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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

University of Minnesota, Morris receives grant from the American Indian Education Foundation

Summary: Morris is one of fifteen colleges nationwide to partner with AIEF to provide emergency fund services to American Indian students in need.

(October 7, 2010)-The American Indian Education Foundation (AIEF) has awarded the University of Minnesota, Morris a grant to develop an Emergency Fund program. Renewable for three years, the grant will provide assistance to full-time American Indian students when unexpected expenses threaten their ability to stay in college. Morris is one of fifteen colleges nationwide to partner with the AIEF to provide emergency fund services to students in need.

Students may qualify for assistance through the Emergency Fund program as a result of situations such as personal injury or illness or that of a family member, the loss of a job, or the need to travel to attend unexpected family gatherings such as funerals or ceremonial occasions.

“This is a really good fund,” says Hilda Ladner, assistant to the chancellor for equity and diversity and director of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Intercultural Programs (EDI) at Morris. “The modest financial assistance will help students to be able to focus on education when they run into emergency situations that Financial Aid cannot address.”

In addition to financial assistance, the Emergency Fund program also benefits the students as they interact with EDI staff. “This is one more way for us to connect with students and to connect students to available resources,” says Ladner. “We may need to help a student find a new job or seek an extended absence from class or readjust a financial budget.”

The Emergency Fund grant features a service component for students who receive assistance. Tracy Peterson, EDI associate department director, says, “Culturally, ‘giving back’ is a concept Indian students already know.” EDI staff will work with students to find projects within the community that work within their academic schedules.

Nationwide, American Indian students represent only one percent of college students. The AIEF reports that of the 17 percent of American Indian students who enroll in college, only one in five students completes the first year. The organization also reports that data from 2005 and 2006 shows 98 percent of students who received Emergency Fund assistance were able to continue their college courses.

The EDI staff believes that the new grant will have a positive impact at Morris, where American Indian students represent 12 percent of the student population. The grant will be one more resource to continue growing Morris’s first-year retention rate, which is already three times the national average at 68 percent compared to 21 percent.

EDI works collaboratively with campus and community partners to meet student needs, foster inclusive diversity, and promote intercultural competence. EDI strives to ensure a supportive environment for students by providing academic, social, and cultural support services and programs. EDI programs provide an access point for students to engage as global citizens in the areas of leadership, civic engagement, and social justice.

Photo: Ladner and Peterson

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.