

New navigator takes over

COLLEGE EMPLOYEE HELPS STUDENTS GET BENEFITS

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The Clackamas Print sat down with Helen Paz, the benefits navigator at Clackamas Community College, to talk about the benefits students can get.

The Clackamas Print: When did you first come to CCC?

Helen Paz: I didn't go to school here, unfortunately. I started at CCC in the fall of 2012. I've been here a while I initially started as a GED instructor with eh skills development department.

TCP: What do you do?

Paz: A lot of students don't know that there are benefits like government and community college state benefits that belong to you. So maybe you're struggling with hunger or buying groceries, let me find a connection for you. Or maybe you're struggling with paying some utilities or finding low-cost utilities or rent, any of that stuff, childcare. It's just a wide variety of things that I can help students locate, to help alleviate some of the stressful financial burdens or childcare burdens, so they can actually stay.

TCP: What services are students accessing?

Paz: A lot of students may be working already with some services

and maybe they got connected with SNAP. But now you're realizing that [you] can't afford internet, or [you] don't have a way to get to the college.

There are other benefits that you qualify for. So students could come to me, and I'd tell you something like, "Hey, you're on SNAP, well, you qualify for a low cost Wi-Fi, XFINITY for like \$9.95 a month, let's get you on that." So if you're on SNAP, we can sign up on that. And, you know, maybe pay for some books, or pay for some clothes related to your job, like you need a polo shirt for your job.

TCP: Was there anything about being a GED instructor that made you want to do the job you have now?

Paz: I love instructing. My entire career, I've had a teaching position, but it's been in many different forms. And it's always about helping people. When I started teaching GED, I quickly realized that my students had a ton of different things going on that weren't allowing them to focus. So one of them being hunger, I made sure to always bring snacks and talk about how chewing is really important for thinking. I don't know if you've ever heard the whole gum-chewing theory.

Like, I don't know if it's necessarily true, but it got people to eat in class so that we can focus on other things like math. And then it just, I mean, it

went from there. I taught from 2012 up until the pandemic hit.

TCP: How can students reach you?

Paz: There's a couple of ways. We're currently working on a survey link for people to express to me their situation, and then it gets submitted to an email, and then I write it back. But while we're working on that, there is an email that anybody can reach me. It's benefits@clackamas.edu. And then my school email is helenp@clackamas.edu. And then my my extension is 594-6180. Any time anybody wants to get in touch with me, they can get that way for now, and there will be an update in the process as well.

TCP: How many students do you think are in need of resources?

Paz: Oh, quite a bit, a large percentage of Clackamas. There are quite a few students who probably don't know, or access as much as they could. So I'm looking for the percentage of students that have the zero to some, so we can again, get them more, but I'd be willing to say that a large percentage of students at CCC would qualify or need some sort of assistance, and maybe they're just too proud to ask or talk about it. Or maybe they don't even perceive it as a problem.

TCP: What are your ideas for reaching those students who don't know where to go for resources?

Paz: So I continue to invite myself to these meetings where I don't belong. I try to connect with, you know, I count on maybe ASG, for y'all to help me a little bit when we're on campus. Hopefully, that comes back soon. And there's, you know, some plans for some fliers, as many as possible.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Helen Paz is the benefits navigator for CCC. Photo by Joseph Lohmolder.