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\$1.95 Million in Grant Funding Awarded to Increase College Completion among Mississippi Students

Students attending six Mississippi public universities will benefit from a five-year, multi-million dollar commitment from the Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF) to support college retention, persistence, and completion through the Improving Mississippi's Persistence and Completion Together (IMPACT) initiative.

WHEF is an endowed Mississippi non-profit organization that has focused its efforts on promoting increased postsecondary access among underrepresented students for nearly 25 years, and more recently, expanded its mission to also support increased credential completion within the state.

"The need to support students and to improve the rates of college completion among Mississippians has always existed. But, in light of COVID, the need has never been greater and more pressing," said WHEF President and CEO Jim McHale. "According to Georgetown University, it is estimated that 65% of all jobs require some kind of postsecondary education. Currently, Mississippi sits at 45.2%. In order to improve the lives of Mississippians, to support Mississippi's economic recovery, and to competitively position our state within a global economy, there is a critical need to not only have more students enroll in college, but to have them successfully complete their degree or credential."

A competitive request for proposals opened in November 2019, with grantees being notified in May 2020. The following schools have been awarded IMPACT grants:

Delta State University	\$400,000
Mississippi State University	\$200,000
Mississippi University of Women	\$357,736
Mississippi Valley State University	\$200,000
University of Mississippi	\$399,979
University of Southern Mississippi	\$400,000

In addition to \$1.95 million in grant awards, WHEF will underwrite biennial IMPACT convenings for all Mississippi public baccalaureate institutions, with the goal of creating a state-specific, facilitated community of practice for the exchange of findings, insights, and ideas. In addition, WHEF plans to provide coordinated access to high-quality professional development opportunities for institutional faculty and staff, innovations in data collection and usage, as well as platforms for peer learning.

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“In addition to providing financial resources to individual schools, we hope to create a learning community where generative conversations about college success can happen,” said WHEF Program Officer and IMPACT Project Lead Shanell Watson. “Although each Mississippi institution has its own unique challenges and opportunities, they are also working to solve the same problems. Our goal with the IMPACT initiative is to provide a place where our universities can share with and learn from one another, for the betterment of all our students.”

About Woodward Hines Education Foundation

The Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF) is committed to helping more Mississippians obtain postsecondary credentials, college certifications, and degrees that lead to meaningful employment.

Since its inception, WHEF has worked to increase college access and entry for young people in Mississippi and has expanded that work to support promising practices that lead to college persistence and completion. The foundation envisions a Mississippi where all people can secure the training and education beyond high school that will allow them to advance their quality of life, strengthen their communities, and contribute to a vibrant and prosperous future for the state.