

# KANSAS

*31st Annual Kansas Legislative Breakfast March 19, 2025*



**54 TRIO Programs – 14,093 Students – \$17,924,248**  
**5 GEAR UP Programs – 8,100 Students - \$7,980,000**

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## WHAT ARE TRIO & GEARUP?

TRIO and GEAR UP support educational opportunity for individuals who are low income, the first in their families to be earning a bachelor's degree, veterans, and those with disabilities.

Our nation has declared a commitment to providing educational opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstance, and these programs serve that vision.

In support of this commitment, Congress established a series of programs to help low-income Americans prepare for and enter college, graduate, and move on to participate more fully in America's economic and social life. These programs are funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and are referred to as the TRIO and GEAR UP programs. While student financial aid programs help students overcome financial barriers to higher education, TRIO and GEAR UP help students overcome class, social, and cultural barriers to higher education.

Currently, more than 3,400 TRIO programs serve over 880,000 students and 160 GEAR UP Programs serve over 523,000 students. Participants enrolled in today's programs closely mirror our nation's multicultural and multi-ethnic society and include veterans and those with disabilities.

### Current TRIO Income Levels

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$23,475	\$29,325	\$26,985
2	\$31,725	\$39,645	\$36,480
3	\$39,975	\$49,965	\$45,975
4	\$48,225	\$60,285	\$55,470
5	\$56,475	\$70,605	\$64,965
6	\$64,725	\$80,925	\$74,460
7	\$72,975	\$91,245	\$83,955
8	\$81,225	\$101,565	\$93,450
Each Additional Family Member	\$5,500	\$6,880	\$6,330

For family units with more than eight members, add the following amount for each additional family member: \$8,070 for the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia and outlying jurisdictions; \$9,285 for Alaska; and \$10,095 for Hawaii.

# TYPES OF PROGRAMS

The name TRIO initially came into use after the first three programs were authorized under the Higher Education Act. Now eight distinct TRIO programs play a unique role in providing educational opportunity. GEAR UP programs are closely related discretionary grant programs supporting students at high-poverty middle and high schools.

## **Educational Opportunity Centers**

The goal of the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) is to increase the number of adult participants who enroll in postsecondary education institutions. The program also provides services to improve the financial and economic literacy of participants. An important objective of the program is to counsel participants on financial aid options, including basic financial planning skills, and to assist in the college application process.

An analysis of EOC participants found that 59% of college-ready students were admitted to institutions of higher learning.<sup>1</sup>

## **Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program**

The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program honors the legacy of Dr. Ronald McNair who died tragically in the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster. These programs, known as McNair Scholars programs for short, aim to promote equity in graduate school enrollment by helping high achieving low-income, first-generation or underrepresented minority undergraduates prepare for successful completion of doctoral degrees. McNair Scholars, who graduated in 2012-13, 84.3% were enrolled in graduate school in 2013-14.<sup>2</sup>

## **Student Support Services**

The goal of Student Support Services (SSS) projects is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants. SSS assists students with college requirements and provides opportunities for academic development. SSS may also provide grant aid to current participants in need of additional financial support to persist in school.

SSS participants were more likely to remain enrolled in higher education and complete a bachelor's degree as compared with eligible non-participants. SSS participants have a higher grade point average than similar students who did not receive such services.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, Educational Opportunity Centers, Fast Facts Report for the Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 2018-19

<sup>2</sup> Grantee-Level Performance Results: 2013-14 from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/performance.html>

<sup>3</sup> National Evaluation of Student Support Services: Examination of Student Outcomes After Six Years.

# TYPES OF PROGRAMS

## **Talent Search**

The goal of Talent Search (TS) is to increase the number of youth, 6th-12th grade, from disadvantaged backgrounds to complete high school and enroll in the postsecondary education institution of their choice. Talent Search also serves high school dropouts, to age 27, by encouraging them to re-enter the educational system and complete their education.

According to the most recent data collected by the Department of Education, 80% of TS participants were admitted to postsecondary institutions.<sup>4</sup>

## **Upward Bound**

The goal of Upward Bound (UB) is to increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Classic UB serves high school students from low-income families and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree.

In 2018, 85% of all students who participated in UB programs immediately enrolled in college in the fall following high school graduation.<sup>5</sup>

## **Upward Bound Math Science**

The goal of the Upward Bound Math Science (UBMS) programs is to help students recognize and develop their potential to excel in high school math and science and to encourage them to pursue postsecondary degrees in math and science, and ultimately careers in the math and science profession.

In recent years, 89% of students who participated in UBMS programs went directly to college after graduating from high school.<sup>5</sup>

## **Veterans Upward Bound**

The goal of Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) is to increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Veterans UB serves low-income, first-generation military veterans who are preparing to enter postsecondary education.

According to the National Association of Veterans Upward Bound Program Personnel, in 2015-2016, more than 74% of recent program participants were enrolled in postsecondary education programs.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, Fast Facts Report for the Student Support Services Program, Washington, D.C., 2016.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, Fast Facts Report for the Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science Program: 2017-18

## TYPES OF PROGRAMS

### **Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)**

GEAR UP Programs are designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Grants are provided to states and partnerships to provide services to high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than seventh grade, following them through their first year of college. Funds also provide college scholarships to low-income students.

“GEAR UP middle school staff, participating in the study focus groups, reported that GEAR UP middle schools were more likely than non-GEAR UP middle schools to offer honors and above-grade-level classes. They perceived that some of these changes took place with the implementation of the GEAR UP projects in 1999.”<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, Fast Facts Report for the Veterans Upward Bound Program, Washington, D.C., 2020.

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Education (2008, August 11). Early outcomes of the GEAR UP program. Retrieved March 17, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/gearup/index.html>

# PROGRAMS OF KANSAS

## Statewide TRIO Programs

The state of Kansas proudly hosts 54 TRIO programs that serve 14,093 first-generation, low income students, clients, and veterans. There are also 200+ professionals that work for the TRIO programs in Kansas. In order to more effectively serve our students, TRIO programs have developed nearly 300 non-TRIO-related educational collaborations. In total, Kansas TRIO programs have secured \$17,234,852 in federal funding.

PROGRAM TYPE	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 23 FUNDING
Educational Opportunity Center	4	4,000	\$1,218,636
McNair Scholars Program	4	112	\$1,218,452
Student Support Services	22	3,944	\$7,010,277
Talent Search	7	4,810	\$2,742,539
Upward Bound	12	777	\$4,081,960
Upward Bound Math Science	3	200	\$1,033,374
Veterans Upward Bound	2	250	\$619,010
	<b>54</b>	<b>14,093</b>	<b>\$17,924,248</b>

## Statewide GEAR UP Programs

Kansas was fortunate to have a statewide GEARUP grant, but it was defunded. The State of Kansas is lucky to have 5 partnership grants. The state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care across all 105 counties in Kansas through 16 regional offices. All 4 congressional districts of Kansas had been served by this state grant. Additional grants support our largest metropolitan areas: Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City. Funded in 2018, Haysville GEAR UP is the newest grant.

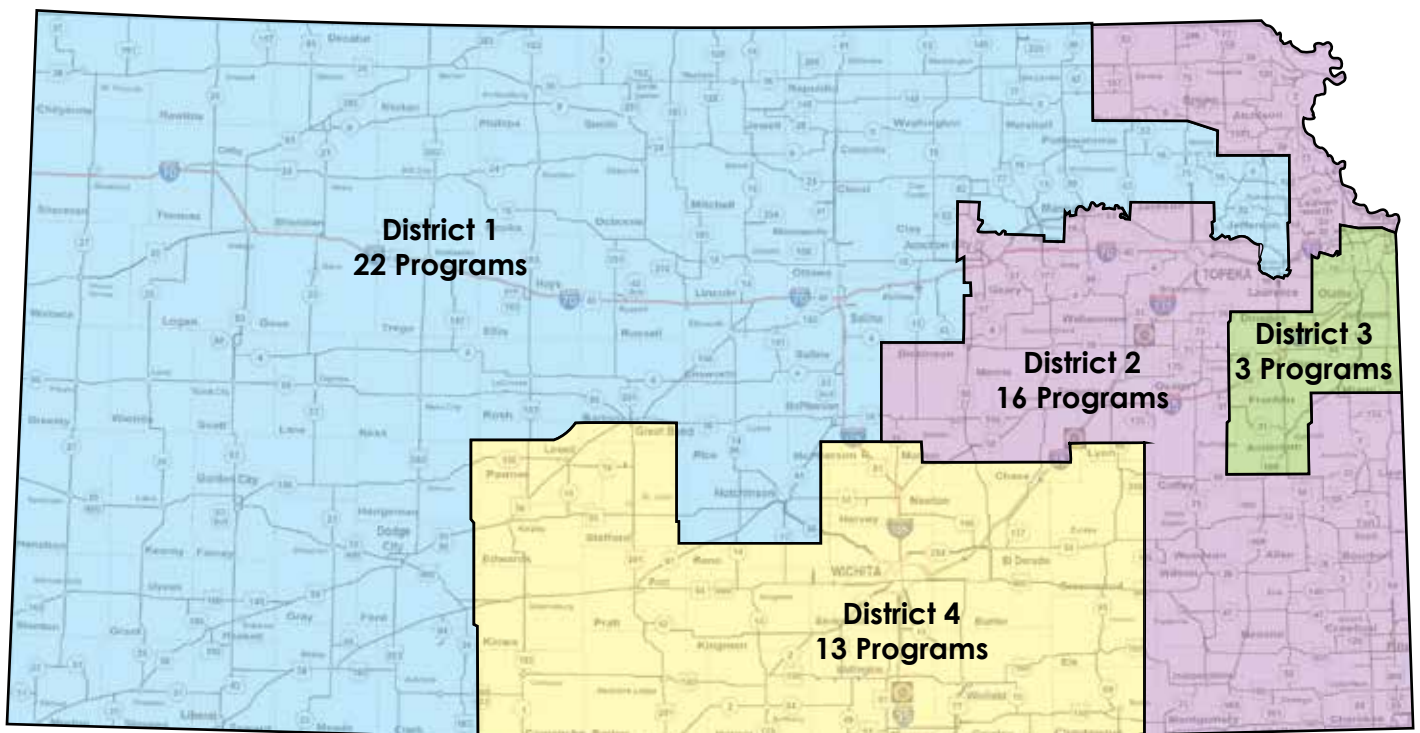
PROGRAM	LOCATION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 23 FUNDING
Kansas Kids GEAR UP	Statewide	2,500	\$3,500,000
University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	Kansas City	3,000	\$2,400,000
University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	Kansas City	950	\$760,000
Haysville GEAR UP	Haysville	900	\$720,000
Haysville GEAR UP	Haysville	750	\$600,000
		<b>8,100</b>	<b>\$7,980,000</b>

# TRIO STATEWIDE DISTRIBUTION

## TRIO Programs by District

There are 21 TRIO host institutions of higher education in Kansas, many of which host multiple grant awards to serve their student, client and veteran populations.

There are more than 120 different TRIO partner organizations and target middle and high schools throughout the state of Kansas. Some of these organizations collaborate with multiple programs. Our partnerships assist us in leveraging grant funds and extending the reach of services.



DISTRICT	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
1st Congressional District	22	5,019	\$7,012,205
2nd Congressional District	16	3,248	\$4,946,639
3rd Congressional District	3	2,057	\$1,172,869
4th Congressional District	13	3,769	\$4,792,535
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>14,093</b>	<b>\$17,924,248</b>



# 1<sup>ST</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
Barton County Community College	Educational Opportunity Center	1,000	\$325,656
Barton County Community College	Student Support Services	200	\$382,232
Barton County Community College	Upward Bound	57	\$309,505
Barton County Community College	Upward Bound	59	\$309,505
Cloud County Community College	Student Support Services	160	\$286,109
Colby Community College	Student Support Services	200	\$283,639
Dodge City Community College	Student Support Services	144	\$272,364
Dodge City Community College	Talent Search	500	\$288,470
Garden City Community College	Student Support Services	200	\$340,805
Haskell Indian Nations University	Student Support Services	175	\$306,514
Kansas State University	McNair Scholars Program	28	\$305,050
Kansas State University	Student Support Services	300	\$357,263
Kansas State University/ Salina	Student Support Services	160	\$275,028
Kansas State University/ Salina	Upward Bound	55	\$309,504
Seward County Community College	Student Support Services	160	\$286,109
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Educational Opportunity Center	1,000	\$283,663
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	McNair Scholars Program	31	\$335,989
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Student Support Services	120	\$272,364
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Student Support Services	250	\$353,692
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound	94	\$480,145
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound Math Science	60	\$309,505
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound Math Science	66	\$339,094
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>22 PROGRAMS</b>	<b>5,019</b>	<b>\$7,012,205</b>

INSTITUTION	TRAINING	PROFESSIONAL SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
University of Kansas Center for Research Inc	Training Grant for TRIO Professionals	250	\$309,505



## 2<sup>ND</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
Donnelly College	Student Support Services	240	\$327,760
Emporia State University	McNair Scholars Program	25	\$272,364
Emporia State University	Student Support Services	165	\$352,530
Emporia State University	Talent Search	513	\$295,972
Emporia State University	Upward Bound	60	\$309,505
Fort Scott Community College	Student Support Services	150	\$271,273
Highland Community College	Student Support Services	140	\$272,364
Independence Community College	Student Support Services	165	\$262,147
Independence Community College	Upward Bound	65	\$349,471
Kansas City Kansas Community College	Upward Bound	60	\$299,040
Labette Community College	Student Support Services	185	\$320,606
Labette Community College	Talent Search	545	\$281,888
Neosho County Community College	Student Support Services	165	\$345,360
Neosho County Community College	Talent Search	655	\$377,896
Neosho County Community College	Upward Bound	55	\$309,505
Washburn University of Topeka	Upward Bound	60	\$298,958
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>16 PROGRAMS</b>	<b>3,248</b>	<b>\$4,946,639</b>

## 3<sup>RD</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Educational Opportunity Center	1,000	\$325,656
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Talent Search	932	\$537,708
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc	Veterans Upward Bound	125	\$309,505
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>3 PROGRAMS</b>	<b>2,057</b>	<b>\$1,172,869</b>

# 4<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY24 FUNDING
Cowley College	Student Support Services	160	\$348,514
Cowley College	Upward Bound	63	\$324,979
Wichita State University	Educational Opportunity Center	1,000	\$283,661
Wichita State University	McNair Scholars Program	28	\$305,049
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	250	\$514,726
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	115	\$306,514
Wichita State University/ Campus of Applied Science and Tech	Student Support Services	140	\$272,364
Wichita State University	Talent Search	1,165	\$672,135
Wichita State University	Talent Search	500	\$288,470
Wichita State University	Upward Bound	52	\$278,305
Wichita State University	Upward Bound	97	\$503,538
Wichita State University	Upward Bound Math Science	74	\$384,775
Wichita State University	Veterans Upward Bound	125	\$309,505
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>13 PROGRAMS</b>	<b>3,769</b>	<b>\$4,792,535</b>



# GEAR UP STATEWIDE DISTRIBUTION

## \*\*REFUNDED\*\* State Grant - Kansas Kids GEAR UP

Our state GEAR UP grant, Kansas Kids GEAR UP, that serves every district of KS and all 105 counties was defunded. This \$3,500,000 partnership started in 2015 to provide services to 2,500 foster care youth across the state. After seven years of providing educational resources to help middle and high school students succeed, the number of students who graduate from Kansas high schools fully prepared for enrollment in post-secondary education, will significantly decrease. The state grant is broken into 6 regions of service. Each district was a host to regional offices that supported area students.

## Partnership Grants

Kansas institutions, the University of Kansas Center for Research and Wichita State University, each host multiple partner grants (3 total), which serve low income students in Haysville and Wichita. Partner grants bring \$2,080,000 to Kansas.

DISTRICT	KANSAS PARTNER GRANTS			KANSAS KIDS GEAR UP	
1st Congressional	--			8 Regional Offices	2,500 students in foster care  \$3,500,000 FY24
2nd Congressional	GEAR UP Topeka	400 students	\$320,000 FY22	4 Regional Offices	
3rd Congressional	GEAR UP Diploma (Kansas City)	3,328 students	\$2,662,400 FY22	1 Regional Office	
4th Congressional	Wichita GEAR UP (2) & Haysville	2,600 students	\$2,080,000 FY22	3 Regional Offices	

## 1<sup>ST</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

### GEAR UP SITES

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY 24 FUNDING
Dodge City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 4	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for \$3,500,000
Emporia	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 6		
Garden City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 4		
Great Bend	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 4		
Hays	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 4		
Hutchinson	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 6		
Junction City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 3		
Lawrence	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 2		
Salina	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 3		
Lawrence	GEAR UP Topeka		

## 2<sup>ND</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

### GEAR UP SITES

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY 24 FUNDING
Pittsburg	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 1	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Parsons	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 1		
Topeka	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 3		

## 3<sup>RD</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

### GEAR UP SITES

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY 24 FUNDING
Kansas City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 2	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Kansas City	University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	950 Students	\$760,000
Kansas City	University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	3,000 students	\$2,400,000

## 4<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

### GEAR UP SITES

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY 24 FUNDING
Wichita	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 5	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Arkansas City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 5		
El Dorado	Kansas Kids GEAR UP – Region 6		
Haysville	Haysville GEAR UP	900 students	\$720,000
Haysville	Haysville GEAR UP	750 students	\$600,000

# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

## **ROSARIO TRETO - UPWARD BOUND - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

My journey with TRIO Upward Bound started my freshman year. It was nerve wracking at first not knowing anyone but as time went on, my peers in TRIO have become a small family that I cherish deeply. TRIO's services such as tutoring became a big part of my life as I made it a semi-permanent addition to my schedule to always attend tutoring throughout the week.

Being able to meet with friends and study after school in TRIO has helped me immensely because the encouragement from the advisors and my friends have motivated me to keep pushing through. Saturday sessions and college visits have also been a key aid in TRIO as the opportunity of stepping onto different college campuses has given me insight to where I feel I belong.

Emporia State University being the college that I commit to, as TRIO has shown me so many aspects of life on campus with dorm stays, summer classes, and activities with the college. TRIO exposed how great it is to be a part of an organization that is involved with the community and college life. In the future I will continue to be a part of TRIO in their college program and attend ESU for Nursing.



## **COURAGE WORTMAN - TALENT SEARCH/SSS ALUMNI**

Courage is a dedicated student and mentor with a passion for advocacy and leadership. They attended West Middle School in Kansas City, KS and later became a proud graduate of Washington High School (2019) in Kansas City, KS. Courage continued their education at Kansas City Kansas Community College, earning their degree in 2020. They went on to graduate from Kansas State University in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, a Minor in Queer Studies, and a Nonprofit Leadership Certificate.

Courage's academic achievements were recognized through multiple scholarships, including the Transfer 1863 Landmark Award, the Clarina Howard Nichols Scholarship, and the Mary Kay Sifers Leadership Scholarship. In addition to excelling in their studies, they have been a dedicated Talent Search College Mentor since 2019, supporting and guiding students on their educational journeys.

While at Kansas State, Courage served as a Resident Assistant (RA) and was honored as the Unsung Hero of the housing department at the annual Housing Banquet, a testament to their invaluable contributions to campus life and their peers. Their commitment to mentorship, leadership, and community engagement continues to inspire those around them.

Since 2021, Courage has also served as a Lead Volunteer for True Colors Flint Hills, a nonprofit in Manhattan, KS, dedicated to community support and advocacy. Their work with the organization reflects their deep commitment to service and leadership.



## **MARIA ALVARADO - TALENT SEARCH ALUM/UPWARD BOUND ALUM/SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

My first experience with TRIO began when I joined TRIO Talent Search in 6th grade. During my freshman year of high school, I got the

# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

opportunity to transition in TRIO Upward Bound. Through my TRIO programs, I have received so many opportunities to help me succeed in my future and through my academic studies.

One of the most enjoyable and memorable trips I had with TRIO was the summer trip to Galveston, TX. We visited amazing museums, aquariums, and beaches. I've also loved attending tutoring sessions where I built strong connections with my tutors while getting the help I needed with my academics. Thanks to the support of TRIO and my family, I plan to attend ESU to complete my Gen Eds and major in Counseling.



## **JUAN FLORES-HERNANDEZ - UBMS ALUM - WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY**

If you were to tell me 4 years ago that I would be able to attend college without worrying about the cost, I wouldn't know how to react. It was my 8th-grade year, and the COVID-19 lock down was still going on, but I was still attending remote classes. It was in one of those classes that a teacher talked to us about the Upward Bound Math Science program at Wichita State University. When I realized I really wanted to join this program, one of my teachers decided to drive to my house just give me an application, and it was thanks to her persistence that I got in.

Beginning freshman year, not having a clue about the do's and the don'ts of high school made it nerve-racking for me, and I was afraid of messing up right off the bat. Hearing about the guidance and assistance that UBMS offers its participants throughout high school with decision-making about college and life after graduation made me immediately want to sign up. When I got the letter saying that I had been accepted, I immediately felt relieved. I now had advisors and mentors who I could turn to if I ever had any questions. Throughout the program, they offered me workshops such as ACT prep, practicing scholarship essays, and even mental health workshops. I believe this help gave me the advantage when it came to my senior year and helped me to win the Rudd Foundation Scholarship. I will forever be thankful to my UBMS advisors, Ms. Burg and Mr. Veasey, for giving me the chance to join the UBMS family and putting me on the path of success.

## **CRISTOBAL VELAZQUEZ -TALENT SEARCH/UPWARD BOUND - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Author Oscar Wilde once wrote, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars". I first became associated with TRIO in 2018 when I joined TRIO Talent Search in sixth grade. Soon after that when high school rolled around I became a proud member of TRIO Upward Bound. Having older siblings who were also members of TRIO, they pushed me to join as they believed it to be a great opportunity for me, they were right.

One instance that TRIO has helped me learn over these last four years is how to communicate better with my peers. I started at TRIO very shy and I was nervous to talk to the other people there, but thanks to their kind nature and welcoming attitude I became more comfortable, and that transferred overall vocal confidence. I started becoming more social at school and I could not have done it without TRIO and the amazing people there.



Another way TRIO has helped me is through the various activities they have us do, specifically the

## STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

guest speakers. Although I will admit that the guest speakers can on occasion be boring; it made me realize that every single one of those people took the steps to start working and get to the point where they are now. This inspired me to look at the future and actually start making strides towards my goals. In conclusion, TRIO has not only provided me with the tools to grow socially and academically, but it has also inspired me to take control of my life and actively pursue the future I desire.



### **LEXI WHITSON - MCNAIR - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

I joined TRIO when I first entered college at 17 years of age. Despite being a victim of trafficking, TRIO managed to help keep me engaged in school during COVID. This program gave me the resources to have an education which gave me hope. I had lovely advisors that provided me with support. Knowing I had someone to answer my questions, point me in the right direction for a resource, or even be the resource, was foundational for my success. College was less daunting with the help of someone committed to my goals. While I struggled in my first year and a half as I worked to separate myself from my trafficker, I had TRIO rooting for my academic success. My TRIO advisors had no idea what was happening behind the computer screen; they had little reference to the cause of my poor performance. Despite this, they remained committed to my success, goals, and future. The hope TRIO planted in me made me strong enough to survive my adverse experiences and lack of familial

support. TRIO helped me believe that I could succeed. My academic performance now is better than I could have imagined.

My TRIO advisor could see my potential and referred me to the TRIO McNair program. I had never considered research and thought the process was too daunting. However, I stepped outside of my comfort zone and decided to meet with the Director of McNair, Mulu Lemma. I was accepted into the program and began my passion as a researcher. I was connected with a fantastic mentor that I learned so much from. The workshops McNair provided gave me insight into the professional world and how to navigate it. I was taught about the importance of networking, cover letters, CVs, the GRE, and received loads of advice that I use every day. My McNair mentors helped me navigate college through my unexpected pregnancy and pointed me to the best resources that would help me succeed. I know that if I ever have any obstacle, I can come to Mulu, and that makes me confident as a student to succeed. Her patience and empowerment really goes a long way. Now, I believe I can do anything I put my mind and will towards without help.

Prior to McNair, I was not serious about graduate school. I am now enrolled in a master's program in economics, and I am finishing my bachelors in social work. I would like to get a PhD in either economics or public policy so that I can conduct effective research about policies. Especially policies that affect sex trafficking victims. I believe that I can make a difference in my community. I have grounded my focus to researching how our system works with scarce resources and how we can ethically and sustainably operate to give everyone a chance to live a prosperous life. My firsthand experiences of abuse, neglect, poverty, and mental health struggles have driven me to make a difference for other people. I want to be the change I want to see in the world and help other young women succeed. I have now found happiness and peace through self-work and with the help of TRIO. I will forever be thankful and grateful for TRIO's support.



# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



## LACEY GOMEZ - EOC - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

My name is Lacey Gomez. My path to obtaining my High School diploma has been a challenging but ultimately a rewarding experience. Growing up I didn't have the benefit of a stable home. My mother struggled with mental health issues and my father was in and out of my life. This instability resulted in emotional abandonment issues during the most important years of my life which made continuing my education a low priority. I have learned to draw strength from these experiences, and it motivates me every day to pursue my dreams and become a better version of myself.

In November of 2023, I began attending GED classes at Washburn Tech. This made my third and final attempt. I have been a stay-at-home mom for 13 years; dedicating my time and attention to my family. I'm a mom to four wonderful boys. My second child has been diagnosed with special needs. I prioritized his care over returning to school. I was determined to be the mother to my children that my mother was not.

At the age of 38, I decided to try GED once more. Melody Lawrence from TRIO EOC visited the GED program and inspired me by sharing the numerous opportunities available once I earned my diploma. She provided encouragement and belief that I could finish this time and achieve great things for myself and my family.

Balancing school and motherhood weren't easy. My boy's curiosity and enthusiasm to learn more about my studies made it all worthwhile. They frequently asked questions about my school progress and homework, showing me that they were paying more attention than I realized. I didn't want my children to think it was acceptable to quit, so they became my motivation.

In April of 2024, I proudly earned my High School diploma through Washburn Tech in Topeka, Kansas. I'm excited to pursue a college degree in Early Childhood Education. This decision was driven by my own experiences in having a child with special needs. I'm determined to make a difference and inspire hope in those that need it most.

With Melody's assistance, I was able to navigate the FASFA process with confidence. I now recognize that obstacles are a natural part of the journey. With the right mindset and support, they can be transformed into steppingstones for success. As I continue my education and strive to make a positive impact in Early Childhood Education, I am grateful for the empowerment and motivation provided by programs like TRIO EOC, Washburn Tech and my loved ones. This is only the beginning!

## DESTNEY WILLIAMS - EOC - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

My name is Destney Williams. I am a formerly incarcerated individual who served 10 years at the Topeka Correctional Facility in Topeka, Kansas. Upon my release on April 4, 2023, I found myself in an unfamiliar city and faced the daunting task of rebuilding my life. I had to relearn essential skills, including using computers and cell phones, navigating the bus system, and paying bills. Despite securing a job that paid \$14.00 an hour, I struggled to make ends meet. I realized that to improve my situation, I needed further education, but I lacked confidence in my ability to succeed in school.

Heartland Regional Alcohol and Drug Assessment Center (RADAC) referred me to the TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) for assistance. It was there that I met my advisor, Melody Lawrence, who provided more support and encouragement than I could have ever expected. After discussing my options with Melody, I decided to enroll in



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the Welding program at Washburn Institute of Technology.

Melody was instrumental in helping me through the admissions process. She assisted me with completing the application, filling out the FAFSA, and requesting my transcripts. Additionally, she provided me with sample Accuplacer Test questions to help me prepare for the placement test at Washburn Tech. Melody's encouragement and belief in me boosted my confidence significantly.

Thanks to the support from Melody and TRIO EOC, I completed the Welding program with a 4.0 GPA, finishing at the top of my class. I am now enrolled in the Electrical and Commercial Driver's License programs. Being awarded the NEOCA scholarship would greatly assist me in funding these additional programs. Upon completion, I plan to pursue a career as a Lineman.

TRIO EOC has been a lifeline for me. Without Melody's support, I might have ended up back in prison. Instead, I am on a path toward a stable and successful future.



## **ALEXANDER OVERBEY - UPWARD BOUND - COWLEY COLLEGE**

Hi, my name is Alexander Overbey and I have been in Upward Bound since 2021. Through Upward Bound, I've been able to learn and experience things that I otherwise would not have been able to. I've also made friends and lifelong relationships with mentors and other UB members.

Upward Bound has been an amazing opportunity to me and so many others. Through activities like volunteering at the local arts center and the local food bank, but also visiting the Wichita Art Museum and getting to tour a larger college campus at Emporia, we've been able to learn valuable lessons and form a community of people who care about each other.

One of the best parts of Upward Bound though is Summer Institute. Summer Institute allows me and so many other to spend our summer vacation learning, getting work experience, and getting to do fun activities in the evening. We live on campus during the institute so it gives

great experience for our future in college. We have some freedom, so we have to learn how to be responsible and manage our time.

## **DARRIEN GATES II - GEAR UP - HE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

GEAR UP has helped me tremendously through my first year of college thus far. They have granted me a \$2,000 scholarship per year, which greatly reduces my financial woes in paying for college. Alongside that, GEAR UP equipped me with all the necessary dorm equipment such as towels, bedsheets, and school supplies, which also helped remove some financial strain.

However, I believe the greatest thing would be the GEAR UP Colorado Trip in Late July. I was so thankful that I got provided this opportunity, as it is something that really meant a lot to me. First, I got the opportunity to visit 3 universities in Colorado. We then visited the US Olympic museum and toured, and that was such a great experience because I was able to learn about some of the rich history of the Olympics and the Paris Summer festival they were hosting that weekend as well. We also went to see the Garden of the Gods and went Kayaking - something I would never imagine myself doing before.



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These are places I would not have gotten the chance to experience had it not be for GEAR UP! It was a great send-off right before I moved 9 hours away for college. I am grateful for the opportunities GEAR UP has provided me with and I will carry those memories on with me for many years!



## **EVINA BOYKIN - GEAR UP - HE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

I have always had an appreciation for GEAR UP. Even now I am grateful for all they have done. Though it may not seem they have done much, the experiences and relationships they have left me with are unmatched. The summer of 2023 contained my absolute favorite memories with gear up. The residential camp at UCM allowed me to learn about myself and introduced me to Cool Speak and many new friends.

My favorite memory though was traveling to Baltimore. I had so much fun even though we were stuck in the pouring rain. I made new friends and reconnected with old ones. On that trip as well, I discovered a new university that I could only dream of attending. For years, I was sure I was going to UMKC, but as soon as I stepped foot on Morgan State University's campus, I knew that was where I had to be.

Another great memory I had was traveling to California during spring break of my senior year. During my senior year, I was going through a whirlwind of emotions so traveling to California gave me a bit of a break.

Building a robot from scratch was not what I exactly had in mind when I heard we were going to Santa Clara, but I had a good time bonding with my peers. I often think about walking around Stanford and having lunch while watching the GEAR UP staff do various line dances. My favorites were Domo and Justin dancing to Soulja Boy, and everyone doing the Tamia shuffle while Justin shuffled around confused

Overall, GEAR UP provided me with lasting relationships and experiences that I would not trade for the world. I appreciate you all more than you know.

## **DESIREE DIXON - MCNAIR - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Hello! My name is Desiree Dixon, and I am currently a graduate student at the University of Central Missouri studying Human Development and Family Science. I am previously part of the McNair Scholars program at Emporia State University during my undergraduate years. Although I was only part of the McNair Scholars program for a short amount of time (November 2022-August 2023), it had a profound impact on my educational trajectory as well as life in general.

I am a first-generation college student and had difficulty navigating college, especially coming from a home schooled background. When attending my first few years of college I received not support in terms of financial assistance or encouragement from my family. Additionally, I have a rare genetic disease, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, which also requires a significant amount of financial need. All of these factors led me to not even contemplate pursuing an education past a bachelor's degree. One day while in class at Emporia State University a few representatives from the McNair Scholars program came and discussed the program in class. I thought that it sounded interesting, and it was the first time I had heard of undergraduates having the capacity to perform research. On a whim, I decided to apply, and I actually got accepted! I was ecstatic to start my



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McNair course and to learn how to further my education by conducting research.

While in the McNair Scholars program, I conducted an original mixed methods research project entitled "Young Adults' Perceptions of Intimate Relationships and Family Units in Correlation with ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Scores." The McNair Scholars program taught me how to conduct graduate level research and provided training that prepared me immensely for graduate school. I think that one of the greatest assets of the McNair Scholars program is the opportunity given to present research and attend national conferences. I had the wonderful opportunity to travel to the 2023 Baylor University McNair Conference to present my research as well as attend the Murray State Graduate School Boot Camp which helped to prepare me for graduate school applications. Additionally, the McNair Scholars program also helps to waive graduate application school fees for students. This was significantly helpful to me as I would have never been able to afford the application fees without assistance.

The experiences I had with the McNair scholars program helped me to be prepared for graduate school while attending the University of Central Missouri. I was able to jump into research projects and had an opportunity to further expand public speaking at other conferences. I am happy to say that as of right now, I have been accepted into two PhD in Human Development and Family Science programs at Kansas State University and the University of Missouri. I also created my own presentation on PACEs (protective and compensatory experiences) and was accepted for the Missouri Department of Mental Health's 2025 Spring Training Institute as a guest speaker. Without the McNair Scholars program I would never have even imagined applying to doctoral programs let alone conducting research that has a profound impact on our communities. The McNair Scholars program is essential in helping first-generation or underprivileged college students who are unable to have assistance from their families when it comes to higher education.



## **ANTONIQUE' FLEMONS - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has impacted my life by providing people that actually care about the nuances of college and are able to show up in many different ways. TRIO has made sure I had the capacity to be successful by matching my efforts when it came to making sure my education and safety were a priority. Always being a vessel of information and a place of resources, these things make all the difference with a college experience and allowing someone to feel like home.

Students shouldn't be stifled for reasons out of their control while trying to better themselves. If someone is dedicated enough to tackle the task of college, having support makes all the difference. People understand not only you, but keep up with you. This program has benefited me as a student. When I talk to advisors in the program, they value working with TRIO students just as much. This program is a staple for not only academic success, but for all communities in higher ed.

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### **ISAAC TARANGO - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

My college journey has been one of perseverance, growth, and purpose. As a first-generation student, I had a vision for my future, but like many students, I faced moments of uncertainty and change. I began my undergraduate career at another institution but soon realized that transferring to Emporia State University was the best path for my academic and athletic goals. As a student-athlete competing in NCAA track and field, I learned the value of discipline, time management, and resilience—qualities that have shaped my success both on and off the track. Balancing rigorous training with a demanding course load was never easy, but it taught me the importance of sticking to a plan and trusting the process. There were long days, early mornings, late nights, and moments of doubt, but through it all, I learned that success is not just about talent or intelligence; it is about commitment and making sacrifices to keep on pushing.

Beyond athletics, I have been committed to academic excellence and professional development. I have maintained a high GPA while actively engaging in research, something that was new to me. This research has given me opportunities to present at professional conferences, including at the Kansas State Capitol, where I shared my findings with legislators and professionals. These experiences have reinforced my passion for advancing knowledge in the field of health and human performance. Engaging in these professional development opportunities elevated my confidence in fulfilling my long-term goals. Through dedication and perseverance, I was grateful to earn acceptance into Wichita State University's Doctor of Physical Therapy program.

Giving back has always been important to me. Before graduating from ESU, I am committed to sharing my knowledge and experiences with others. Whether through tutoring, volunteering, or health-related outreach programs, I want to support and inspire those around me. These experiences have deepened my commitment to making a meaningful impact. As I am preparing to enter a Doctor of Physical Therapy program this summer, I am excited to continue this journey of learning, service, and growth. The TRIO McNair program, as well as my professors, have played a pivotal role in my success, providing the support and opportunities necessary to reach this point. I look forward to using my story to uplift others in the future.

### **JENNIFER PHAM - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has been a huge part of my college experience, especially as a first-generation Vietnamese student. Coming into college, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in healthcare, but I wasn't sure how to navigate everything like classes, financial aid, or even where to turn for support. TRIO helped me figure all of that out. From academic advising and tutoring to financial guidance and a strong community, it gave me the confidence and resources I needed to succeed. Now, I'm on my way to becoming a pharmacist, and I'll be the first in my family to enter the healthcare field. TRIO has made what once felt overwhelming feel achievable, and I wouldn't be where I am without it.

Legislators should support TRIO because it gives first-generation students like me the tools we need to succeed. Without TRIO, many of us wouldn't have access to the academic and financial resources that help us stay in school and work toward our goals. I'm studying to become a pharmacist, and TRIO has helped me stay on track and connect with the right opportunities. By funding TRIO, legislators are investing in students who are



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determined to make a difference—whether in healthcare, education, or other fields. TRIO isn't just about helping students graduate; it's about creating a pathway for success that benefits individuals, families, and entire communities.



## **ABBY HOUT - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

I am a freshman this year and come from a family of middle-class parents who never went to college, or took any advanced classes in high school. This meant when I started college it was not only a new adventure for us all, but also meant that we were all left questions that we had no idea what the answers were. These questions ranged from I don't understand this concept in my chemistry class, to how I make sure all of my scholarships were added to my student account, to helping me figure out how to balance college, a job, and a personal life. Without TRIO I would be in debt (due to scholarship mistakes and not knowing how to fix it), lost in my classes with no one to turn to for help, and feeling very isolated and alone. TRIO has supplied me with the resources, and mentors I have needed to help guide me through my college journey and keep me on track for medical school, so one day I can be a Cardiothoracic Surgeon.

Our legislators should support TRIO because most of our country is middle to lower-class workers trying to make ends meet. This often means that there was never money for them to go to college or have the opportunities and resources needed for them to. As the world gets more and more technologically advanced the jobs that the middle and lower-class populations were able to get to make ends meet are going away. This leaves a gap between the young adults nowadays who need to go to college to get a degree so we can make a living, and the resources and support needed to get there because no one in our family has ever done it before. TRIO helps bridge this gap and make it possible for us to go to college. Think of it like if you were out in the wilderness, lost and cold and knew you needed to start a fire before hypothermia sets in, but you didn't have anything that could burn/the resources you need to so, things would take a downhill turn very fast. TRIO is our resource to make sure we don't get into college end up feeling like we are in over our heads and then tank. They help make sure we have the resources we need to succeed, so we can set a better example for our kids one day and make sure they don't end up not able to make ends meet. TRIO helps bridge the gap from those who were never able to get a higher education to the leaders of tomorrow. .

## **THANH NGUYEN - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has helped me navigate the academic, social, and financial struggles of college by providing me with a strong support network. My TRIO advisor and community are always ready to provide me with guidance, support, and encouragement. This has helped me become the successful and confident student that I am today, despite coming from a first-generation and low-income background.

TRIO helps underserved, first-generation, low-income, and students of color navigate the maze that is college. It provides a strong and supportive framework that can lead students to success and make college not seem so foreign or out of reach.



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## **CARLY HAYDEN - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has done so much for me. It has provided free tutoring and free printing when I couldn't afford to access those resources. TRIO gave me a great academic advisor. My advisor Maggie has supported me and connected me to a lot of opportunities on campus for scholarships, grants, and jobs. She also provided me with support for things outside of school like the on-campus food pantry and how to get access to health insurance when I did not have it. TRIO has a lot of really kind and considerate staff. Being in TRIO is something I cannot recommend enough they have given me so many great memories. I have traveled out of the country with TRIO participated in TRIO for four years gone to TRIO events. My positive college experience wouldn't have been the same without TRIO.

TRIO is a really important resource for students especially for students who are coming to college without the support of their family or relationships with people who have already attended a university.

## **KIMBERLY VILLANUEVA - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has played a significant role in my personal and academic growth. Through TRIO, I was given the incredible opportunity to study abroad—an experience that would not have been possible without their financial support. That trip had a lasting impact on my life, shaping my perspective and broadening my horizons. I know my story isn't unique; TRIO has provided countless students with opportunities they never thought they'd have. Beyond financial support, TRIO staff has been there for me throughout my college journey, whether it was listening to me vent about my professors or providing tutoring for physics. Their guidance and encouragement have made a world of difference. Simply put, I wouldn't be graduating without the support of TRIO.

Legislators should support TRIO because it provides life-changing opportunities for students who might not otherwise have access to higher education resources. TRIO programs help level the playing field by offering financial assistance, academic support, and mentorship to first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students. By investing in TRIO, legislators are investing in the success of students who, in turn, contribute to their communities and the workforce. TRIO doesn't just help students earn degrees—it empowers them to break cycles of poverty, achieve their full potential, and become leaders in their fields. The impact of TRIO extends far beyond graduation, creating a ripple effect that benefits families, local economies, and society as a whole. Continued funding and legislative support for TRIO ensure that future students receive the same opportunities to succeed, grow, and give back.



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## **SAMANTHA GARCIA - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has impacted my college experiences by providing me with a space to ask questions and share any concerns about my schoolwork, mental health, and more. My TRIO advisor has supported me through it all- the good, the bad, and the ugly- and she has never wavered in her assistance. Whenever I had concerns about graduating on time or my grades, she directed me to the appropriate resources and guided me through every step. I remember needing help with my calculus class, and TRIO provided tutors. I was able to meet with the tutoring coordinator and was assigned a tutor, with whom I met once a week, ultimately passing the class. My advisor also helped me acknowledge the difficulty of asking for help but made me feel comfortable reaching out to her in times of need. As a first-generation college student, there are times when you feel pressure, especially from your parents, along with the desire to succeed to repay them for all the sacrifices they made. My advisor assisted me in navigating that pressure and also helped me by conducting grade

checks once a month during our meetings. She is truly one of the best people I know, and thanks to her support, I am set to graduate this May with my degree in Marketing.

Our legislators should support TRIO because it creates spaces for students like me to feel welcome and supported, especially while navigating the challenging times of college. TRIO provides the support that many college students yearn for, and thanks to this program, I know that my peers and I received the help and resources we needed to graduate. The one-on-one meetings with advisors, tutoring services, printing services, calculators, and even graduate school assistance are invaluable. Programs like these are often undervalued, but they contribute to the success of many students. Our TRIO advisors are mentors. I know that my advisor has been one of the most supportive people I have on campus, and I trust she will help guide me in making difficult decisions. TRIO is important because programs like these support students in times of need, providing a space that is hard to find, especially on larger campuses. From the events they host, such as planning for the semester, budgeting, and even field trips to local areas to learn about different cultures and backgrounds, TRIO makes a significant impact. I have many friends in TRIO, and it's safe to say that all of us are genuinely grateful for the program and would not be where we are without the constant support.

## **GERARDO FORNOZA - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

After months of quarantine induced anxiety and isolation, the Spring of 2021 became an inflection point for so many of us whose lives had been upturned by the pandemic, and I felt the need to escape from my apartment that for months had felt like a prison. I was diagnosed with Leukemia in November of 2019 and had been isolated with a weakened immune system for an even longer than the rest of the population but with a heightened risk whenever I ventured to the hospital for checkups and treatment. This horrible situation, however, presented me with the unique opportunity, and I chose to leave my job and try to return to school full-time to finish my degree first at Johnson County Community College and now at the University of Kansas. Returning to academics has been an incredibly challenging experience as a 32-year-old, first generation immigrant and this transition was compounded when I returned to KU. One of the biggest challenges as a non-traditional student was navigating the maze of regulations and forms that each department requires to complete to receive any





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accommodation or financial assistance. Having a one-hour commute by bus to a college or university with such a large population as the University of Kansas, exacerbated the feeling of disconnection from my peers stemming from the age gaps and life experiences and would have most likely led to a very difficult semester. Luckily, one of my professors suggested that I should contact TRIO, and I stepped out of my comfort zone and emailed to request a meeting and was assigned an advisor. TRIO and the Center for Educational Opportunity has been the most helpful and supportive group that I have encountered in my academic career. My advisor has gone above and beyond their duties, connecting me with financial and academic resources, while finding and encouraging me to apply for scholarly opportunities that I would have never known existed. With their help I was able to apply and join two prestigious scholars programs and achieve more than I thought possible, encouraging me climb ever higher.

TRIO staff and advisors are remarkable individuals that are passionate about helping students find academic success and thrive despite the challenges that come from being a first-generation, low-income or disabled student. The services provided are worthwhile investments that support the leaders of the future through the difficulties of present. Effective institutions are rare, and the institutional knowledge and best practices refined over decades are invaluable to the students serviced by this organization. It is my sincere hope that this organization continues to help and develop generations of future students.



### **ASHLEY HERNANDEZ - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

As a first-generation college student and transfer from Butler Community College that is now a graduating senior at the University of Kansas, TRIO has played a vital role in my journey at the University of Kansas. Balancing academics, leadership roles, and part-time work to support myself has been challenging, but TRIO has provided me with the guidance and resources necessary to stay on track toward my dream of becoming a physician. From financial literacy support to academic advising, TRIO has been a cornerstone of my success. Through TRIO, I have found a community that understands the unique challenges faced by students like me—those who are breaking barriers in higher education. The mentorship and advocacy I have received have empowered me to pursue leadership roles, such as serving as the president of multiple pre-med organizations, and to give back by supporting other underrepresented students. TRIO's impact goes beyond my personal experience—it provides

opportunities for countless students who may not otherwise have access to the resources needed to succeed in higher education. Programs like TRIO are essential for ensuring that first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students have the tools to reach their goals. Continued funding for TRIO means continued success for students who are striving to change their lives and communities. I am incredibly grateful for this program and hope to see it thrive for future generations.

Legislators should support TRIO because it is a proven investment in success of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students. TRIO programs provide essential academic, financial, and personal support that help students overcome systemic barriers to higher education. By funding TRIO, legislators are not just supporting individual students—they are strengthening the workforce, increasing social mobility, and fostering a more educated and diverse society. Investing in TRIO is investing in the future.

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## **JAZMIN PÉREZ-HERNÁNDEZ - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has had an everlasting impact on both me and my education. As a first-generation student, navigating higher education has not been easy, but TRIO has been there to guide me every step of the way. It has created an environment where I feel comfortable seeking help and knowing I'm supported. My TRIO advisor has truly become one of my favorite staff members on campus. Whenever I need guidance, advice, or support, she's always there to help me find solutions or point me in the right direction.

TRIO has provided countless opportunities and resources that have transformed my educational experience. From workshops and tutoring to information about scholarships, programs, peer support, and much more—TRIO is the ultimate go-to resource. Continued funding for TRIO will ensure that other students, like me, can benefit from the support and community it fosters. Without TRIO and my advisor, my college

journey would have been significantly more challenging from start to finish. Students—they are strengthening the workforce, increasing social mobility, and fostering a more educated and diverse society. Investing in TRIO is investing in the future.

## **KAYA TAYLOR - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

I am a first-generation student and low-income. Going into college, I was entirely unprepared to navigate the institution and keep up with expectations. TRIO connected me with two counselors that both became vital resources for me, and I genuinely look forward to each meeting with them. But they are more than a resource; they did for me what my parents often couldn't due to lack of experience and guided me through all the applications, all the challenges, all the scholarships I needed. More than any advisor or counselor, I knew I could speak to them honestly and they would be a compassionate and helpful ear. When I felt like I was not capable of continuing with my degree, they urged me on.

Legislators need to continue to support TRIO to allow universities to serve as a gateway to success for all Americans. I worked hard to get to my senior year of college and will be graduating in May 2025, but I don't believe I could have done it without TRIO. Students like me need to be provided with the means to thrive in their educational career and beyond, and TRIO provided me with that.



## **ALLISON MONTELEONE - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has been essential to my college success and overall life. When I began college I had very little support around navigating the college process and just the challenges of adult life, as I come from a low socioeconomic status family. TRIO was there for me from the beginning, helping guide me through everything from how to enroll in the right classes to how to make personal and professional connections and set goals for myself. Through TRIO I was able to take a free course UNIV 101 that taught me essential college skills that I know have helped me succeed in college and life. My TRIO advisor has been with me encouraging me and making me feel that succeeding at college and my future career goals

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were possible. They provided me references and helped me find resources to pay for my healthcare when I lost my Medicaid and was struggling with my health among many other things. With TRIO I know there is always someone who wants to listen to me, hear about my problems and experiences, and values me as a student and person. TRIO is so important to me as without I think I would have had to drop out of college instead of about to become a senior with a 4.00 GPA while being the vice president of a student organization, a mentor, tutor, and award recipient for my research. TRIO is making a real impact.

Legislators should support TRIO because it helps to level the playing field for disadvantaged students like me, who without it would not be able to achieve the learning and impact that we have with it. TRIO provides a vital service to students like me and if ended would have devastating consequences for so many students. With TRIO we are better able to be successful citizens and contribute to the economy and our community. As a TRIO student, I know I will go on to do great things that will make a difference in the world. We need TRIO.

## **ELIZABETH JANE VARELMAN - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

Most importantly, TRIO has shown me that my circumstances do not define my potential. It has helped me break generational cycles, build a strong foundation for my future, and fight for opportunities that will uplift others. Without TRIO, I wouldn't be where I am today. It's not just a program—it's a movement that transforms lives.

Beyond academics, TRIO fosters a sense of belonging. Many students in the program share similar experiences of overcoming adversity, and TRIO creates a space where we can uplift each other. Through cultural trips and outreach programs, I've not only expanded my knowledge but also gained a deeper appreciation for advocacy and the power of education.



## **DAVID ALBERTO NEVAREZ-SAENZ - TALENT SEARCH - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

David Alberto Nevarez-Saenz went to school in Kansas City, KS and attended Grant Elementary School, Rosedale Middle School, and Sumner Academy of Arts and Science. He attended Wichita State University and earned a Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering. He is currently working at Airbus in Mobile, Alabama, where he modifies and upgrades aircraft cabins for airlines worldwide.

David was a participant in the University of Kansas TRIO Talent Search; Wichita State University Upward Bound Math & Science (9th-12th Grades); and the Wichita State University McNair Scholars Program (College)

The Talent Search Program: This program allowed me to reach my goals of going to college debt-free through all the one-on-one meetings, financial/college/family workshops, guest speakers, college visits, summer camps/academies, community service, and many more of the free resources! Every single activity taught me something unique that I eventually implemented in my everyday life. The TRIO Staff helped me prepare for college over a span of 6 years and I am extremely thankful for that. Please take advantage of the great team of mentors who want to help YOU be successful! In all honesty, TRIO really works!!

The Upward Bound Math & Science Program (WSU UBMS): Going to WSU's campus during my summers as a high school student really gave me the advantage to excel in my classes in the

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following school years. I got the opportunities to do my first research projects and express myself in ways that made me become a better version of myself. The mentoring and workshops shaped me as the person I am today.

The McNair Scholars Program: The amazing thing about TRIO is how they build you from a 12-year-old until you earn your doctorate degree! The college guidance on pushing forward helped me learn of the amazing opportunities with a doctorate degree. Combining research guidance and workshops, the program helped me learn how I can make a positive world impact in aerospace engineering by finding methods to minimize turbofan engine noise.

## **EASTYN ARMSTRONG - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Outside the classroom, I am a dedicated member of the Hornet Cheer team and a TRIO tutor, mentor, and academic coach. I also work as the social media intern for the Humanities and Social Sciences program. Creativity is one of my greatest strengths, evident in my hobby of creating armor and props inspired by video games and shows. My dream is to one day become a voice actor so I can bring characters to life through performance. My hope is that I'm laying the foundation of a fulfilling career that combines my creative mind with the love for storytelling. In my free time, I love spending time with my tuxedo cat, Nora. Ideally, I'd like to live in the mountains with a scenic view right in my backyard..



## **JOLEEN (JOJO) GONZALES - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

My name is Joleen Gonzales! I'm a junior from a small town in southwest Kansas. I live with my mom, and I'm the oldest sister of two brothers, so I'm a little rough around the edges. My career path will go like this: first, become a teacher working with younger students. I wish to be in an administration position one day, and then become a professor in my field. It will be a long time before my long-term goals are completed, but I do not plan on straying from that path. As for why a minor in crime and delinquency? I simply found it interesting to study! I'm also involved with our school's student government and the TRIO Honor Society because I want to work towards the betterment of my school.

## **TOPAINGA HERNANDEZ - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Most importantly, TRIO has shown me that my circumstances do not define my potential. It has helped me break generational cycles, build a strong foundation for my future, and fight for opportunities that will uplift others. Without TRIO, I wouldn't be where I am today. It's not just a program—it's a movement that transforms lives.

Beyond academics, TRIO fosters a sense of belonging. Many students in the program share similar experiences of overcoming adversity, and TRIO creates a space where we can uplift each other. Through cultural trips and



# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

outreach programs, I've not only expanded my knowledge but also gained a deeper appreciation for advocacy and the power of education.



## **DESTYNI MEADOWS - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

I am currently a junior. In addition to my studies, I serve as the president of Chi Alpha Epsilon and as a captain of the Emporia State cheerleading team. I am also a proud member of the sorority Kappa Delta Chi, where I hold multiple leadership positions. Many of these opportunities have come through the TRIO program, which has been instrumental in my journey as a first-generation college student. From the Bridge program, which helped me navigate college before classes even started, to the ongoing support TRIO has provided throughout my academic career, this program has been invaluable. Through TRIO, I've gained incredible opportunities and built meaningful relationships with faculty and fellow students. I am deeply grateful for the support I've received and for the chance to give back to a program that has been so rewarding and transformative in my life.

## **ELIZABETH WILLHITE - SSS - EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Next year I plan to apply to the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at University of Kansas. Being a first-generation college student has come with its challenges, especially without the guidance and support from my family, who were unfamiliar with the college process. Many of my high school peers had parents who graduated from college, which gave them a head start. This made the transition to college particularly stressful for me. However, TRIO services have been a breath of fresh air, providing much-needed support and guidance. For the first time, I had people I could turn to for help, which has made a world of difference in my academic journey. Through TRIO, I've been able to access a variety of valuable services, including mentoring, tutoring, and academic advising. These resources have helped me become a stronger student, taught me effective study strategies, and significantly reduced the stress of navigating college on my own. I'm deeply grateful for the support TRIO has provided, as it has helped me not only with my academics, but also with my personal growth and career goals.



# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

## **BENJAMIN DICKERSON - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

TRIO has given me the resources to become a successful engineering student. There are thousands of people like myself who live in rural communities in Kansas that are incredibly gifted and deserve a chance to further their educations.



## **JERRY MURRAY - SSS - THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS**

Made it easier through free food and free use of the printer. I also used some of the books. Some of the finance/scholarship events helped me with money too.

Legislators should keep it because it doesn't cost a lot of money and it helps students with finances.



## **HANNAH WATTS - UPWARD BOUND - COWLEY COLLEGE**

I was first introduced to the Upward Bound program when I was doing an activity at my local theater. I met my director, Liz Shepard and she asked what age I was. At the time, I was in Eighth grade and she said I was the perfect age to join the program. I decided to sign up and I was able to do the summer camp that same year. I didn't know it then, but I soon figured out that Upward Bound would do wonders for my personality, education and growth as a human being. Even though I have had a few troubles within the program, and heavily considered quitting, I am very happy I decided not to. I have enjoyed introducing my friends to the program and seeing them grow and also learn and have a great time. Now, I'm eighteen and ready to join the Student Support Services Trio program in a few months. My success and drive is all thanks to the Upward Bound program.





### **JESSICA CARROL - UPWARD BOUND - COWLEY COLLEGE**

Hello, my name is Jess, I have been in Upward Bound since 2023. This Trio program has changed my life for the better. I have always planned to go to college but Upward Bound has made me see what my future can look like. With all of the trips and the career seeking programs, it has opened my eyes to all of the possible careers that are available. The people in Upward Bound have made me a better person also.

Speaking with students from other schools has made me see what their school can offer. I like having a safe space to talk about school work, as well as, to get tutoring if I need it. There is always someone there to help me with homework or applying for scholarships. I really appreciate this program. I am glad my friends told me to join. I don't think I would succeed this much without Upward Bound. This program has made a noticeable difference in my life.



# KANSAS

*to the stars*

## TRIO

EDUCATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

RONALD E. MCNAIR  
POST-BACCALAUREATE  
ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

TALENT SEARCH

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