



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
LANCASTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA LANCASTER AWARDED \$305,706.00
ANNUALLY TO HELP LOW INCOME, FIRST GENERATION, AND STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES SUCCEED IN COLLEGE**

Federal Student Support Services grant awarded every five years

Lancaster, South Carolina. (August 2020) – The U.S. Department of Education announced that USC Lancaster will receive a federal Student Support Services (SSS) grant of \$305,706 annually to help more students succeed in and graduate from college. This is the fifth federal grant cycle that USC Lancaster has been awarded over the years. The campus is very proud of its record of helping over 3,000 students obtain their associate college degrees

“For over 20 years TRiO has been an essential part of USC Lancaster’s mission to offer an accessible education and to make a positive impact on the region. TRiO students thrive during and after their college time at Lancaster. Besides their academic success, they take on leadership and service roles outside the classroom. After graduation they are beacons of hope for other prospective college students in their communities,” said Dr. Todd Lekan, USC Lancaster Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs.

The Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP), as it is called locally, helps college students who are low income, first generation (those whose parents do not have a four-year college degree), or students with disabilities. The array of services this grant will provide is comprehensive and will include academic tutoring, financial aid advice, career and college mentoring, help in choosing courses, and other forms of assistance. Such services enhance academic success and make it more likely that students will graduate or transfer with the lowest possible debt.

SSS began in 1968 and is one of the eight federal “TRiO” programs authorized by the Higher Education Act to help college students succeed in higher education. It recognizes that students whose parents do not have a college degree have more difficulties navigating the complexity of decisions that college requires for success; it bolsters students from low income families who

have not had the academic opportunities that their college peers have had, and helps students with disabilities remove obstacles preventing them from thriving academically.

“Nothing makes my staff and me prouder than to see ‘wide-eyed’ traditional or non-traditional students work hard for two or more years and then finally walk across the stage to receive their hard earned associate degrees,” said Matt Williamson, Director of TRiO Programs at USC Lancaster. He went on to state, “Of course, graduation is the ultimate goal; however, the program takes hundreds of hours for OSP staff to implement, as well as encourage OSP participants, to make use of the many resources offered by the project that are designed to make their total college experience a success.” Williamson adds, “It is the commitment and the professionalism of Andrea Campbell (Project Coordinator); CoSonja Allen (Administrative Coordinator); Kristen Hammond (Administrative Specialist); and Mark Ammons (Associate Director / Business Manager) whom I credit for the success of the project in recent years.” USC Lancaster’s proposal writing committee consisted of the following members: Mark Ammons and Matt Williamson (co-chairs); Laura Carnes; Dr. Walter P. Collins, III; Dr. Deborah Cureton; Shana Dry; Dr. Lisa Hammond; and Professor Lauren Thomas. Other contributors and researchers included Kenneth T. Cole, Buddy Faile, Dr. Paul N. McKenzie, and Justin H. Pearson, Sr.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the systemic inequality and financial hardship which keep promising students from succeeding in college. Student Support Services is needed now more than ever,” said Maureen Hoyler. Hoyler is the president of the non-profit Council for Opportunity in Education in Washington, D.C., dedicated to furthering the expansion of college opportunities for low-income, first generation students, and students with disabilities.

For more than 50 years, the Student Support Services program has made important contributions to individuals and society as a whole by providing a broad range of services to help students succeed. This vital program can and does make all the difference – *TRiO Works!*

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