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**CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY WORKS TO CLOSE CHICAGO'S BLACK AND LATINX
EDUCATION AND WEALTH GAP WITH LAUNCH OF ITS
COUGAR COMMITMENT INITIATIVE**

*Initiative Offers Free Tuition for All Incoming Freshman, Provides Training and Holistic Support
to Prospective and Current Students*

CHICAGO (June 11, 2020) – Chicago State University (CSU) announces the launch of its new Cougar Commitment Initiative, representing a comprehensive suite of high-quality academic programming and scholarships. With the support of leaders across the city and the state, CSU is taking swift action to dismantle barriers to education equity for Black and Latinx communities. Cougar Commitment is a data-driven strategy for increasing CSU's student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, an initiative that will drive measurable - and sustainable - results to close the Black and Latinx education and wealth gap in Chicago and the State of Illinois.

"With this bold action, Chicago State University is sending the message to prospective students and families across the state and region, we are here for you," said Zaldwaynaka "Z" Scott, Esq., President of Chicago State University. "Current events amplify the challenges and underscore the need to address the range of obstacles that create roadblocks for students and families seeking to enroll in college and earn a college degree. Cougar Commitment addresses those challenges head on, providing the programs and financial support students need to earn an education that equips them to enter the workforce or start a business."

The initiative is holistic and based on best practices for addressing the academic, financial and personal well-being challenges that can prevent students from enrolling, persisting, and graduating college. Most notably is the new *Rise Academy*, a year-long student success initiative for freshmen. All incoming CSU freshmen who successfully complete the five-week summer program as part of the academy will receive a full-tuition and fee scholarship, free textbooks, and free laptops and internet service for the 2020-21 academic year starting in the fall. The scholarship fills the gap between grants and tuition, fees, and textbook costs.

Other components of the initiative range from microgrants and scholarships, financial education, workforce preparedness training, to access to a food pantry, and ensuring that CSU students are supported in every aspect of their college experience. The new initiative is supported financially by a reallocation of current funding and new gifts from corporate and foundation

partners, including The Joyce Foundation, spearheaded by the Chicago State Foundation, the University's chief fundraising partner.

CSU is focused on utilizing the power of higher education to close the wealth gaps that exist between minority and majority communities. According to a study by [Georgetown University](#), approximately two-thirds of all jobs in the U.S. require postsecondary education. However, according to the [Illinois Board of Education's 2018 Annual Report](#), Illinois public universities and colleges have experienced a 26 percent decline in the enrollment of African-American students.

With its newly piloted Cougar Commitment Initiative, Chicago State University is actively working to reverse this trend and increase college enrollment and graduation rates of underrepresented Black students. As the only U.S. Department of Education-designated, four-year predominantly Black institution in Illinois, CSU is a critical institution for reversing declining enrollment rates of African Americans.

"It has never been a better time to become a Cougar," said Dr. Carlos A. Gooden, Director of Admissions and Recruitment. "Chicago State University has always welcomed a diverse student body, with more than 60 percent first-generation college students. The multi-pronged Cougar Commitment opens the pathway to many more, introducing students to higher education while in high school, as well as providing the resources needed to support academic success once enrolled as a CSU student."

To become a Rise Scholar, admitted freshman students must register at <https://www.csu.edu/risescholars/>.

For more detailed information about the Cougar Commitment Initiative and programming, please visit <https://www.csu.edu/cougarcommitment/>.

ABOUT CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1867, Chicago State University (CSU) is a public, comprehensive post-secondary institution that stands distinctively as one of Illinois's oldest public universities, providing access to higher education for students of diverse backgrounds and educational needs. CSU is a nationally accredited university with five colleges—Health Sciences, Arts and Science, Business, Education, and Pharmacy—offering 31 undergraduate and 25 graduate degree-granting programs. Consistently evolving to reflect state-of-the-art trends in higher education, CSU prepares students for success in the twenty-first century.

ABOUT CHICAGO STATE FOUNDATION

Serving as the university's chief fund development partner, the mission of Chicago State Foundation (CSF) is to advance the interests and welfare of Chicago State University by building relationships, securing philanthropic support, stewarding assets and otherwise procuring private support on behalf of the University. Working in concert with the President of Chicago State University, CSF helps to identify strategic private support priorities, create suitable fundraising strategies and tactics, and implement and evaluate appropriate development programs designed to advance the interests and welfare of the University. In its role, CSF procures private support on behalf of the University.

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