



New Program Takes Aim at Old Barriers to Higher Education

Sioux Falls, SD – Around the Sioux Empire you will find adults who want to go to college but haven't. Worries about academic ability might be holding them back. Or maybe they don't know how to pay for it. That's why University Center is launching a new program that addresses these issues and more.

University Center is now taking applications for its new "Learning Community" - a part-time program for adults who are new to college. As many as 30 students may participate in the first group which will start taking classes in the Fall of 2010. Everyone in the pilot, also known as a cohort program, will take the same classes at the same time. Depending on their financial situation, students may be eligible for new need-based scholarships too.

"Students who are in the Learning Communities and demonstrate financial need will have access to scholarships that actually reduce their tuition by 30% to nearly a half," says Dr. Mark Lee, Executive Dean of University Center. "And that's pretty substantial. The reality is, however, it isn't just about reducing the cost of education but also about making students more successful."

Each Learning Community will include a faculty mentor, an assigned advisor and a unique program of study designed to improve success rates. Other support services such as tutoring and workshops will be made available for students who want them.

"We know from research and experience that once students enroll and have some success, the likelihood of finishing their program is significantly increased," notes Dr. Jack Warner, Executive Director of the South Dakota Board of Regents. "The combination of a cohort program with need-based aid addresses both the academic and financial issues that often deter students from engaging in higher education."

"We want to reach all people who seek higher education as a way to a better life," says Lee.

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Fast Facts:

- The Learning Community program spans 39 credit hours. (An Associate's Degree requires 64 credit hours. 128 credit hours are required for a Bachelor's Degree.)
- The pilot Community will include 30 students. Additional Communities will be started in future semesters based on demand.
- The median family income of an adult undergraduate student attending college in Sioux Falls was \$69,000, according to a survey conducted in the summer of 2008.
- In comparison, the median family income of an adult who had applied for undergraduate study at University Center but then did not enroll, was \$37,000.
- 30% of students who inquired about classes but chose not to enroll cited cost as the reason.
- The average age of a University Center student is 27.
- 65% of University Center students are female.
- More than 90% are employed at least part-time, with nearly 50% employed full-time.
- Most students are taking one to two classes.
- The number of students attending University Center under a GED increased 50% in the last year.
- University Center offers a wide variety of degree programs brought to Sioux Falls by the six state-funded universities of South Dakota.
- Total enrollment at University Center during the Fall 2009 term was 2,275 students.
- Over the course of the year, University Center serves 3,400 unique students.

Links:

- University Center - www.sduniversitycenter.org/
- U.C. Learning Communities - www.sduniversitycenter.org/LearningCommunity
- Learning Community Application - www.sduniversitycenter.org/files/learning%20communities%20application.pdf
- About University Center - www.sduniversitycenter.org/Mission/
- Federal Student Aid FAFSA - www.fafsa.ed.gov/

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- Facebook - www.facebook.com/SDUniversityCenter
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