BC Launches Laptop Loaner to Learn Program with Support from Greg and Mary Bynum (Page 1)

In response to student survey data that indicated high student need for technology as Bakersfield College moved instruction online, BC developed a laptop loan program with a generous donation from Greg and Mary Bynum.

Of Bakersfield College’s 40,000 students, 80% are First Generation, approximately 80% are low income, and many rely on campus WiFi and computer labs to access the internet in order to complete their assignments. Students’ responses to a March 20 survey revealed that about one in 10 students do not have adequate off-campus internet access while nearly a quarter of students use their cell phones as their primary device to access their courses.

Understanding the demographics of BC students, Mary Bynum said, “My heart goes out to those in our community who are struggling to make ends meet, including Bakersfield College students who are navigating so many difficulties in their lives. BC has always been about uplifting our community, giving those in poverty, facing unemployment, or other challenges a vehicle to a better life. I am just happy that Greg and I are able to play a small part in supporting these students to complete their education and find jobs.”

To keep these vulnerable students on path during this tumultuous time, Bakersfield College’s laptop loan program will funnel 500 Chromebooks to students affected by the transition to a fully online environment due to the COVID-19 threat. These Chromebooks will be equipped with the necessary technology to ensure students are able to complete their college-level requirements. These include:

1. Canvas, an online learning management platform developed for each course for faculty to house all course materials and assignments
2. Zoom Meeting, a cloud-based service which offers virtual meetings for video conferencing capability for synchronized classrooms
3. Starfish, a retention program that creates an online student success environment, facilitating programs such as advising, tutoring, mentoring, and more with the aim of improving student success and retention who are helping students like me.”

Greg Bynum emphasized the value of higher education and the important role Bakersfield College plays in this community. He said, “During this unprecedented time and as unemployment rates exceed those of the most deep recessions we have seen, education is even more critical in providing the stability necessary to fuel us through this time of severe economic strife. Higher education is essential to keep our community strong, our state competitive, and our nation prosperous as those experiencing job loss need to rebuild. Bakersfield College has played this role for generations, including helping Mary and me get our start. I am confident that this investment will equip those in our community with the tools necessary to engage as active members of our community and contribute to a vibrant economy once again.”
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"Being able to get a laptop from BC after my classes got moved online is the only way I am able to stay in school," said Sharon Gilbert, BC student and Sociology major. "Thank you to BC and to the donors who are helping students like me."

In late January, Bakersfield College began closely monitoring the COVID-19 Pandemic, launching a communication and education campaign, releasing a Pandemic Response Plan, and hosting daily forums across campus. Anticipating the likelihood of a closure, BC began transitioning the first wave of 1,000 courses to an online environment in early March while supporting faculty in getting the necessary training to transition the over 2,500 courses offered in spring 2020. By Thursday, March 19, BC had moved 100% of its courses fully online, 100% of its student services and academic support fully online, prepared all employees to work remotely, and closed the physical campus.

President Christian expressed her gratitude to the Bynums for their support, saying, “This is a very difficult time for our students who are working to stay in class and focused on their goals despite mass upheaval to their daily routines. The generosity of Greg and Mary Bynum will ensure our students stay on their educational path toward creating a better life for themselves, their families, and our communities. This is the kind of hope our students need right now.”

Students will need only to complete a very simple, low barrier, online application they can access from their cell phones to provide basic contact information. The BC Laptop Loaner to Learn application can be found at https://bcstudentlife.wufoo.com/forms/q11jhxj00qyhc80/.

Jeff Bell, Chair of Bakersfield College Foundation, emphasized that donors’ contributions have a direct impact on student success, stating, “The Bakersfield College Foundation’s mission is to support Bakersfield College and its students. This is a very difficult time for the students we serve - the majority of whom are among the lowest socioeconomic levels in Kern County. The Foundation is grateful to the Bynums for their generosity and contribution to BC students.”

If you are interested and able to donate money or a used laptop to the Laptop Loaner to Learn Program for low-income BC students, please contact the Bakersfield College Foundation at foundation@bakersfieldcollege.edu to make a tax-deductible contribution.

(Photos/Captions Attached)

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