

Colorado Mountain College's Income Share Agreement Program Offers Interest-Free Option for DACA Students

[By Hunter B. Martin, NASFAA Staff Reporter](#)

As college costs rise, some institutions are expanding lending options to include income share agreements (ISAs). Colorado Mountain College (CMC) launched its new financial aid initiative called [Fund Sueños](#) (the Dream Fund) on Sept. 20, 2018.

“Fund Sueños was created primarily for our DACA students in Colorado,” said Shane Larson, vice president of student affairs.

In Colorado, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who graduated from Colorado high schools are eligible to receive in-state tuition. DACA students are also referred to as DREAMers, hence the name of the fund.

“Fund Sueños is an opportunity for DREAMers, but it could eventually expand to more students who dream about an opportunity to pursue higher education,” Larson added.

CMC created Fund Sueños after discovering a significant portion of the community wanted to attend college classes but were not eligible for federal student aid.

“What other options did they have?” asked Matthew Gianneschi, the chief operating officer at CMC. “[DACA students] have work authorization, so the ability to participate in the income-share is totally feasible,” Gianneschi said. “The only gap for these students is that they don’t qualify for federal financial aid.”

According to CMC, the vast majority of jobs in Colorado’s economy now require some form of higher education credential or degree. As an ISA, Fund Sueños helps bridge the financial gap for DACA students in exchange for a percentage of that student’s income after graduation. However, unlike some ISAs, there is no interest on financial aid through Fund Sueños. Students also have to reach a certain level of income before being required to begin repayment.

“We wanted to have another tool in the toolbox,” Gianneschi said. “If [Congress] could figure out how to provide support to all the students enrolled at [CMC] then maybe it wouldn’t be necessary in all cases.”

DACA students at CMC are encouraged to apply for other sources of funding such as scholarships and grants, but that is often not enough. Fund Sueños is an additional financial resource capped at \$3,000 a year for full-time students.

“The reason we put that cap in is because, when we look at our cost of attendance, we want it to be a help but we also don’t want the students to end up taking more than they need,” Larson said.

Currently, there are 12 students utilizing Fund Sueños, split between first-time and second-time borrowers.

“This is a cohort of students that doesn’t always want to identify themselves as being DACA students, so we have struggled to get the word out,” Larson said. “We need to continue to find ways to grow the program, and get the word out that this is an opportunity and another resource for students.”

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