

Internship Program ‘Life-Changing’ for Students

EDUCATION: Mesa Impactship Provides Pay for Unpaid Internship Opportunities

By Madison Geering | March 24, 2025

Student Alexus Grey couldn't have imagined being a neuroscience student at John Hopkins University without her time at Mesa College.

Grey was part of the community college's Mesa Impactship

program, which funds students while they complete unpaid internships. Since her father passed away from skin cancer when she was five years old, she had a “vester interest in science and medicine.” Her time working at ScrippsResearch Institute was pivotal for her career. “I believe it was probably one of the most impactful experiences of my life,” Grey said. “Being part of internships geared towards what you're passionate about, while also being paid, is fundamental to an undergraduate study.”

The Mesa Impactship program was launched in September of 2022. Each semester, the program supports 150-200 students with either an hourly wage or a \$1,000 stipend. The money can go toward food, transportation, professional clothes and other costs associated with their internship.

“We're trying to give them a shot that they otherwise may not have gotten as a community college student,” Dean Alexander Berry said.

Many community college students struggle to balance work, school and experiences, like internships, that help propel their careers. The program's goal is to provide financial security so that students can take unpaid internships and gain valuable experience without worrying about cost. Such is the case for Mesa College pre-law student Angel Wilson. Before attending Mesa College, Wilson faced several challenges, from being kicked out of his parents' house to living in his car for six months.

Now, Wilson is balancing five internships with the help of the Mesa Impactship program, plans on attending a four-year university next fall and law school after he graduates.



Student Alexus Grey with her peers at an event for the Mesa Impactship program. Photo courtesy Mesa College



Alexander Berry
Dean
Mesa College

"Everything that I've been able to do and accomplish is simply because there's a bedrock of love and support from people at the school," Wilson said.

Variety of Funding Sources for Impactful Program

Since its founding, the Mesa Impactship program has supported over 700 students, providing over \$700,000 to support their pursuits. Students can join Mesa Impactship with an internship they've already secured or find one with the program's resources.

"I will always support Mesa Impactship Program," Grey said. "Because it was such a crucial steppingstone for me. I firmly believe that

I would not have been admitted to my dream university otherwise."

According to Berry, the college partners with over 200 employers in in-demand industries to provide students with opportunities.

The Mesa Impactship Program receives funding from several sources. Staffing is supported primarily by the Strong Workforce Program and state revenue. Student stipends are funded currently by the California Apprenticeship Initiative and the Perkins Act.

In the future, Berry hopes to expand the program's funding from private philanthropy. Another objective is extending the use of Strong Workforce Program funding to students.

"The reason we can't use those funds to support our students hinges on the wording of the legislation," Dean Amertah Perman said. "It's preventing us from providing even more access and support to students." On Tuesday, March 18 Perman testified in Sacramento in favor of California Assembly Bill 323, which would allow the extension of Strong Workforce Program funding to students.

"We have the right mix of student interest and employer interest, and now we're just trying to obtain the resources to more effectively serve our community," Berry said. Over 85,000 workforce training hours have been completed since the program began, and Berry plans for that number to keep growing. "I think when [anyone] reflects on how they got where they're at, there was someone in their life that stepped up and advocated for them,"

Berry said. "That's really what we're trying to do – to surround these students with resources, but, most importantly, a network they can rely on and be supported by when needed."



Amertah Perman
Dean
Mesa College

San Diego Community College District

SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

FOUNDED: 1972

CHANCELLOR: Gregory A. Smith

STUDENTS: Approximately 100,000

BUDGET: \$1.05 billion for 2024-25

WEBSITE: <https://www.sdccd.edu/index.aspx>

CONTACT: 619-388-6500

NOTABLE: SDCCD includes three credit colleges (San Diego City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College) and seven campuses of San Diego College of Continuing Education.

Link for sharing: <https://www.sdccd.edu/docs/District/cpr/SDBJInternshipProgram3-24-2025.pdf>

