
Holyoke Community College recruiting students for human services program

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College is now recruiting students interested in working in the human services field for a free, two-semester certificate program that starts in September 2024.

This is the second year of the grant-funded human services certificate program, which started in the fall of 2023 after the college received a \$1.28

million award from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The grant covers the full cost of tuition, fees, books, and supplies for students who want to earn a certificate in human services and is coupled with a paid internship at participating local social service agencies.

HCC's community partners

in the grant include the Gandara Center, Craig's Doors, Mental Health Association, and Jewish Family Services. The grant and the HCC program are intended to help address a shortage of workers in the human services industry.

"This program is really meant to accelerate a student's entry into the workforce," said Donna Rowe, chair of

HCC's Human Services program. "It's wonderful that these four agencies have made this agreement with us. They're looking for workers, and we have students looking to get into the field."

The two-semester Human Services Internship Program is now looking to fill slots for up to 30 full-time students to

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start in the fall.

HCC celebrated the first cohort of students to complete the program on May 1.

“Learning how to make a positive impact in people’s lives has been a rewarding and meaningful journey,” said graduating student Crystal Kenyon of Monson, who is already working as an assistant in the case management department at Baystate Wing Hospital in Palmer.

Alezza Maldonado joined the program last fall with her sister, Oceana Maldonado, who both live in Holyoke.

“This is the perfect opportunity to gain more skills to grow in your career,” said Alezza Maldonado, who works at One Holyoke. “It is a well-developed program, and we had 100 percent support from the HCC faculty and staff. I think anyone would thrive in the program, even if they had been out of school for a long time.”

The human services industry presents a wide variety of career options for people who are interested in providing care to children, seniors, adolescents, the homeless, or individuals dealing with substance abuse or mental health issues.

Thanks to the grant, the total savings for full-time students is estimated to be \$5,384 per semester. During their

second-semester internship, students will receive a stipend of \$2,500, which will pay \$20 an hour for 10 hours a week of on-the-job training and learning.

A 2018 report from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission detailed a gap of some 600 social/human service workers in western Massachusetts, a deficit that widened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There is definitely a big shortage of human service workers,” said Amy Brandt, HCC dean of Health Sciences. “It’s a challenge for agencies who have a variety of workers at different levels. They don’t have a lot of additional resources to develop that talent pool. They really are on shoestring budgets

trying to provide services to the community. When you look at this grant, it’s a huge investment that can really help fill their needs.”

The 24-credit human services certificate students earn can also be “stacked” or applied toward an associate degree in human services, which could then lead to a bachelor’s degree in social work at a four-year college or university.

“The program really has the potential to set students up for lifelong learning and career advancement,” said Brandt, “and it’s also helping these social service agencies meet their needs.”

For more information, or to apply, please visit: hcc.edu/hsv-grant.