

Southeast Community College Area (SCC) **“Learn to Dream” Scholarship Program**

The “Learn to Dream” initiative is a partnership in Lincoln, NE that has come together to help our youth realize the dream of accessing higher education opportunities.

In the fall of 2007, Union Bank, NELNET, all of Lincoln's public and private/parochial schools, and Southeast Community College announced “*Learn to Dream*”... a scholarship program that would allow a targeted group of students to attend any SCC campus for free... no tuition, no fees... for the first year. The scholarship will pay for 45 credit hours at SCC for low-income youth who graduate from any high school in Lincoln. This promise is made to every low income eighth grader in Lincoln this year, and in each coming year.

For many youth in our community, the dream of attending college is often out of reach. Not because they lack the knowledge, skills and abilities to attend college... it's that college is out of reach financially. The “*Learn to Dream*” scholarship program provides opportunities for these youth to access and benefit from a college education.

At the announcement last fall, Dr. Susan Gourley, the Lincoln Public School District Superintendent, said that “*the Learn to Dream scholarships will encourage students to stay in schools and have dreams for a future that in fact can become their reality.*”

A story about the scholarship in the Journal Star last October introduced us to Alex, a senior at Lincoln High. A quote from that story embodies the impact of the “Learn to Dream” scholarship: *Alex “wants to go to SCC but can't do it without some financial aid. Nobody from his family has been to college, he said, because they can't afford it. And a scholarship would help.”*

In 2008, about 600 high school seniors in Lincoln are eligible to “learn to dream.” The power of this opportunity was best expressed by a high school counselor also quoted in the newspaper... “*(the Learn to Dream scholarship) could be the motivating force for students who otherwise might not consider continuing their education (beyond high school). Money concerns weigh heavily on many students.*” **As of May 2008, about 250 low-income students from Lincoln's high schools have been awarded Learn to Dream scholarships and will be enrolling at an SCC campus after graduation from high school.** They will start visiting SCC campuses in May 2008.

SCC, along with our community partners (Union Bank, NELNET, all of Lincoln's public and private/parochial high schools) is proud to be able to help Lincoln students and their families “Learn to Dream” that higher education is a part of their future. Further, once they experience success and achievement at the college level at SCC, it is our dream that students will consider the possibility of transferring to a four-year institution.

Those early successes and achievements will multiply... our community ends up with youth entering the future work force at the appropriate levels of education and training. A better education leads to a better job, which leads to higher wages, which helps families succeed, which in turn expands the community's economic base... the impact is substantial and the benefits are exponential.

All partners are currently working closely with all Lincoln schools to develop communication campaigns to inform parents and students as early as 8th grade about the Learn to Dream Scholarship program. Early and consistent communication about the opportunities offered by this program will provide an incentive for low-income students to plan and prepare for post-secondary education.

SCC administration and staff are actively discussing and preparing to receive the first class of “Dreamers” slated to begin classes in the summer or fall terms this year. Discussions and preparations include enhancing and expanding supports, assistance, and services to these students to help them maximize their first year, and providing guidance to ensure they continue toward completing their educational objectives at SCC.

**SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE AREA
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUITY/DIVERSITY DIVISION**

DIVERSITY EDUCATION AT SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

At SCC all regular employees of the college, including faculty, are required to participate on an ongoing basis in diversity-related activities. The College's approach is unique and reflects a serious commitment to making "diversity" an integral part of the institution.

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S POLICY

In September of 1992, the Governing Board and president at SCC identified a) attaining diversity, and b) achieving a basic understanding and valuing diversity as priority goals for organizational and staff development. As a step toward achieving those goals, a broad-based employee education initiative focusing on the various elements of diversity was formalized. In March of 1994 the College's Board of Governors adopted the following policy:

"It is the policy of Southeast Community College to require regular employees of the College to pursue a course of ongoing involvement and participation in Diversity Education activities designed to increase their awareness, sensitivity, skill, and competency in and appreciation for working in a diverse and Multicultural work place, and working with students and employees of diverse and Multicultural backgrounds."

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE INVOLVED

The Affirmative Action/Equity/Diversity Office has lead responsibility for implementing the Diversity Education Program and is allotted \$30,000 annually to coordinate, co-sponsor, and/or conduct diversity-related activities at all SCC locations and in the communities served by the College. Over the past fourteen years of operation, the AA/Equity/Diversity Office has made available 400-500 opportunities annually for employees to be involved in. Activities include lectures, seminars, educational presentations, entertainment, video series, community activities, and dialogue sessions on a variety of diversity-related topics, issues, and concerns focused on racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and other elements of the diversity equation.

PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

It is important to note that the Diversity Education initiative at SCC is but one facet of the College's commitment to addressing diversity. Diversity Education is part of a comprehensive approach that includes:

- A newsletter (*Dimensions in Diversity*);
- An informational flyer (*Cultural Perspectives*);
- Coordination with Multicultural student services and other College operations;
- Development of a diversity video library containing over 600 titles covering all elements of the diversity equation.
- A policy framework and processes to address racial/sexual harassment and discrimination issues, disability-related obligations, fair employment practices, and multicultural education.

PARTICIPATION EXPECTED AND ENCOURAGED

While regular employees of the College are not required to undertake a specific curriculum or to attend any particular diversity sessions, they are expected to be involved in diversity-related activities on an ongoing basis. In effect, participation is a "term and condition" of employment at the College, and has evolved into an integral part of the institution's culture. Part-time and temporary employees of the College, as well as students, are invited and encouraged to attend and participate in diversity education activities on campus and in the communities served by SCC.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The College has distinguished itself through its real and substantive commitment to affirmative action, equity, and diversity. The mandatory Diversity Education program for employees has provided a vehicle for the College to demonstrate leadership in the area of diversity, and has positioned the college to serve as a catalyst for diversity on our campuses and within the communities we serve. As a point of reference, since its inception in 1994, the College is proud of the following achievements:

- College employees have dedicated about 35,000 hours to diversity education participation;
- The College has sponsored or co-sponsored over 90 diversity-related community events in Lincoln, Milford and Beatrice;
- The College has collaborated and partnered with most major educational, government, and business entities in the city to promote and support diversity; and
- The College is providing leadership and support in the area of "diversity" to the Nebraska Community College Association and its member institutions, other secondary and postsecondary institutions in the state, in addition to serving as a resource state and local government entities, and businesses/industries in the 15-county district served by the College.