

CSN Subject Matter: Nevada Promise

Air date: Sunday, October 13, 2019

Meghin Delaney: Welcome to this week's edition of CSN Subject matter, the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in conjunction with KNPR. I'm your host, Meghin Delaney, CSN's Communications Coordinator and I appreciate you being here with us. CSN is Nevada's largest and most diverse higher education institution naturally we've got plenty of great stories to share from within our walls.

On today's show I talk with Carolina Clavel and Guy Amato, CSN staff members who help administer a very special scholarship program in Nevada. The Promise scholarship, created in the 2017 legislature, help students complete course work at Nevada Community Colleges for free. We'll dive more into later, in the second half of the show we're actually going to talk to three peer facilitators and CSN students, all of whom also benefited from the scholarship.

As always you can learn more about CSN by visiting CSN.edu, we look forward to helping you succeed.

Thanks for being with me today, can you start can you give our audience a little bit of a brief introduction, who you are and what you do for a CSN? Carolina?

Carolina: Of course, Carolina Clavel, I'm the manager of the Promise scholarship at CSN and I've worked for the Nevada System of Higher Education for about 12 years now, different capacities, and I'm really excited about being part of this team.

Guy: I'm Guy Amato, I'm the director of community relations for the college I've been with CSN for 8 years.

Meghin: I always like to ask folks to share a bit of their education story and how they go to CSN. So what did your path look like? Guy, do you want to go first?

Guy: Sure, I graduated with a bachelor's degree many years ago and I went on to a career in business for many years. I came to Las Vegas 25 years ago and I've held various senior management positions in commercial real estate development, Title Insurance business for a while, and I ran a major nonprofit in town for several years and when I came to the college, they put me to work as a community relations person because I had been in the community for so long and I had met a lot of people and that I had worked with over the years.

Meghin: What about you, Carolian? How'd you end up here?

Carolina: I came to the United States in 1998 with my family, immigrants did not speak English, and I went to school here at Western High School and talked to a counselor and learned about CSN, the community colleges in the United States and what they did for the community. My language, of course, needed a little work, I was a good student but I still knew that I needed a little help before I got to the university. So I came to CSN, I had a really good experience with the student services at that time. they got me excited about starting college. so I started here I transferred to UNLV, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, my emphasis is international business and you know, I work with culture, I love travelling, I love languages so CSN has a very special place in my heart

because I felt accepted and I supported from the beginning and I knew at some point that I was going to work here, that's why I'm here.

Meghin: Well, I'm glad that you're both here, what an amazing and sort of different paths you both took to get here, and we see that a lot with our students because none of them have the same path here. So today, we're talking about the Promise program, what it is, what it does, why it's amazing, but can we start for folks who are unfamiliar, what is the program and what does it do? Maybe Carolina, can you explain that first?

Carolina: Of course, the Nevada Promise law was passed in July 2017 and basically provided a scholarship for students that graduated from high school in 2018, that were Nevada residents, that completed a number of requirements. The beauty of the scholarship was that they added a mentoring component and a community service component to it, there was no income requirement and there's no GPA requirement to it, so it basically was the solution for a lot of students that at that point most likely did not think that college was possible for them. So we had very little time to really put together a plan, an implementation plan within CSN, but at CSN the program was seen more as a college access initiative and we started quickly to put together an action plan. We called every high school, we talked to every principal, we called every counselor, we were trying to become very visible letting the students know about the opportunity and very quickly we received over 9,150 applications just that the first year that we started. You know, the law has very specific guidelines that the students have to meet, so throughout the year we had we put together a different types of incentives and initiatives at the high schools within the community to let them know how they could fulfill those requirements and where they could submit the requirements, and it was really a lot of work, but it was very effective.

Meghin: I remember a lot of people are very excited when this law passed, it's similar to initiatives that that basically make Community College free for students regardless of your GPA, like you said, and regardless of your income, so can you talk about how this program is administered. It's a last dollar scholarship, but what does that mean from a student's perspective?

Carolina: By itself, Nevada Promise will not offer the free experience, however we get you really close to it. So it will be applied to the student account only after all the free money, basically, the Pell Grant, the Millennium Scholarship, the Silver State Opportunity grants have been applied to the student account and if there is a remainder balance for registration and mandatory fees, so Nevada Promise will basically cover for that amount, and then there is a smaller fee that needs to be covered by the student, especially if they are going into programs that are more technical in nature that require uniforms or require other of your special equipment, but the reality is that it has been a game-changer for a lot of families, that most likely will not be able to get the Pell Grant for example because in terms of the federal government's, they make too much money to receive their funding.

Meghin: Can you tell us a little bit more about the requirements for students to apply and be eligible for this scholarship?

Carolina: We were fortunate that the Nevada Promise law was passed for the next biennium and a lot of suggestions that we brought were listened to by the legislation and some of those changes have been approved and right now we're waiting for the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents to make to vote on it, but there will be some changes from the past two years, that will affect the students and in a positive way I believe. In general, without giving too much detail, the students have to complete community service hours, they have to complete a mentoring activity, they have to do

a training that involves information about financial aid, information about college access and college enrollment processes, information about how to submit the requirements to the institutions so that they can be considered as a scholar. The law also requires students to complete a FAFSA application, that the free application for federal student aid and the students have to submit that by a certain deadline that is not shared with us by the Board of Regents, but as soon as we have that we'll share it, they also have to complete the verification process, whether they receive funding or not is not the problem, it's the fact that they have submit to application and one of the changes to the law is that if a student is not eligible to complete the FAFSA, they can go through the processes of the college to submit an alternate needs form, so that they can also be considered as eligible scholars.

Meghin: I think one of the things you mentioned in there that makes this program different from some of the other scholarship programs is the community service and the mentorship aspect. I know that that's a huge component of the program, I've helped facilitate some mentorship activities, part of that involves bringing in community members to work with our students, this is not strictly a program or initiative that happens within CSN's walls, so Guy can you talk to us about why it's so important for these students to participate in these mentorship activities?

Guy: The obvious benefit of this program is that students will get money to go to college and it gets paid for, that's the mechanism, but the overall impact of the program is much broader than that. A key component of the bill, as it was passed, was to engage students in the community through their community service, but also to engage the community with the schools, high school for those students applying and then college students are here receiving those funds in the subsequent years that they attend. So the mentor program is one way of engaging the community and meeting with students and initially with the high school applicants, we'll meet in group sessions and one mentor may have a group of up to 10 students, it's a guided discussion, Carolina's designed an activity to facilitate that discussion among students and the key point there is not a true relationship in that regard, but what it is an introduction to the concept of what a mentor could mean to them over the course of their academic career and into their careers in general, and we have many people from all walks of life in the community who apply to be mentors and meet with students in this discussion forum.

The students get to hear about a personal experience that that person has had in their academic pursuits, in their career and what I've noticed from attending all of these sessions for the last two years is that what really benefits the student is to hear another adult say I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I was a freshman or I started down this path and changed or some circumstance arose out of my control and I had to rethink my entire schooling and career, because the students coming in have been prepared to prepare to prepare for the next stage, the next year, and they think and my son was the same way, that he has to make a decision today about how he's going to spend the rest of his life and they're pressured into that situation from their expectations of their parents, their school counselors, whatever. When they're talking to another adult, who's not their parent, in a controlled environment, where they feel safe, they can open up and say well I'm going to major in technology or computers but I really want to be a musician.

They'll say that in that group setting, when they may not say that to a parent. It's for no other reason than to get them to think more freely and to get them to be aware that those are questions that they can ask for more information. The other super great benefit of this and I'm so enthusiastic about it because I work in the community a lot, is that people who come as mentors from the community, once they've done it one time, the first question they have is how soon can I do this again and how soon can I work with more students. So we have to let you know, control with the parameters of the program are at that

level, but we encourage them to sign up for the next level of mentoring at the school and that program is evolving because we have so many plans for what those mentors can do with their students.

So it engages the community with the educational process. To a person of these mentors that have met with these high school students all of them come away with the impression that they don't really know the benefits and how good our school district is until they met these students. They come away saying wow, these' students are engaged, they're aware, they're interested and they want to do something significant, they're not spoiled and they're not not paying attention, if they're on their iPhone more than likely different kind of some kind of social network their discussing a lot of current events because they're very aware of what's going on in the world, and so those folks that are mentors come out of that session changed. They come out with an impression of our high school students that's far more positive and they come out with impression of the school district that it's far more positive, especially when we're doing our sessions at the high school themselves. They get a sense of what's going on on a high school that has a large population of students, teachers involved and engaged, parents on campus and now they're part of that process.

I think the intent of the bill while it's to get as many students through the college experience as possible and create that culture, I think some of the biggest benefits are going to come from the fact that we're engaging community members in the educational process where they are literally hands on helping a student succeed. Then on the other side is engaging the students out in the community through their service to the community, to the nonprofit that we're engaged with, it's a tremendous win-win for everybody all around, there's no downside to this program at all. When you look at the cost associated with the potential benefit here, it's minuscule compared to the impact it's going to have on the community and to our students.

Meghin: I think, too, from a community member perspective, although I am a CSN employee, it's not much out of my day to go spend a couple hours with ten high school kids, you know down the road I'm hoping to find a Promise student to match on a more one-on-one mentor basis, which I know is sort of some of the things that are in the works too, and so that's amazing, but quickly here can we talk about some of the deadlines if we have a high school student or a parent listening who wants to know more about this wants to apply for this program, how would they go about doing?

Carolina: I will definitely recommend that they visit our website, it's www.csn.edu/promise and click on eligibility, a lot of information there is still in the works because we're waiting for approvals, but the first deadline they have to remember is October 31. The application opened on August 1, so they can start submitting your applications and giving us a call so that we can make sure the profile looks good that information is all there, but October 31, that is when we close the application and at that point we started disseminating information about what the requirements are and how to submit those requirements are and so on.

Meghin: And to be clear, I can apply by October 31, that doesn't commit me to exploring CSN, I can still explore my other options?

Carolina: Definitely, actually a study done by UNLV on the effects of Nevada Promise throughout the state, has shown that students may not end up at CSN but they have actually gone to UNLV, UNR and they're doing really well right and then idea here is that college access, that I was talking about, wherever they want to go, just go right and here's how.

Meghin: Great, well this is such an exciting time for CSN, I know that this program is just going to continue to evolve and get better the more we administer it. If you're just joining us now you're listening to CSN Subject Matter, the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in cooperation with KNPR. I've just finished chatting with our first two guests, Carolina and Guy, who help run the Promise Scholarship at CSN.

The Promise Program is relatively new in the state of Nevada and it helps students attend Nevada's community colleges at little to no cost. Next, we're going to welcome three students who are actively involved in the Nevada Promise Program as facilitators. They've also benefited directly from this program as recipients. As part of their jobs as facilitators, they make sure the incoming Promise students and the current Promise students stay on top of all the requirements. That means they answer a lot of questions via phone calls and email, they also help run a lot of the events we do a CSN for promise students. One of the best things that they do that they'll tell you about is they create that peer to peer mentorship, so not only do the Promise students get mentors from the community like we talked about but they got mentors from active CSN students.

Oscar, Luis and Mexley, thank you for being here with me would you guys mind introducing yourselves to the audience, Oscar, will you go first?

Oscar: Yes, my name is Oscar Flores, I am a program facilitator for the Nevada Promise Scholarship and also a Nevada promise recipient. I am currently finishing an associate of science degree to go for a bachelor's degree in engineering.

Mexley: Hello, my name is Mexley Morales, I'm both a facilitator and a Promise Scholarship recipient and I'm working on my associate of science degree.

Luis: Hi, I am Luis Rocha, I'm 19, I am both a Promise facilitator and a Promise Scholarship recipient at CSN and I'm also working on an associate of science degree here at CSN.

Meghin: Can you tell me how you found about the Promise Program, how you found out about CSN, how you ended up here?

Luis: OK, so ever since I was younger, I had always wanted a career in Health Sciences, but I never really knew how I was going to pay for that being adding more debt onto my family, them having to get another job or even me having to get a job, but that all changed when the Promise recruiter came to my high school and then they talk to me about CSN, and more options available to me and then me going to college became a lot more real, and then Promise came into my life and then whole program opened up, and it was a lot more than just money, that's when I knew that CSN was an option. That's when I knew that I wanted to go to college and college became my life.

Meghin: It become something you really could do at that point. Mexley?

Mexley: So I was always sure that I wanted to go to college and being the first in my family to attend, I felt my transition from high-school to college was very complicated, there's always that fear of am I doing everything right, how am I going to afford all these classes and I met with the recruiter for Nevada Promise at my high school and since then, that that opened up many resources, and with the help of the recruiter my transition was very reassuring after that and now I am here at CSN and I plan to

graduate with my associate of science and hopefully transfer to Nevada State College to work towards my bachelors of science in nursing. My ultimate goal is to become a registered nurse.

Meghin: So it sounds like in the first two stories that recruiters are pretty important, Oscar, did you have a similar experience?

Oscar: I never thought I would afford to attend college, so it was in my senior year in high school when a Gear Up coordinator asked me to apply for the scholarship and that's when it all changed. So one of the requirements for the scholarship was to apply for CSN for the upcoming fall and that's what I knew to be pretty serious. As the school year passed, I knew I must stay on top of the requirements because my priority is to receive the funding in order to attend college and thankfully, I received the scholarship and was able to attend college and my educational journey has had its ups and downs so developing new study habits, learning to say no at appropriate times, maintaining a proper routine and being responsible were all skills that were rough in the beginning, but have gone better throughout time.

Meghin: How had scholarship changed the game for you, you guys sort of mentioned it a little bit that maybe college wouldn't have been an option because of the expense, but can one of you talk about a little bit more, did you have a back-up plan or something else if the scholarship didn't come through?

Mexley: When I became a promise scholarship recipient I was exposed to many opportunities and resources that have all made a positive impact on my college journey, for example, I was able to speak with mentors that were in the same exact position that I was in and they gave me advice to help make my educational journey a bit easier, and so I didn't have to go through so many hurdles that they went through and that so many other students go through, and having that opportunity I was given an early glimpse of what to expect and how to better prepare for it as well as receiving the scholarship it has made it possible for me to get the degree I need in the time frame that I wanted.

Meghin: I know one of the issues at community colleges, is that sometimes students take a long time to get degree and we want to help make sure that you guys are getting your degree on time and getting out into the workforce. I know all of your scholarship recipients, but you're also facilitators which means you're helping students just like you and the next batch of students. So Oscar, can you tell me a little bit about what that job is like and what you what you do for the program?

Oscar: So in my role as a facilitator, I'm helping the new promise students meet the state requirements, in terms of doing community service hours, I'm going to promise trainings, mentor meetings and completing the FAFSA application, so because I'm helping them grow and succeed, but at the same time there's times when it can be stressful, so there have been times in which I received phone calls and emails from both students and parents in which there are cases where some of these students are falling behind their requirements, and I always reassure that it is important to meet these deadlines.

Meghin: So a lot of that work is reminding them to top of these things, but I know that part of the work too is facilitating the events, making connections with with Promise students, talking to your peers. Luis, do you have a favorite memory or example when you've worked with the students?

Luis: Yeah, recently we had the opportunity to have this Promise Academy in the summer and I had the opportunity to lead a group of students and see this one student in particular show this passion speaking and expressing her opinions, and you see that this engagement brings upon this open environments for engagement with other students and seeing that and being able to lead this group of

students is amazing, just me as a peer mentor, you would never expect this a year ago or two years ago, and it's just an amazing experience to make connections with these students and to see them all together in a group making connections between them and me being a part of this program and being part of this Academy and just making connections between them.

Meghin: So this summer academy was great, and I just want to talk about that a little bit more, and so what the Promise Team did here was took 150 students who have just finished high school, they're going to be coming to CSN in the fall as Promise students, and it was almost a jumpstart, a bridge program for them, and you guys as facilitators were super instrumental in that, I know that every time I dropped in you guys were busy doing things, helping set things up, helping break things down and that was I think just so amazing, so are there other experiences Luis, you talked about a particular experience that struck you from that but Mexley or Oscar are there things that happened in that summer program that stuck out in your minds as well?

Mexley: Yes, so fortunately I was able to see the students everyday, I would check them in and get to hear some of their stories about how an assignment they had that they thought was too difficult and they can't finish, but they completed it, managed to complete it, and bring something to the table and I was always a proud moment for me, I always encouraged them to always just bring something to the table, don't just run away from it and just getting to see them every morning and see that drive to learn, grow a little bit each and every day was always a great thing for me.

Meghin: Oscar, I know you talked about before as a very positive experience with your community mentor that you matched with during your freshman year, but I think one of the exciting things about what you guys get to do is you are a peer-to-peer mentor with these Promise students, so can you talk about how that's different from having a community mentor, being a peer mentor how you think that's different?

Oscar: I think that's different because a peer mentor, in my opinion, is really helpful because it can help you understand your path. So a peer mentor can relate to you, they can understand what you're going through, your struggles, hardships. As to a mentor that's older than you, they may be able to relate with you, but not as much because their times may be different than ours now and with the peer mentor they'd be able to help guide you in a better direction, of course.

Meghin: The application is open for new students to apply to Promise so if I were a high school senior or parent of a high school senior who's looking at this Promise Program, what would you say to them to encourage them to apply or to tell them about the program, what would your strategy be to market it to them. Why should they apply?

Luis: I would say that we're more than just money, there are different examples of all that we put into our program for the students, and if you have an interest for the scholarship, I would take it because all that we put in for the student is for your benefits and it's a lot more than money.

Meghin: I'm glad that here and that I've gone to spend some time with you thank you for joining me. You've been listening to CSN Subject Matter, the College of Southern Nevada's weekly radio program in conjunction with KNPR. We've been chatting today about the Promise Program at CSN, I want to thank my guests, Carolina, Guy, Mexley, Oscar and Luis for joining me on the show. Also big thanks as always to KNPR for helping produce this show. I'm Meghin Delaney, CSN's Communications Coordinator, you can learn more about CSN by visiting csn.edu or following us on your social media

platform of choice, we look forward to seeing you on campus and helping you succeed and I'll see you next time.