COVID-19 EMERGENCY AID INITIATIVE

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Basic Information

What is this initiative?
This emergency aid response is an initiative of Course Hero, in collaboration with Believe in Students and Edquity designed to help all students, including non-Title IV-eligible students, gain access to emergency grants in the wake of COVID-19. In light of the recent guidance out of the Department of Education to limit emergency aid under the CARES Act to Title IV-eligible students only, the purpose of the fund is to ensure that all students, regardless of background, circumstance, and immigration status, have the financial support needed to attain the credential they’re working so hard to achieve.

How does a student access the money?
Funding will be made to students in two phases. In the first phase, five nonprofit organizations, convened by Course Hero, (Achieving the Dream, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Excelencia in Education, United Negro College Fund, and the University Innovation Alliance) will be making grants to its member schools, who will then make emergency funds available to their students. Students will be able to apply through the emergency aid process at these schools.
In the second phase, which will begin on June 15, students who attend colleges and universities that are partnered with Edquity will be able to use the free Edquity app to apply for and receive emergency funds. Currently, Edquity supports colleges and universities across the country, including in some of the areas hardest hit by COVID-19, including Seattle, New York, and Los Angeles, and is rapidly expanding its college partnerships to support as many students as possible.

Why these nonprofits?
Achieving the Dream, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Excelencia in Education, United Negro College Fund, and the University Innovation Alliance are demonstrated postsecondary leaders in ensuring the success of all students. These partners are uniquely positioned to champion the values of this initiative, and enable the rapid distribution of funds funding out rapidly to students who need it.

Why Course Hero?
Started by a college student in 2006, Course Hero is used by millions of college students every year to access academic resources, tutoring and support to help them to get unstuck, and graduate confident and prepared.

In March, Course Hero launched a student survey which received an overwhelming response of more than 17,000 students, who reported significant challenges making up for lost income and affording the cost of food and rent. It became immediately clear that students were, and would, experience significant financial hardship.

The initiative was born from Course Hero’s conviction to making an immediate and powerful commitment to closing gaps in emergency aid. They are now helping to lead this initiative by partnering with nonprofit organizations who have the networks and expertise to direct targeted financial resources to students and campuses in need.

Why Edquity?
In short, because no other organization has the ability to get emergency aid out fast and effectively at scale, particularly during a crisis. Edquity provides the first-ever technology platform to administer emergency aid to college students, using an evidence-based approach to get students access to cash assistance in 48 hours. The technology has been documented to improve retention rates for the highest risk student populations, even in the wake of natural disasters and crises. Based on the research of its Chief Strategy Officer Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, Edquity’s algorithm optimizes for assisting students who need help most and who also have a strong chance of persisting. Beyond this, Edquity offers a student-centered application design to ensure applications can be completed either on a mobile device or on the web in less than five minutes.
Does Edquity have the capacity and relative experience?
Edquity is based on the expertise and research of the leading expert on the topic of student emergency aid in the country. Beyond that, Edquity has successfully supported students in crisis before, having launched in the Dallas County Community College District three days after the largest tornado-based natural disaster in the history of the state. In Dallas, Edquity processed over 100 applications in the first hour of service and has since documented a 5 percentage point semester over semester retention improvement, while serving a student population of which 30% has experienced homelessness. Edquity is currently growing fast, and while it cannot serve every partner overnight, Edquity will be positioned to serve millions of students later in 2020.

College Partnerships

Which colleges does Edquity currently support?
As of April 2020, Edquity is currently supporting Dallas County Community College District, which includes 7 colleges serving more than 90,000 students, Compton College, Bellevue College, and Shoreline Community College. Edquity is currently in the process of onboarding large districts and systems across the country and is welcoming new partnerships. Much like the CARES Act dollars, the Believe in All Students Fund aims to support students not just in the short-term but also over the next 12-18 months as COVID-19 continues to impact students and their ability to stay in school. Edquity will continue to develop partnerships quickly over this timeframe to get dollars out to as many students as possible.

How does a college sign up?
Colleges that believe that all of their students matter equally and are in the process of identifying an equitable, single application that can serve all students -- leveraging both CARES Act dollars and philanthropic support -- can e-mail david@edquity.co.

Are colleges able to change Edquity’s emergency aid application?
At the moment, colleges are not able to request changes to the emergency aid application, as the demand for Edquity’s services is too great and Edquity is needing to move rapidly to support all students. Edquity’s application is based on the research of Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab and years of basic needs insecurity and emergency aid insights.

How much does Edquity cost for students?
Nothing! Edquity is completely free for students.

Contributions to the Fund

Where does my money go?
All contributions go to Believe in Students, the nation’s only non-profit organization focused exclusively on supporting college students’ living expenses. BIS develops and supports innovative, sustainable and effective solutions that can scale to meet the widespread demand.

Is Believe in Students trustworthy?
Since 2016, Believe in Students has been doing groundbreaking work to support students around basic needs insecurity and access to emergency aid, including through the FAST Fund, a program that leverages faculty to distribute emergency aid to students. Believe in Students has received support from some of the most prominent postsecondary success partners in the country, including the ECMC Foundation and Imaginable Futures.

How is this different from the FAST Fund?
The FAST Fund provides grants to faculty members to administer directly to students in the form of emergency aid. This is an entirely philanthropic emergency aid program, which, while effective, is unable to leverage CARES dollars and also faces some administrative challenges at scale. This partnership will enable schools to offer a one-stop shop for scalable emergency aid distribution that includes both CARES and philanthropic funding, ensuring all students are served.

General

Lots of students have historically been restricted from receiving Title IV aid. Why this and why now?
We know the majority of college students suffer with financial challenges that include access to food, housing, childcare, and other basic needs. COVID-19 has made a bad situation worse. For the first time, Congress acknowledged these issues, and to its credit acted to provide emergency aid to all students. Despite the intent and wording of the law itself, the Department of Education and Secretary of Education Betsy Devos have decided that only some students are worthy of support. Beyond the injustice of the decision, the Department issued multiple conflicting guidances over a number of weeks that have led to lost time and money for institutions across the country, created massive confusion about how this money should be allocated, and economically constrained institutions who rely on non-Title IV students for financial solvency. With COVID-19 having already impacted 80 percent of college students, and with many non-Title IV students in inherently financially precarious circumstances due to their limited access to funding to begin with, we now face a do or die situation for these students. We have no choice but to act now and act forcefully to ensure we do not create an ineffective and unjust response that fails our students, fails our economy, and exacerbates inequality even further.