Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)

On March 27, Congress passed the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” (CARES) to provide economic relief to individuals for hardships experienced during the Covid-19 crisis. The CARES Act provides colleges with funds to be distributed directly to eligible students for their “expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus, such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care, and child-care expenses.” Western New Mexico University (WNMU) has signed and returned to the Department of Education, the certification and agreement to provide assurance that WNMU intends to use no less than 50% of the funds received under Section 18004(a)(1), which equates to a total of $775,713, for emergency financial aid grants to students for additional costs as a result of the disruption caused by COVID-19. As of August 15, 2020, a total of $775,713 has been awarded to students.

Students who meet basic eligibility criteria for federal financial aid can be considered for these funds. The Financial Aid Office is using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data elements criteria to determine students’ eligibility. WNMU based the majority of the allocation formula on lower income students. 68% of the funds were allocated to students with an EFC of 0-5576, 21% was allocated to students with EFC greater than 5576 and 11% was allocated to students who were eligible to apply for financial aid, but did not complete the FAFSA. The lower EFC students received between $155 and $751, while the higher EFC students received between $200 and $625. Students that were eligible to apply for financial aid but did not complete the FAFSA, received between $155 and $730.

Under U.S. Department of Education rules for the program, these funds can be awarded to students pursuing degree programs and enrolled at WNMU. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Education does not allow these funds to be used for international students, undocumented students, non-matriculated/non-degree seeking students or students enrolled in distance-only degree programs (virtual students). The number of student who were eligible to receive CARES funds is 1254. The number of students who have received CARES funds, as of August 15, 2020 is 1254.

Students with questions about the CARES Act/Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding should contact the Financial Aid Office at finaid@wnmu.edu