



**The Impact of
Philanthropy** **2025**



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WELCOME

Thank you for your support in 2025. Because of you, students at Empire State University are able to fulfill their dreams and achieve their goals.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Empire State University Foundation and how your generosity is enriching lives.



Or visit: sunyempire.edu/foundation



A Message from SUNY Empire Foundation Board Chairwoman

Marian Conway, Ph.D. '01, '04



The Empire State University Foundation is proud to support a variety of pathways to student success, ensuring greater access to a SUNY Empire degree. A college education should be accessible to as many students as possible; this tenet is central to SUNY Empire's mission.

The Foundation helps SUNY Empire open doors and remove barriers. We provide grants for faculty projects that enhance student learning, endowed scholarships that enable students to attend, and emergency assistance for students who struggle with affording basic needs.

One program that improves access is the Textbook Affordability Initiative. Books and materials are a significant financial burden. In my own educational journey, which I undertook while working full time and raising a family, the textbooks cost as much as half the price of a single college credit. Working with the Foundation, the SUNY Empire

library established the initiative in 2023 to sharply reduce, even eliminate, textbook costs by encouraging the use of Open Educational Resources.

We do not do this alone. We are deeply grateful to our donors, who are our partners. Thanks to their generosity, we can work together to advance our shared belief that education should be accessible to all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Conway".

Marian Conway, Ph.D. '01, '04
Chairwoman, Empire State University
Foundation Board of Directors



James '79 and Christine '93 Karcher

Challenge Met!

On November 25, 2024, we celebrated the graduation of 100,000 alumni, with a challenge to raise \$100,000 in 24 hours.

The Karcher family of alumni kicked off the celebration with a 2:1 match, tripling the power of your giving power. John '94 and Jane Corrou pledged \$10,000 if we generated 15 gifts or more!

By the end of the 24 hours, we raised nearly \$140,000. Congratulations and thank you to all who gave!

SPOTLIGHTS

For Amoya Stewart, receiving the Michael LaManna Memorial Scholarship was not only a financial boost but an emotional one. "It provided stability, dignity, and hope at a time when I needed it most," says Stewart, a single mom in New Windsor, NY, who works as a teacher's aide in a special ed classroom.

While a student at Empire State University, Stewart was hospitalized several times with a cervical spinal lesion. The condition caused tremendous pain in her neck — and a lot of medical bills.

The scholarship — established by Bob Lento '98 and his wife Kathryn, to honor her father's 43-year career as an educator — helped her pay tuition bills and stay on track toward getting her Master of Arts in Teaching. She plans to become a specialized teacher and advocate for equity and accessibility in education.

"This financial support has allowed me to focus more on my academic and professional goals, rather than worrying about tuition and related expenses," Stewart says. "It's not just an investment in my education but in the future of numerous students who will benefit from my knowledge and skills."



Amoya Stewart



As a 2024-25 Scholar Across the University, Assistant Professor Cailyn Green, Ph.D. did a presentation about treating addiction in neurodivergent clients for Empire State University's Center for Autism Advocacy, Research, Education, and Supports.

The event spawned a wealth of ideas, and Green's research expanded. "I began to dive deeper into specific evidence-based practices and clinical techniques that could help neurodivergent clients," she says.

Last summer, Green presented her work to 300 addiction professionals

at the Northwest Behavioral Health Institute in Portland, OR. She also hired a work-study student, who is exploring ways to enhance the treatment experience for neurodivergent clients, from adjustments to the office décor and intake process to the body language and conversational style that counselors use.

"This is a niche population that can be better served with some subtle but important accommodations," Green says. "My goal is to support the addiction professionals who treat them, so they can be better counselors."

Cailyn Green, Ph.D. is a former addiction counselor. *Scholars Across the University* is funded by donor support of the Empire State University Foundation as a way for faculty to share research and teaching.

With college textbooks averaging \$1,400 a year nationwide, Empire State University has secured a grant from ECMC Foundation to find ways to help lower those costs.

ECMC Foundation works to eliminate gaps in postsecondary completion, so underserved learners have greater opportunity for social and economic mobility. The grant expands on what SUNY Empire is already doing to make course materials less costly, including the adoption of OER — open educational resources — which give students access to less expensive course materials, including textbooks.

The \$300,000 grant enables analysts at Ithaca S+R, a higher education research firm, and librarians from SUNY Empire, SUNY Canton, and Monroe Community College to pilot affordable models for providing course materials that will eventually be used across the SUNY system. The models



will be based on a comprehensive report, now underway, on course material costs in the U.S.

Work on the grant is overseen by an advisory board that includes SUNY Empire student Nicole Brink-Ramey '25 and Shannon Pritting '22, '25, executive director of Graduate Studies and Scholarly Supports. "College affordability is built into SUNY Empire's



founding principles," Pritting says. "I'm happy we can test and advance strategies that will save students money on textbooks, while improving the quality of these resources."

The goal is to replicate the most cost-effective models for students at other colleges and universities in the U.S.



Bridging the Gap to a Bachelor's

More than 25 million Americans hold an associate degree. Data shows that these students are more likely to complete a four-year degree than adults without an associate degree.

Many of them want to get a four-year degree but find that road blocked financially. They may have exhausted available state and federal aid, or as working adults, are in an income bracket that renders them ineligible for financial aid.

To assist them, President Lisa Vollendorf and the Empire State University Foundation partnered with donors to launch the Presidential Scholars Opportunity Program (PSOP), which was established with a \$1 million endowment and enrolled its first cohort in the Fall 2023 term.

The program targets transfer students with an associate degree and offers \$1,000 in scholarships every year for up to four years, academic coaching, and monthly leadership meetings with PSOP staff and students, and President Vollendorf.

Meet two Presidential Scholars who are on the path to a bachelor's with support from the PSOP.

MELANIE POYNTER: STAYING ON TRACK

When Melanie Poynter landed a job at a domestic violence shelter, she knew she'd found her calling: to get a master's in social work and become a trauma therapist.

But first, she needed a bachelor's degree. Last fall, she was accepted into SUNY Empire's Presidential Scholars Opportunity Program.

Poynter, who now works as an addiction recovery case manager at an outpatient clinic, credits her mentor Nicholas Mendez and the PSOP with keeping her on track toward a degree in substance use studies.

"My supports from SUNY Empire have reminded me that things can be difficult, but it is learning to pivot and reframe when those times happen that decide how successful you will be," she says. "The scholarship also helps; any extra funds allow me to continue my educational journey and achieve my dreams along the way."

Those dreams include publishing a book of poetry filled with messages of hope. "I want to help people in any way I can and leave the world a better place than I found it," Poynter says.

"Any extra funds allow me to continue my educational journey and achieve my dreams along the way."



Melanie Poynter



JOSÉ OQUENDO '25: A CODE FOR SUCCESS

Monthly meetings with his mentor. Tutors as needed. Technical assistance with Microsoft. For José Oquendo '25, these supports in the Presidential Scholar Opportunity Program have given him the tools he needs to succeed as he works toward his bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

"My mentor [Nicholas Mendez] and the help of the people in the program lay out a blueprint that almost feels like a cheat code to be successful," says Oquendo, who works as a law enforcement officer in a psychiatric hospital. "But they give you the freedom to make your own decisions on how you want your college education to play out."

"I also wanted to break the generational barrier that was set by my family and show my children that they can also strive to pursue anything they put their minds to."

Oquendo grew up in New York City, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Far Rockaway, Queens. In 2009, he moved to Binghamton, NY, where he now lives with his fiancé and son; a grown stepdaughter lives nearby.

As a first-generation college student, Oquendo is the first in his family to have an associate degree. After he gets his bachelor's, he hopes to go on and get a master's and doctorate.

"I have always wanted to go back to school to open more doors and opportunities for progression in my career," he says. "Moreover, I wanted to break the generational barrier



José Oquendo '25

that was set by my family and show my children that they can also strive to pursue anything they put their minds to."



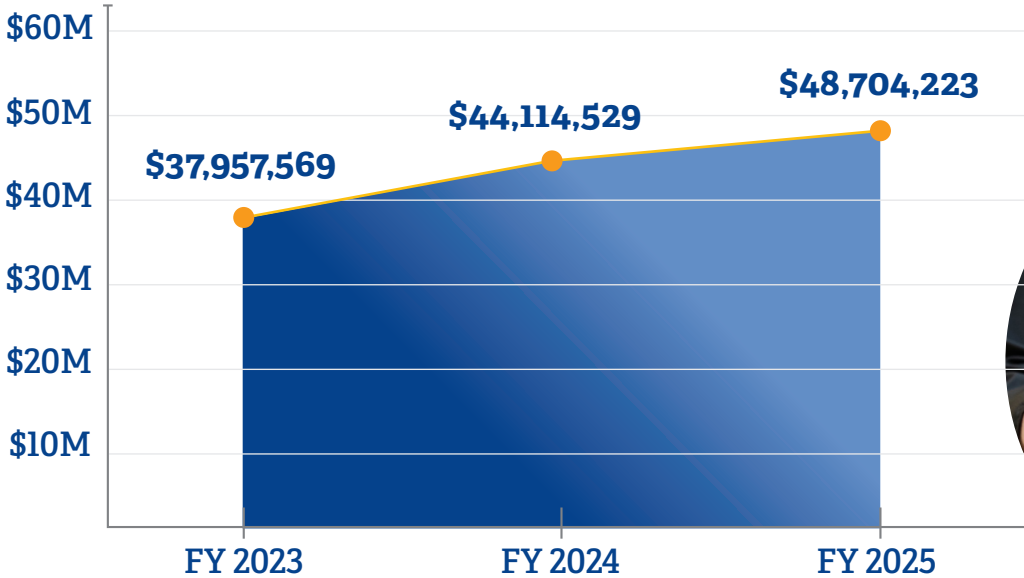
**Learn more about SUNY Empire's opportunity programs.
Scan the QR code or visit:
sunyempire.edu/student-support/opportunity-programs/**





TOTAL ENDOWMENT

Thanks to donor gifts, we've seen our endowment grow by more than **9%** in five years. Our prudent fiscal management enables us to invest in today's students while preserving and growing resources for the future.



* Each year, we draw 4% from the endowment to fund student scholarships and other academic programs.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

\$1,225,587

Dedicated to student scholarships and support in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

\$104,500

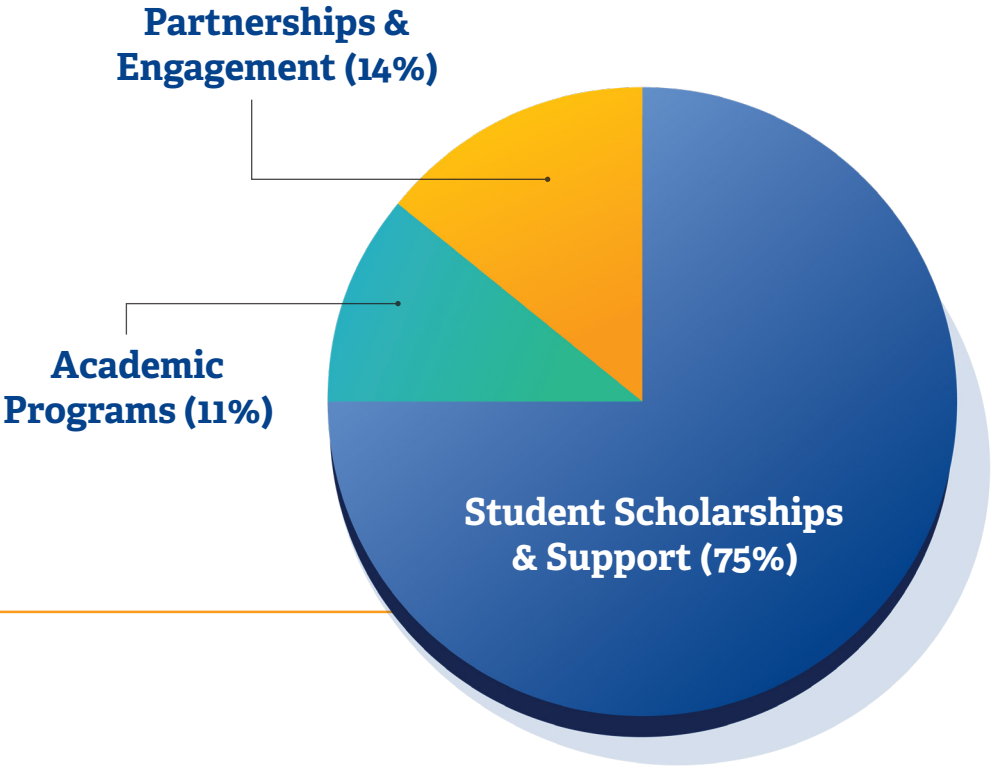
Provided assistance to students who experienced sudden financial hardships, such as housing insecurity, unexpected utility price hikes, and transportation issues.

\$119,541

Has been distributed to students and their families since the launch of the Virtual Food Pantry in January 2024.

FOUNDATION ALLOCATIONS

The Foundation Board of Directors allocated **\$2 million** to university programs and initiatives throughout the 2025-26 academic year, three-quarters of which went directly to students.

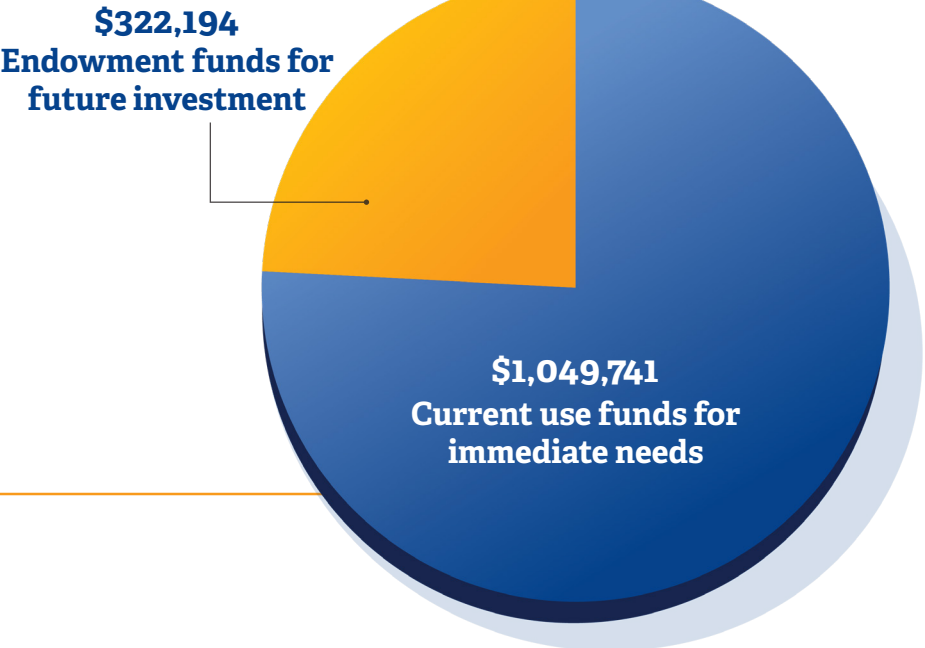


TOTAL ALLOCATIONS

\$2,003,848

TOTAL FUNDRAISING

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, SUNY Empire donors generously gave **\$1,371,935**. These gifts provided current use support to benefit the university's students and programs, and endowment funding to ensure future success.



TOTAL FUNDRAISING

\$1,371,935



THE PRESIDENT'S CLUB

The President's Club recognizes our most generous alumni and friends who make gifts totaling \$500 or more between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Members of the President's Club share the university's vision and demonstrate their dedication and commitment through their leadership support.

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\$5,000+

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▶ **Empire True**

Individuals who have donated for three or more consecutive years or participate in monthly giving are recognized as members of Empire True and denoted by this symbol ♦.

(D) Deceased



The Boyer Legacy Society recognizes individuals who have named Empire State University in their will or as the beneficiary of a trust or other planned gift. Membership represents an outstanding commitment to the university and helps ensure that SUNY Empire

maintains its leadership in higher education for adult students. The society is named in honor of Dr. Ernest Boyer, the former Chancellor of the State University of New York, and his wife Kay Boyer '78.

Members

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- Jacqueline Christine Hannon '15, '18
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- Maggie '11, '13, '16 and
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- Philip Hilden '82
- Susan T. Hollis
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- Michael C. Hubbard '75
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- Scott Jefferson '07
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and John F. Turben
Ann '86 and Bruce Turner
Cathleen L. Vadala '09
Jennifer L. VanEgas '16
Sharon Villines
Karin C. VonKay '79
and David C. Duggan
Natasha Vujanovic '21
Carey A. Wainwright '00
Felicia Helene Walker '11
George Lamont Warren '18, '24
James Weatherstone '12
Susan Marie Weber
Merrick Anthony and
Susan Rasheedah Wesley '17
Karen West '84, '95
Sharen L. Whitley Privette '21
Gareth Williams '07
Lillie M. Williams '97, '98
Eldon R. Williamson '94
Judith '02, '04 and Jack (D) Willis
Cedric T. Winn '08
Gloria Jean Wright '79
David Yamada '99
Cynthia Zaentz '89
(D) Deceased

Why I'm A Member

David Yamada '99 was a lawyer in the Labor Bureau of the New York State Attorney General's Office when he enrolled in the labor and policy studies master's program at Empire State University. "At SUNY Empire, research and analysis linked easily with real-life policy issues," he says. By the time he earned his degree, Yamada had launched an academic career at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, where he specializes in employment law and policy. His gratitude to SUNY Empire inspired the David Yamada '99 Labor Relations Scholarship. Yamada also joined the

Boyer Legacy Society and set up a bequest that endows the yearly scholarship.

"A recent recipient told me he used his scholarship to buy a computer to support his studies, whereas before he had to queue up for computer time at his local library," Yamada says. "He reminded me that even a modest scholarship like this one can make a true difference to a deserving student."



David Yamada '99



A Message From The President

Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.

Access is at the core of Empire State University's ethos. In 2026, we are celebrating 55 years of turning our mission into reality with the help of donors like you.

Your philanthropy creates opportunities for students from all walks of life to achieve their dream of earning a college degree, whether they started their journey within the last few years or decades ago.

Access in action means reaching more students who could benefit from the transformational impact of a college degree, including those left behind by traditional higher education. Our enrollments grew 9.2% in Fall 2025, on top of a 10% increase the prior year. We now serve over 17,500 students annually and are on track to serve 20,000 students by 2028.

This past year, the university restructured its eight academic schools into five colleges and made key hires across the university to support our growth. We also continue to invest in major student success initiatives that strengthen retention and persistence with wraparound services.

We are committed to building new academic programs aligned with the labor market, adding 30 programs in the last three years alone. Your generosity helps ensure that a SUNY Empire education remains accessible, affordable,



and relevant for all learners. With 63% of our undergraduates qualifying for Pell grants, we play an important role in helping people from all backgrounds and circumstances access a college education.

On behalf of our over 103,000 alumni, as well as our current and future students, I thank you for supporting SUNY Empire and our commitment to expanding access to higher education for students around the world.

Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.
President

FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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