



News Release

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WESTERN'S COMPUTER SCIENCE, MATH AND PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

AWARDED \$294,200 GRANT

St. Joseph, Mo. — Sept. 25, 2003 — James Blevins, a senior mathematics and Spanish major at Missouri Western State College, hopes to ease his tuition burden next semester, thanks to a grant for scholarships that was awarded to the computer science, mathematics and physics department. The department recently learned that they were the recipients of a \$294,200 grant, the largest faculty grant award in college history.

The objective of the grant is to increase the number of underrepresented groups, such as minorities, women and nontraditional students, in the computer science and mathematics fields by awarding scholarships to academically talented and financially needy students. The grant is from the National Science Foundation's Division of Undergraduate Education Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics Scholarships program.

"I think it's absolutely wonderful," said Blevins, who is a nontraditional student and husband and father of two from St. Joseph. "The department saw a need and did what it took to fill it. Getting the grant is just another shining example of how good the faculty are at Western."

The four-year grant will provide up to 20 scholarships of \$3,125 per academic year for Western computer science or mathematics majors. To qualify for a scholarship, a student must declare a major of computer science or mathematics by the beginning of the scholarship period, have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0, and meet the financial aid requirements set by the US Department of Education. Scholarships may be renewed up to a maximum of eight semesters as long as the criteria are met. The scholarships awards will begin in the spring 2004 semester.

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Western offers bachelor of science degrees in computer science, computer information systems, mathematics and teacher education in mathematics with several options for minors. Dr. Sharon Vestal, assistant professor of computer science, mathematics and physics and principal investigator of the grant, noted that students who graduated from Western with degrees in the mathematics and computer science fields have pursued careers as computer programmers, software engineers, actuaries, operations research analysts, statisticians and teachers. Several have continued their education in graduate school.

“I know our students work a lot out of school,” Dr. Vestal said. “My hope is that this scholarship will alleviate some of their financial burdens so they can spend more time studying and less time working to put themselves through school.”

“It would have a huge impact on me if I were awarded one of these scholarships,” said Blevins.

Dr. Vestal plans to have the scholarship recipients meet on a regular basis and host guest speakers, tour local industries, and create internship opportunities for students at local businesses. The review board of the grant committee noted this as a major strength of the project.

Other criteria for the grant award included integration of research and education, and the ability to broaden opportunities for all citizens – men and women, underrepresented minorities and persons with disabilities.

Dr. Don Vestal, assistant professor of computer science, mathematics and physics assisted Dr. Sharon Vestal with the grant writing. Also assisting in the project were Dr. Ken Lee, professor of computer science, mathematics and physics; Kent Pickett, assistant professor of computer science, mathematics and physics; and Deborah Becker, instructor of computer science, mathematics and physics.

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.

