

# PRACTICES EXCHANGE

## NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 59

**Growing the Coalition** If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at [glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org).

### YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: McMurry University



**McMurry University** in Abilene, Texas, has been providing transformational education to students for a century. Founded as a Methodist college in 1923, McMurry challenges students to examine our complex world from multiple perspectives in preparation for lives of leadership, service, and professional success. Proudly serving a racially and culturally diverse student body, we strive to foster an inclusive environment that enriches the lives of our students, a significant percentage of whom are first-generation college students and students from low-income families. McMurry has an enrollment of more than 1100 students and an 11:1 student-to-faculty ratio. The University is among the newest members of the Yes We Must Coalition, having joined in 2023.

The University offers undergraduate and graduate programs in face-to-face, blended, and online formats. Academic programs are managed in four divisions and two endowed schools: Division of Science and Mathematics, Division of Human Wellness and Health Sciences,

Division of Humanities, Religion, and Social Science, Division of Visual and Performing Arts and Education, Walter F. and Virginia Johnson School of Business, and Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing.

McMurry has also recently launched a robust Dual Credit Academy and is currently serving over 1400 high school students across more than 80 public and private high schools in Texas.



McMurry has developed a strong network of student support programs, including the *War Hawk Success Center*, which offers dedicated success coaching and career specialists, guiding students towards academic and professional achievement. A new focus on Career Preparation is emerging thanks to a significant endowed gift, designed to enhance the development of vocational identity and career confidence. New programs include *Career Discovery Trips*, an annual Professional Exploration Summit, and a *Professional Leadership Program*.

University faculty and students are involved in a wide variety of research, scholarship, and creative works and are actively engaged in grant writing. Significant recent awards include The Student Success Acceleration Program from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, TRIO Student Support Services, two Title V grants, and two NSF grants. These grant programs, totaling over \$1,500,000 per year, are helping to shape a strong future.

McMurry War Hawks compete in a wide variety of NCAA Division III athletic programs, including football, volleyball, men's and women's basketball, baseball, softball, men's and women's soccer, swimming, golf, tennis, and a track and field program that has won multiple championships over the years. Most recently, we have added an E-sports program that combines the digital age with competitive sports, attracting a new generation of athletes and fans. McMurry just completed the largest capital project in its 100-year history and is building a new student center and new apartments that will open in January of 2024.

For more information, please contact Matt Draud, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, at [draud.matt@mcm.edu](mailto:draud.matt@mcm.edu).

## Institutional Resources/Practices

### The College Completion Scholarship Program

**Mars Hill University's** Adult and Graduate Studies (AGS) program aims to make a college degree more accessible for working adults and other non-traditional students. To do so, AGS offers flexible online programming, easy credit transfer processes, and faculty and peer connections. In addition, the University recently launched a scholarship opportunity to help make degree completion more financially attainable for AGS students.

The annual College Completion Scholarship contest awards one full-tuition scholarship to an adult (23+ years old) who wants to earn a bachelor's degree in business, criminal justice, education, psychology, or social work through Mars Hill's Adult and Graduate Studies program. The scholarship award includes textbooks. Candidates may nominate themselves or someone else and are asked to submit an essay describing why the scholarship would change the life of the nominee.

Although there is only one scholarship recipient per year, the Adult and Graduate Studies program also extends tiered discounts for additional nominees that fall within the top rankings of the Scholarship Review Committee. In the first two years of the College Completion Scholarship program, the University has garnered almost 50 nominations for students that were outside our existing enrollment pipeline with 5 of those currently enrolled or planning to enroll in the coming year. The program reached 372,500 people via social media, with approximately 78,000 impressions daily and over 500 clicks for a one-month period during each campaign.

The stories of the scholarship recipients are important because they allow other would-be students to see themselves reflected in the successful candidates. Publicizing the stories of the recipients — and intentionally branding the scholarship as “College Completion” — is meant to encourage students who may have stopped out of school due to life's circumstances to consider returning and completing a degree. That connection, coupled with a partnership with a local media outlet that included frequent mentions about the scholarship during news programming and a feature story about recipients, generated interest in the scholarship in the local market and drove an increase in nominations and subsequent applications for the second year in a row. There was an overall increase of 15 applications during the same time period year over year.

Our most recent scholarship recipient is committed to improving his local community and works at Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry's Recovery Living Ministry. There, as part of his role in peer support, he helps homeless men who face challenges of mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and unemployment. Just this fall he began his studies in Mars Hill's psychology program, taking the online degree track that offers increased accessibility and affordability to working adults.

A second student is completing her college education several years after she dropped out. Initially a traditional student at Mars Hill, life changes forced her to hit the pause button on her college career after her sophomore year. She tried to continue attending classes, but the challenges of balancing a long commute with her coursework and the responsibilities of serving as caregiver for her grandparents proved overwhelming. What she thought would be a brief break stretched into years. She got married and had a daughter who, along with her husband's daughter from a previous relationship, are two of her primary motivations for wanting to finish her degree.



For more information, please contact Tracy Parkinson, Executive Vice President and Provost and Vice President for Enrollment, at [tracyparkinson@mhu.edu](mailto:tracyparkinson@mhu.edu).

*Mars Hill University is a premier private, liberal arts institution offering over 30 baccalaureate degrees, as well as master's degrees in criminal justice, elementary education, teaching, and management. Founded in 1856 by Baptist families of the region, the campus is located just 20 minutes north of Asheville in the mountains of western North Carolina.*

## **Submissions for Future Issues**

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, [barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org).