huddleston said. "We have helped individual students who did not have meal plans. We have helped parents with kids who were just trying to finish their degree. Not having to choose between books or groceries makes a difference and is a bigger help than what we realize sometimes."

The main food pantry is located in Tech Village, and the auxiliary food pantry is located in room 209 behind the Volpe Library's front desk. Hours for both locations are available on the food pantry website at [www.tntech.edu/volunteer/pantry.php](http://www.tntech.edu/volunteer/pantry.php).

*"Not having to choose between books or groceries makes a difference and is a bigger help than what we realize sometimes."*

# Accessible Education Center provides equity in education for students with disabilities

*"When we make things more accessible for individuals, we're making them more accessible for the entire campus community. Accessibility benefits everyone."*



**IMPACT**



When Tennessee Tech transitioned to online classes in the middle of the spring 2020 semester, the entire Golden Eagle community was suddenly faced with new challenges. But it was particularly challenging for students with disabilities and the faculty and staff responsible for their education. Thankfully, Tech's Accessible Education Center (AEC) was prepared to meet those challenges.

The AEC is committed to ensuring equal access, for all qualifying individuals, to Tech's academic and physical environments. The center is also dedicated to providing quality services to students and faculty through a variety of resources including academic adjustments, assistive technology and software and other programs that promote awareness of the law and disability-related services.

"While many on our campus are experts in technology, others have had to reimagine their courses or campus services," said Chester Goad, director of the AEC. "The AEC has been able to provide guidance and practical support on how to reimagine those services in an accessible way. In many ways, the COVID-19 crisis has positively pushed the needle of accessibility forward. When we make things more accessible for individuals, we're making them more accessible for the entire campus community. Accessibility benefits everyone."

Videos and lectures had to be captioned. Live synchronous courses that would typically require an interpreter now require Video Remote Interpreting or Captioning in Real Time (CART) services. Faculty and staff have had to deliver content in a variety of creative and innovative ways, and the AEC ensures students have access to that content.

"For example, if a geography instructor is providing maps, a blind student should be able to access the map content in a tactile way," explained Goad. "Similarly, several of our blind students are engineering majors. The faculty's teaching content (graphs, formulas, problem sets) should have the ability to be converted to braille or tactile format as well."

Students with a variety of disabilities qualify for assistance with notetaking, so audio notetaking and speech-to-text

software programs are critical, as is providing faculty and staff with a variety of avenues to guarantee that documents uploaded to Tech's website or within AEC's learning management system are accessible.

The AEC has also identified items such as clear face masks or clear face shields so students and guests who are hearing impaired and rely on lip reading can participate in campus events and activities. They have worked closely with campus partners and vendors to ensure that Tech acquired appropriate services for live and recorded virtual meeting sessions.

"In many ways, this is our time to prove the value and importance of developing accessible content," said Goad. "We are quickly exploring newer, innovative and intuitive ways for Tech's digital and academic environment to be more accessible."

Currently, the AEC serves 615 students — approximately 6% of the student population — who have a variety of disabilities including visual limitations, hearing impairments and others. Nearly 30% of the AEC's students are computer science majors. STEM majors can present unique challenges, but the AEC contracted with a new software company to ensure math is made digitally accessible. Students and instructors now have an effective tool that can "read" formulas, equations and other STEM content.

Vadim Kholodilo, an international student from Russia, relies on the AEC's services.

"When I arrived at Tech, I didn't know what to expect," he said. "I knew there would be accessibility issues, because they are everywhere. There is no fully accessible place in the world. The AEC has done a great job to make my year at Tech much easier. I was provided all materials in an accessible format. When I was working on my education in Russia, I always had to ask my friends to read an equation for me from a book which was not accessible. At Tech, I can do everything on my own."

C.E. Mullins, a graduate student who also utilizes the AEC's

services, added, "The AEC has provided me not just with a support system but also with a community. I have met individuals who have encouraged and inspired me in ways I didn't know I would need."

Throughout the years, several generous donors have stepped forward to establish scholarships for students with disabilities. Each year, these scholarships are awarded to qualifying students who enrich the Tech campus with diverse perspectives and approaches to learning and access.

"The Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship, Carlene Hall Fellowship, Marilyn Rockovich Garnto and Michael Garnto Scholarship and Chris Hinds Scholarship have all made a tremendous impact on our campus," said Goad. "The benefit and reach of these scholarships cannot be overstated. These scholarships are truly appreciated, and the reward is seeing students who sometimes face multiple barriers be able to complete their education with less financial burden so they can focus on their major and career goals."

The Carlene Hall Fellowship provides funds each year for a graduate student to serve as a graduate assistant in the AEC. Hannah Willis, a masters candidate in counseling and psychology, has been AEC's graduate assistant and academic coach for three semesters and is scheduled

to graduate in December 2021. She also serves on the Student Government Association (SGA) as a senator for accessibility.

"I help students utilize their own natural skills as well as develop new ones to ensure student success," said Willis. "Each of my students has made an impact on my life, and I am thankful for it. This position has provided me with a number of opportunities — real job experience — and has supported me both academically and financially. I am proud to be a part of the AEC team and to be a Golden Eagle."

On July 26, 2020, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebrated its 30th anniversary. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability.

"It is amazing and ironic that we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ADA during such a challenging time — a time that has forced us to examine how accessible we really are," said Goad. "We hope to truly focus on how the world has become more accessible for people with disabilities. We will not only be highlighting the history and progress made through the years; we also hope to discuss barriers that still exist for people with disabilities — and not just physical, academic or digital barriers — but barriers that exist through perception. The AEC team believes strongly in an equitable education for people with all disabilities."





A group of four young women are sitting around a dark metal table outdoors, likely on a university campus. They are engaged in a study session. One woman in the center is smiling broadly at the camera. Another woman to her right is looking at a laptop. A third woman is writing in a notebook. A fourth woman is partially visible on the left. In the background, there is a large brick building with several dormer windows and a white pergola structure. The entire image has a semi-transparent purple overlay.

**IMPACT**

# Tennessee Tech celebrates Eagle Assistance Grant donors on #GivingTuesdayNow



# IMPACT

On May 5, 2020, more than 145 countries came together to participate in #GivingTuesdayNow, a global day of unity and giving — and Tennessee Tech was a part of it.

Millions of people around the world expressed their generosity through acts of kindness; gifts of goods, time and money; notes of compassion; advocacy for causes; and care for family and friends. The event was launched by GivingTuesday — in addition to the annual GivingTuesday that will take place on December 1, 2020 — as an emergency response to the unprecedented need caused by COVID-19. The day ignited a global conversation on generosity with more than three billion social media posts around the world.

“When we received notice that there would be a #GivingTuesdayNow movement to benefit those directly and indirectly impacted by COVID-19, we were already in the middle of our second annual ‘I Heart Tech Students’ campaign,” said Brandon Boyd, director of the Crawford Alumni Center. “Our campaign was similar to the goals of #GivingTuesdayNow, so we elected to use this day to honor our generous donors and show our gratitude.”

On #GivingTuesdayNow, Tech celebrated the faculty, staff, alumni and friends who established and funded the university’s Eagle Assistance Grant (EAG), an emergency need-based grant for students who have exhausted all other financial aid options. It is 100% donor funded, and more than 700 gifts have been made to the EAG since it was established in spring 2019.

“I’m grateful that Tech has so many caring faculty, staff, alumni and friends whose generosity made this possible for students in need in 2020,” said Boyd.

When the EAG was designed, Tech knew it was not a matter of if but when students would face unexpected challenges and need financial support. The donors who helped to establish the EAG in 2019 could not have known that in 2020, Cookeville would experience its worst natural disaster in history and that a pandemic would affect millions of students across the world. But when Tech students experienced loss and asked for help, the university was fortunate to have funds available.

Several Tech students lost everything in the March 3 tornadoes, and just a few weeks later, COVID-19 affected many students’ full- or part-time employment. While day-to-day operations at Tech changed in spring 2020, the university’s commitment to education did not. Tech remained dedicated to transitioning classes to an online format, providing the technology required for faculty, staff and students to teach and learn online and the emergency funds necessary to keep students enrolled.

On #GivingTuesdayNow, people around the world came together to present a united front of hope, generosity and kindness at a time when many face challenges due to the pandemic. The global #GivingTuesdayNow message read, “Together we give. Together we help. Together we heal. Together we stand.” And the Golden Eagle community came together as well.

Tech students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends are generous, even in the midst of uncertainty. Thanks to the many donors who established, funded and continue to support the Eagle Assistance Grant, students will remain enrolled at Tennessee Tech, regardless of what challenges may come their way.

*“I’m grateful that Tech has so many caring faculty, staff, alumni and friends whose generosity made this possible for students in need in 2020.”*



Counseling Center  
offers virtual  
counseling, crisis  
hotline and  
suicide prevention  
programs for  
students



*"We want to make sure everyone is supported during this time. We are all in this together. We are working out the new normal together and are here to support our students."*

The Tennessee Tech Counseling Center's mission is to promote healthy student development through a wide range of mental health, educational and consultative services to students. After the March 3 tornadoes and due to the effects of COVID-19, the Counseling Center saw an increase in students with anxiety, and calls to the Eagle Eye After-Hours Crisis Hotline increased as well. When COVID-19 required most offices on campus to close from March through May, the Counseling Center staff knew they had to be innovative and find new ways to counsel students in need.

"We saw this coming," said Christina Mick, assistant director of the Counseling Center. "We researched what other universities were doing, what other campuses were doing, what other student affairs departments were doing. So we had prepared ourselves for this."

The Counseling Center staff ensured they had tablets, laptops and access to virtual meeting software accounts including a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant account for secure connections with students. They prepared announcements about how counseling services would be handled while offices were closed, frequently asked questions and tips for dealing with anxiety for social media and the website.

"When the buildings closed, we transitioned to all virtual sessions," said Patricia Smith, director of the Counseling Center. "If students didn't have access to internet then we offered phone sessions. We provided the same services online as what we offered in person."

Mick added that the Counseling Center continuously updates the website and is always looking for new ways to counsel students and distribute information.

"I have been doing research since December/January on the impact of this on mental health and mental wellbeing, and I'm seeing some things — consistent things — that I'm sure are impacting our students, and one of those is connection," said Mick. "As human beings, we have to have connection to thrive and to survive, and that lack of human connection has put a little bit of stress on everyone. So

connect, but connect with social distancing in mind, using platforms like Zoom, Instagram and social media. Learn new ways to connect with people."

In 2015, Tech received a three-year campus suicide prevention grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Tech used the funds from this grant to establish the #HopeStrongEagles Suicide Prevention Program.

#HopeStrongEagles provides campus suicide prevention efforts through prevention training — specifically question, persuade and refer training for the campus community. Through this program, the Counseling Center teaches the campus community how to identify risk factors, warning signs and protective measures for at-risk individuals and outlines screening, counseling and referral options. The plan encourages the Golden Eagle community to "Ask a question, save a life."

While the grant ended in 2018, the program continues and is shared with all Tech faculty, staff and students on a regular basis. The Eagle Eye After-Hours Crisis Hotline is just one of several suicide prevention efforts on campus.

"The money we receive from donors is used to help pay for the Crisis Hotline," said Smith. "This is a virtual tool that students can utilize after hours and on weekends and holidays. It is also available for individuals who are taking classes from satellite locations. We are so fortunate to have this service."

With an increase in students seeking counseling due to the March 3 tornadoes and COVID-19, and because the Counseling Center cannot be open 24 hours a day, the crisis hotline has been crucial for students needing immediate assistance.

"We want to make sure everyone is supported during this time," said Mick. "We are all in this together. We are working out the new normal together and are here to support our students."



Emergency funds  
keep students  
enrolled during  
tough times



IMPACT



*"There is a need for resources more than ever to help support our students so they can continue to focus on their academic success."*

Tennessee Tech students are resilient. Whether it's a tornado or a pandemic, Golden Eagles find a way to persevere. But when a lack of finances threatens to prevent a student from earning a college degree, the only option is to ask for help.

Tech has several emergency fund programs designed to help students who have exhausted all other financial aid options. Every gift made to an emergency fund ensures that Tech can offer aid to students when they need it the most, and the support received from generous donors can be life-changing.

#### *College of Business Advisory Board Emergency Funds Program*

The College of Business Advisory Board's Emergency Funds Program assists students who are close to finishing their degree but have exhausted all forms of financial and university aid. Students who receive support from this emergency fund are required to complete an internship in the College of Business. This provides them with the funds needed to remain in school and complete their degree, but it also provides students with valuable work experience so they can be career-ready on graduation day.

#### *Debbie McCormick Praxis Exam*

The Dr. Debbie McCormick Praxis Exam Fund directly supports teacher candidates by covering fees for required professional exams. Praxis exams are required by the State of Tennessee as part of the qualifications for teacher candidates to be recommended for licensure by an educator preparation program. Praxis exams cost between \$100 and \$150 per test, and some candidates take up to five tests, depending on their program.

"Many of our candidates have part time jobs — in addition to a full load of coursework — to help support themselves and their families, and they don't have the flexibility to pay for all the required exams," said Lisa Zagumny, dean of the College of Education. "When the candidates experience financial hardships, unfortunately they end up prolonging their programs by putting off the exams."

Historically, the College of Education at Tech graduates more teachers than any other educator preparation program in Tennessee, and more districts in the State hire Tech teacher candidates than candidates from other universities. With partnerships in more than 52 school districts, Tech's College of Education is often the first call for districts looking to fill vacancies.

"The national shortage of teachers compounded by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on P-12 schools makes growing the Praxis Exam Fund even more important as we work to help P-12 schools in Tennessee fill their teacher shortages with high quality, effective teachers," said Zagumny. "Supporting this fund will directly help students complete their degree program in a timely manner and begin their careers as teachers."

#### *Nursing Students Emergency Fund*

The Whitson-Hester School of Nursing Development Council established the Nursing Students Emergency Fund to assist students with some of the additional expenses that come with being a nursing major. These expenses may include costs associated with tuition, fees, traveling to clinical labs across the state, equipment, uniforms, additional achievement testing required during the final year of nursing school or review workshops for the licensure examination.

Raden Taylor began her pursuit of a nursing degree in 2014. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (UTK). After two years at UTK, she received the news that she had been waitlisted for the nursing program. In 2017, Taylor applied and was accepted into the RN program at Columbia State Community College but missed passing one class by one point. Columbia State's program required students to pass all classes their first semester to continue the program. At this point, Taylor chose to pursue other programs and in 2018, she graduated from UTK with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education-Kinesiology. In fall 2019, Taylor decided to give nursing school one last chance and was accepted into Tech's Whitson-Hester School of Nursing



Second-Degree Accelerated Program. But in spring 2020, as she began her final year of the program, Taylor was furloughed from her part-time job due to COVID-19. Despite years of dedication, she faced having to withdraw from Tech. Thankfully, the Nursing Students Emergency Fund allowed Taylor to stay enrolled, and she is on track to graduate in December with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

“My journey to become a nurse has not been traditional,” Taylor explained. “This emergency fund allowed me to be free from an unexpected financial burden and continue at Tech’s Whitson-Hester School of Nursing. It allowed me to continue a long journey of becoming a nurse.”

### *Eagle Assistance Grant*

Established in spring 2019 by a team of enrollment management professionals, the Eagle Assistance Grant (EAG) was designed to help students facing unforeseen financial circumstances. It is an emergency need-based grant for students who have exhausted all other financial aid options.

Because of COVID-19, applications for emergency funds have increased exponentially. More students applied for the EAG in March 2020 than during the entire 2019 calendar year.

“These are certainly unprecedented times,” said Mary McCaskey, director of Financial Aid and Veterans Affairs. “We are seeing an increase in hardship for our students, especially those who enrolled in summer classes and prepared for fall classes while also dealing with loss of income and unexpected expenses due to COVID-19. There is a need for resources more than ever to help support our students so they can continue to focus on their academic success.”

McCaskey explained that some students have been laid off or furloughed from restaurant and retail jobs. Others have had to quarantine for 14 days after being exposed to COVID-19, leaving them in an unpaid status for two weeks. In the EAG application, several students expressed embarrassment in asking for help. They pride themselves in being financially independent, but COVID-19 changed their lives in ways for which they could not have planned.

Tech’s emergency funds are 100% donor funded. While unforeseen financial challenges have long been a part of college life, 2020 has presented new challenges and required colleges and departments across campus to draw from their emergency funds more than ever before. Tech is grateful to the donors who support these funds. They ensure that a difficult year does not have to result in the loss of a college diploma.









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