



FAIRMONT STATE UNIVERSITY™

Office of Sponsored Programs

September 26, 2024



SPECIAL FEATURE

Title III Grant

Upcoming & Ongoing Title III Initiatives on Campus

A wide variety of sponsored programs are always ongoing at Fairmont State, but this week the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) wants to draw special attention to the Title III program. In October 2023, Fairmont State was awarded more than \$2.2 million dollars through the U.S. Department of Education's Strengthening Institutions Program grant. With the first year of the five-year project nearly completed, the impact is already being felt around campus.

Valerie Morpew, Ed.D., serves as the Title III Project Director. The

grant funded two new positions: Nicole Samson was hired as the Career Connections Coordinator and Dedra Cobb was hired as the Student Success Coordinator. The Title III team has been working hard to bring multiple initiatives to fruition.

As a dedicated educator, Morphew has cared about student success her entire career: “The job’s all about making a difference in the lives of students, so this program is a natural extension for me.” Her experience with project management also makes her current position as Project Director a perfect fit.

For Dedra Cobb, the opportunity to work as Title III’s Student Success Coordinator was a welcome one. She explained, “When I first saw the grant, I immediately thought, ‘What a wonderful initiative!’ I wanted to be part of what I hope will create positive experiences for our students—some of the same experiences I had as a student here at Fairmont State.”

Nicole Samson indicated the potential student impact as a benefit of her position as Career Connections Coordinator and said, “I am inspired by the vision to improve numerous areas impacting student success for not just one group of students but many.”

Overall, the Title III grant is focused on connecting systems, resources, classrooms, and experiences to truly support underserved students. This includes projects such as developing a Student Professional Corps, creating a Student Empowerment Liaison peer mentor program, integrating HyFlex courses into the University’s offerings, and streamlining existing campus systems.

Many of these projects build upon existing student success and retention initiatives, and Title III staff work collaboratively with numerous faculty and departments across campus. According to Samson, “This highlights how so many of us play a role in the success of our students. Our individual roles vary, but collectively, we offer one experience to students, and we are most effective when we work together.”

Morphew explained, “The Student Professional Corps is going to elevate the positions of students working on campus and enhance these positions so that students are developing skills that help them to become more workplace ready.” Faculty and staff can expect restructuring of student positions and descriptions to a paraprofessional level in the coming months.

“Student Empowerment Liaisons (SELs) will be a bridge between students and the resources they need,” Morphew continued. SELs will serve as peer mentors to their fellow students, providing information on and access to Fairmont State services. They will help students identify and utilize various offices, departments, and resources that might be otherwise confusing. Cobb said, “Our ambassador program [SELs], I believe, will have a huge impact on student success, as it is truly students for students.”

HyFlex refers to courses that include three modalities: in person, online synchronous, and online asynchronous. This provides greater flexibility for students who may need to switch between modalities due to childcare, illness, employment, and various other life situations. Members of the Title III HyFlex Committee shared information and updates on HyFlex during a recent Lunch & Learn and will continue to provide timely, accurate information to faculty and staff. A HyFlex Roundtable is scheduled for October to bring together the campus community to learn more about opportunities and to receive input from participants.

Streamlining the various campus systems is a part of the project led by Frank Lafone, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, and Heath Howard, Director of Institutional Research. A task force has come together to explore how Fairmont State can improve the efficiency and efficacy of its systems. Two Junior Research Associates have been hired and are currently working to assist with this process.

Beyond the logistical details of the grant, Morpew and team feel genuinely inspired by the Title III program. “The potential reach we have is huge. We can take this vision to remove barriers to improve student success and retention and really see students’ lives improve and even their families’ lives improve,” Morpew shared.

Title III program members want to remind Fairmont State faculty and staff that this work will not be done in isolation. If you have expertise or interest in a specific aspect of the program, contact *Valerie Morpew*, *Dedra Cobb*, or *Nicole Samson* to get involved.

For more information about the ongoing progress of this sponsored program, visit the Title III website [here](#).

SPECIAL NOTE:

Any grant application, proposal, or request for external funding must be reviewed and approved **prior to submission** through an internal process managed by the Office of Sponsored Programs. Please *visit our website* for more information and to access the required forms which facilitate the internal review and approval process.



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