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## PRESS RELEASE

# AFSCME Members, Family Members Awarded 2024 Union Plus Scholarships

*Winners Honored for Achievement and Union Values*

**Washington, D.C.** – Union Plus recently awarded \$200,000 in scholarships to 209 students representing 42 unions, including 22 winners representing the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). This year's group of scholarship recipients includes university, college, and trade or technical school students from 33 states, the District of Columbia, and one Canadian province. The AFSCME winners are:

- **Carsyn Casebolt of Delaware, Ohio.** Casebolt, whose mother, Kristin Fisher, is a member of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA)/AFSCME Local 11, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Jacklyn Coglianese of Fresh Meadows, New York.** Coglianese, whose mother, Marylouise Raab, is a member of AFSCME District Council 37, Local 372, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Joelle Dunnell of Lone, California.** Dunnell, who is a member of AFSCME Council 57, Local 2620, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Amy Abigail Estrada of Southold, New York.** Estrada, whose mother, Miriam Huertas, is a member of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA)/AFSCME Local 1000, Unit 870 has been awarded a \$2,000 scholarship.
- **Ariyanna Lenae Fernandez of Olympia, Washington.** Fernandez, whose mother, Evette Superales, is a member of the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE)/AFSCME Council 28, Local 443, has been awarded a \$2,000 scholarship.
- **Rajeana Harris of Lincoln, Nebraska.** Harris, who is a member of the Nebraska Association of Public Employees (NAPE)/AFSCME Local 61, has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Troy William Holbrook of East Alton, Illinois.** Holbrook, whose father, Randall Holbrook, is a member of AFSCME Council 31, Local 1805, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Dillon Michael Horrie of Kewanee, Illinois.** Horrie, whose father, Landon Horrie, is a member of AFSCME Council 31, Local 3744 has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Addison Grace Hughes of Mount Sterling, Illinois.** Hughes, whose father, Aaron Hughes, is a member of AFSCME Council 31, Local 3567, has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Abigaile Nicole Ledbetter of Brownstown, Illinois.** Ledbetter, whose father, Lucas Ledbetter, and mother, Monica Ledbetter, are members of AFSCME Council 31, Local 993, has been awarded a \$750 scholarship.

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- **Jacob Mohring of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.** Mohring, whose father, Andrew Mohring, is a member of AFSCME Council 88, Local 2455, has been awarded a \$4,000 scholarship. Jacob was a Union Plus Scholarship recipient in 2021 and 2023.
- **Juliet Elizabeth Murray of Rhinebeck, New York.** Murray, whose mother, Linda Murray, is a member of CSEA/AFSCME Local 1000, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Shannen Paige O'Brien of Feeding Hills, Massachusetts.** O'Brien, who is a member of AFSCME Council 93, Local 1067, has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Tangela Yvonne Oliver of Carbondale, Illinois.** Oliver, who is a member of AFSCME Council 31, Local 2806, has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Cecilia Ragsdale of San Ysidro, California.** Ragsdale, who is a member of United Domestic Workers of America (UDW)/AFSCME Local 3930, has been awarded a \$750 scholarship.
- **Perla Rodriguez of Roosevelt, New York.** Rodriguez, whose mother, Engel Rodriguez, is a member of CSEA/AFSCME Local 1000, Unit 830, has been awarded a \$2,000 scholarship.
- **Luna Serena Romero of Albuquerque, New Mexico.** Romero, whose father, Augustine Romero, is a member of AFSCME Council 18, Local 3022, has been awarded a \$4,000 scholarship.
- **Myles Sanders of Matteson, Illinois.** Sanders, whose father, Marlon Sanders, is a member of AFSCME Council 31, Local 2833, has been awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.
- **Marina Santini of Georgetown, Delaware.** Santini, whose father, Michael Santini, is a member of AFSCME Local 247, has been awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.
- **Jackson Nikolai van Pelt of Bellingham, Washington.** Van Pelt, whose mother, Colleen van Pelt, is a member of WFSE/AFSCME Council 28, Local 1381, has been awarded a \$500 scholarship.
- **Eric Velez of Lynnwood, Washington.** Velez, who is a member of AFSCME Council 2, Local 1811, has been awarded a \$1,050 scholarship.
- **Jacob Thomas Wingate of Lambertville, Michigan.** Lambertville, whose mother, Laura Wingate, is a member of AFSCME Council 8, Local 2174, has been awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

“This year’s Union Plus Scholarship award winners are as inspirational as ever,” Union Plus President Mitch Stevens said. “We sincerely appreciate them sharing their incredible personal accomplishments and plans with us. We wish them all continued success, and we are proud to support their education.”

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## Meet Some of the 2024 AFSCME Honorees

### **Amy Estrada**

*Southold [New York] Junior/Senior High School (SHS) (2024)*

Amy plans to attend Cornell University this fall and double major in business analytics, and international trade and development. She was among the top students in her SHS graduating class, and she will be a first-generation college student. Amy intends to focus on agricultural business practices, particularly in developing countries. She regularly volunteers with CAST, a local organization that supports and serves low-income families. "I'm deeply committed to making a positive impact on the lives of those less fortunate," Amy said. "I want to help developing nations with services they may need to better support their economies."

James W. Stahl, who taught Amy's Advanced Placement (AP) language and composition class at SHS, said she is a teacher's dream student. "Amy is a study in thoughtfulness and perseverance," Stahl said. "Her demeanor combined with her dedication to all things academic and extracurricular make her one of the finest young people to have walked through our halls. Amy shines in many fields, but her altruistic spirit makes her a favorite among many people in the community. She has a vibrant spirit and desire to get involved that will light up any campus."

*Activities and honors: National Honor Society; FIRST Robotics Team 870; Navy Junior ROTC; SHS student council; SHS student newspaper; SHS environmental, international clubs; SHS varsity volleyball; Hampton Music Educators Association (HMEA) county festival; National Hispanic Recognition Program; SHS high honor roll; Navy Junior ROTC Leadership Award*

*Employment and volunteerism: Southold Town Public Library; UNICEF fundraiser*

### **Ariyanna Fernandez**

*Seattle Pacific University (SPU)*

*South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC): Associate in the Arts (2023)*

*Washington Virtual Academy (WVA), Tacoma, Washington (2023)*

Ariyanna is a music production and communication studies double major at SPU and expects to graduate in June 2026. She is an accomplished vocalist and has performed "The Star-Spangled Banner" at more than 50 professional and college sporting events. Ariyanna's mother, Evette Superales, immigrated from Guam and faced many workplace trials before beginning a job with the Washington State Department of Health Services and joining AFSCME. "I am so delighted to spend quality time with my mother, who is happier and more at ease now that she has the assistance of a union to ensure a healthy, productive work environment," Ariyanna said.

Ariyanna is a GSBA Scholar, one of 17 selected from throughout the state in 2023 who demonstrate a strong sense of self, awareness of community needs, and a vision to bring about change in those communities after college. Program manager Stacy Harbour-Van Hoy said Ariyanna was selected because she embodies the program's ideals. "Struggle, exacerbated by the pandemic, could have easily pushed Ariyanna down a dark path," Harbour-Van Hoy said. "Instead, she turned to music and discovered a path of creative expression. Her powerful combination of persistence, creativity, and joy will carry Ariyanna far into her studies."

*Activities and honors: SPU concert choir soloist; SPU student newspaper; SPU Distinguished Scholar; SPSCC Highest Honors; SPSCC graduation speaker*

*Employment and volunteerism: SPSCC Campus Activities Board; church leader; cosplay performer*

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## **Rajeana Harris**

*Peru [Nebraska] State College*

*Lincoln [Nebraska] Northeast High School (LNE) (1997)*

Rajeana is a psychology major at Peru State and expects to graduate in May 2026. She has worked in social services for more than 15 years and currently is a community support specialist with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Children and Family Services Prevention Program. Rajeana, a mother of two, is the first person in her family to attend a four-year college. She works with prevention-based programs and organizations to intercept families before they become child and/or adult protective services cases. "So many families need a helping hand, and there are so many children involved in the DHHS system in one way or another," Rajeana said. "I have been amazed by the lived experience of the individuals I have met; they offer a huge depth of knowledge."

Rajeana, whose father was a union member and city employee for 40 years, said unions have greatly benefited her family and influenced her life. "I have children that were born with serious medical issues, and they were able to get the medical care they needed due to benefits afforded to AFSCME members," Rajeana said. "Also, having a good work environment helps me to be a better mother and wife when I am not at work. AFSCME is helping to lift my family out of poverty and debt, and it will affect my kids and my future generations to come."

*Honors: Nebraska DHHS Employee Recognition Award*

*Volunteerism: National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE) Lincoln chapter; local nonprofit information technology, marketing; local children's museum; children's school activities*

## **Dillon Horrie**

*Wethersfield High School (WHS), Kewanee, Illinois (2024)*

Dillon will attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign this fall and major in business. He is unsure of his career path, but he is confident that a college education will help him make that decision and prepare him for a successful career regardless of the field. Dillon considers his father, Landon, who has been a firefighter, paramedic, and police officer, to be his hero. "I have seen him firsthand save lives, run into fires, and take care of the community," Dillon said. "His selflessness has instilled many positive traits into me, and I will forever be grateful for that. My father is grateful to be an AFSCME member, and his membership has benefited our family."

WHS math teacher and assistant football coach Carl Anderson said Dillon is an honest, hardworking young man with an infectious blue-collar work ethic. "He is a driven young man," Anderson said. "Never will there be a question of preparedness for Dillon, and others are quick to study him and mimic his tenacious desire to improve daily. His tenacity for perfection transfers straight from the game field to the classroom. Few students put in the amount of time and effort toward academics that he does. I believe Dillon will prove that he is more than deserving of this scholarship."

*Activities and honors: National Honor Society; WHS Key Club; WHS Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA); WHS varsity football; Wethersfield School District Student of the Month; Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) regional essay competition winner*

*Volunteerism: American Red Cross blood drives; Kewanee food drives; youth basketball camp coach; youth flag football referee*

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## **Addison Hughes**

*Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE)  
Brown County [Illinois] High School (BCHS) (2023)*

Addie is a business marketing major at SIUE with a dual specialization in data analytics and marketing. She expects to graduate in August 2026 and plans to immediately enter graduate school. Addie's father, Aaron, works at a correctional facility and has been an AFSCME member since 2018. She appreciates the financial stability, health benefits, and retirement plan afforded her father as an AFSCME member. "Working at a prison is a hard job, but AFSCME makes it worth it," Addie said. "AFSCME allows my dad's time away from his family to mean something. He will be able to retire soon because of AFSCME, and it feels good to know that he won't have to work until he can't move."

BCHS English teacher and student council adviser Jennifer G. Zimmerman said Addie is an avid reader, a thoughtful writer, and the kind of student who makes being a teacher easy. "Addie constantly sought feedback to improve her analysis and writing skills, and she asked thoughtful questions to help others deepen their understanding of the topic," Zimmerman said. "She was a vital member of our school community and the larger community as well. I am confident that Addie will continue to strive to achieve the same level of intellectual and community engagement throughout college and beyond."

*Activities and honors: SIUE American Marketing Association; BCHS student council, senior class president; dance; Illinois State Scholar; BCHS valedictorian*

*Employment and volunteerism: children's boutique marketing and retail associate; YMCA after school, summer camp counselor; church middle school mentoring*

## **Jacob Mohring**

*University of Scranton [Pennsylvania] (UofS)  
Stroudsburg [Pennsylvania] High School (2021)*

Jacob is a biochemistry, cell, and molecular biology major at UofS, where he is a member of the Magis Honors Program in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). He was one of eight STEM students to receive the UofS President's Fellowship for summer research in 2023, and he hopes to attend medical school after graduating in May 2025. In addition to his father, Andrew, being an AFSCME member, Jacob's grandmother is a retired AFSCME member. "AFSCME has had a profoundly positive effect on my family for generations," Jacob said. "My two siblings and I are all currently in college, and AFSCME has provided financial relief for us through scholarships. My family and I are grateful for the Union Plus Scholarship."

Jacob conducts Parkinson's disease research in the lab of Joe C. Brague, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology at UofS. Brague has mentored more than 50 undergraduate and graduate students at UofS, the University of Pittsburgh, and Lehigh University. "Jacob is in the top 3 percent of those students in terms of academic and research ability," Brague said. "His intellect and work ethic make him the perfect candidate for the Union Plus Scholarship."

*Activities and honors: UofS Health Professions Organization; UofS Neuroscience Society; UofS Remote Area Medical Society; UofS health promotion club; UofS Merit Scholar; Eagle Scout*

*Employment and volunteerism: Geisinger Health System medical scribe; LVH-Pocono intensive care unit, surgical center; UofS chemistry tutor; UofS resident assistant; St. Luke's University Health Network; American Red Cross duty officer; Habitat for Humanity; church building restoration*

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## **Shannen O'Brien**

*Westfield [Massachusetts] State University (WSU): Bachelor of Arts, psychology (2023)*

*Holyoke Community College: Associate of Arts, liberal arts (2013)*

*Agawam [Massachusetts] High School (2010)*

Shannen is a Master of Arts in Counseling candidate at WSU and expects to graduate in May 2026. She worked full-time as a custodian and maintenance employee at WSU while earning her bachelor's degree, and she continues to work in that capacity now that she is in graduate school. Shannen, who is also an accomplished five-instrument musician, is thankful for the benefits and protections provided through her AFSCME membership. "Since becoming a public employee, life has improved substantially, and I really owe that to AFSCME," she said. "Prior to that, I was surviving but not thriving. I would not be where I am today without the support of AFSCME Local 1067 (C93)."

Shannen was a teenager when her mother succumbed to brain cancer; she now volunteers with Rick's Place, a nonprofit organization that facilitates peer support groups in schools for grieving children. Pamela Gentile is a licensed clinical social worker and school adjustment counselor at Agawam's Roberta Doering Middle School, one of the schools with which Shannen has worked through Rick's Place. "With her patient but fun nature, Shannen creates an environment where students are willing to take risks and share with each other, supportively, and free of judgment," Gentile said. "Grief work seems to come naturally to Shannen, and she has demonstrated the compassion and commitment necessary to work in the counseling profession."

*Activities and honors: WSU Robert Goodale Award for highest psychology continuing education GPA*

*Volunteerism: local library; various fundraisers and community events*

## **Tangela Oliver**

*Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC): Master of Education, workforce education, training (2012)*

*Chicago State University: bachelor's degree (1993)*

*Murphysboro [Illinois] High School (1988)*

Tangela is an education doctoral student at SIUC and expects to graduate in May 2026. She is a corrections assessment specialist for the Illinois Department of Corrections. Tangela has created Employment Skills School, an education and employment-readiness program for inmates who are approaching release. Her career goal is to create an educational program for inmates, regardless of their institution. "These inmates have not been afforded the opportunity to earn college credits, and some cannot even earn a GED certificate because of their security level," Oliver said. "I hope to break the barriers to their education."

Tangela has been an NAACP member for four years and serves on the Carbondale branch executive board. Linda Flowers, Ph.D., president of the Carbondale branch, has known Tangela for more than five years, and they are fellow members of several community and civic organizations. "Tangela is a conscientious and effective leader," Flowers said. "She is a hard worker, applying herself to the task at hand while going above and beyond what is deemed necessary. Tangela demonstrates a love for learning and the level of commitment necessary to succeed in higher education. She is a deserving Union Plus Scholarship recipient."

*Activities and honors: Black Graduate Greek Council vice president; Women in NAACP committee chair; Zeta Phi Beta Illinois State Social Action chair; AFSCME steward bargaining committee (former member)*

*Employment and volunteerism: Wexford Health Sources behavioral health technician; Lutheran Social Services prisoner family ministry, federal parole case manager*

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## **Perla Rodriguez**

*Long Island University (LIU) Post, Brookville, New York  
Roosevelt [New York] High School (RHS) (2023)*

Perla recently completed her first year as a business administration major at LIU Post, where she is a member of the Honors College and the business school's dean's cohort. Perla earned college credits while in high school through the RHS dual enrollment program with the State University of New York (SUNY) Old Westbury. She is thankful for her mother's AFSCME membership, saying it has transformed her family by shaping their livelihood and influenced their collective wellbeing. "AFSCME is a pillar of support for our family, fostering a sense of solidarity and community," Perla said. "I have a deep appreciation for the labor movement and its role in creating a fair and just society."

LIU Post Honors College Associate Director Cassandra Greco is Perla's academic adviser and success coach, and she taught one of Perla's freshman courses. "Perla is a delightful presence in the classroom and creates an energy that motivates those around her," Greco said. "Her insightful contributions and collaborative spirit made her a joy to teach. She is dependable, well-rounded, inclusive to all students, and enhances academics and campus life. Perla has demonstrated the level of commitment necessary to succeed in college and beyond."

*Activities and honors: LIU Investment Fund; LIU Latino Student Union founder, president; LIU Black Student Union; LIU fashion club; National Honor Society; RHS foreign language club; RHS robotics club; LIU Post Presidential Scholar; New York State Academic Excellence Scholar; SUNY Old Westbury SMART (science, mathematics, and research for transformation) Scholars Academic Excellence Award; Nassau County [New York] Council of Superintendents Certificate of Excellence*

*Employment and volunteerism: RHS academic tutor*

## **Luna Romero**

*Pitzer College (PC), Claremont, California  
Albuquerque [New Mexico] Academy (AA) (2022)*

Luna is a Chicana/Latina and Spanish studies major at PC, one of the Claremont Colleges, and expects to graduate in May 2026. Her goal is to earn a doctoral degree or pursue a career path in which she can participate in cultivating civic engagement. In addition to her father's AFSCME membership, her mother, Nancy Lopez, is a member of American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 6662. Luna is a member of the Claremont College Student Worker Alliance and is active in student organizing. "I have worked hand in hand with union drives, advocating for workers' rights, attending picket lines, and learning about the Chicano leaders who were at the forefront of fighting for labor demands," Luna said.

Oscar Marquez, a visiting assistant professor at PC, taught two of Luna's classes and mentored her in preparation for her application for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. "Through her own lived experiences, family history, and our classes together, Luna has developed a sophisticated understanding of and appreciation for workers' rights and union organizing," Marquez said. "In the classroom, she exhibited outstanding critical and analytical skills. She is able to understand, dissect, and incorporate difficult theoretical concepts into real-world applications. Luna's success in higher education will be a benefit to the labor movement."

*Activities and honors: PC Latina Student Union Executive Board identity representative; The College Board AP Scholar; National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar; AA Vincent Cordova Diversity Award*

*Employment and volunteerism: City College of New York Dominican Studies Institute research intern; Corrales [New Mexico] Indigenous Farmhub; elementary school teacher assistant*

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## **Marina Santini**

*University of Delaware (UD)*

*Cape Henlopen High School (CHHS), Lewes, Delaware (2022)*

Marina is a psychology and political science double major at UD and expects to graduate in May 2026. She aspires to attend law school and wants to spend her life helping those in need.

Marina learned the value of her father's AFSCME membership when she needed heart surgery at age 16. "My family did not have to worry financially because of his AFSCME-provided health care benefits," Marina said. "Because my father was protected, I was protected. I will forever be grateful that there are organizations like AFSCME that protect workers."

Sgt. 1st Class (ret.) Richard T. Hurt taught and mentored Marina for three years in the CHSS Army Junior ROTC program. She earned multiple awards, including the Legion of Valor Bronze Cross of Achievement, the Junior ROTC's highest national award, and reached the highest rank of battalion commander. "Marina is a remarkable woman who possesses unlimited academic and leadership potential," Hurt said. "Her standards of personal conduct, academic achievement, and high ethical standing consistently set an example for her peers. Marina's future leadership and academic potential is unlimited in any endeavor she chooses to pursue."

*Activities and honors: National Honor Society; Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation Youth Conference; Delaware Girls State; UD Mock Trial; UD HenLaw Society; UD peer mentor; CHHS dance team captain; UD Trustee Scholar; U.S. Department of the Army Superior Cadet Decoration; American Legion Gold Medal of Merit; Senior Army Instructor Leadership Medal; Cape Henlopen School District Distinguished Scholar; CHHS Principal's Academic Achievement Award; CHHS Junior ROTC Cadet of the Year*

*Volunteerism: Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's; Easterseals; National Down Syndrome Society Buddy Walk; National Kidney Foundation; Sussex County [Maryland] Holiday Project*

## **Eric Velez**

*University of Washington (UW)*

*Edmonds College (EC), Lynwood, Washington: Certificate in Addiction Studies (2021)*

*University of Phoenix (UoP): Bachelor of Science, industrial-organizational psychology (2010)*

*UoP: Associate of Arts, business administration (2008)*

*Badger High School (BHS), Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (2002)*

Eric is a clinical track master's candidate in the UW School of Social Work and expects to graduate in June 2025. He aspires to become a licensed independent clinical social worker, serving the social and behavioral health needs of individuals struggling with various disorders and lacking resources. Eric, who is already a licensed addiction counselor, is a recovery support coordinator for the Snohomish County [Washington] Recovery Court.

Eric said he was an opioids user for a decade, and he became a counselor to provide others the help he never received. "Those with lived experience and our allies can be difference makers," Eric said. "There is power in our stories to offer hope to those suffering and understanding to the broader community. For too long, we have recovered in secret, anonymously. I am not ashamed of my past and draw so much resilience, compassion, and hope from it. I would be ashamed if I saw people struggling in my community and did nothing about it."

*Activities, certifications and honors: Snohomish County Recovery Coalition; EC Merchants of Hope; EC Social and Human Services Advisory Committee; Washington State Department of Health Substance Use Disorder Professional; Approved Association of Social Work Board Motivational Interviewing Training*

*Employment and volunteerism: Seattle Associated Behavioral Health Care; Northpoint Recovery, Edmonds; Recovery Advocacy Day*

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## Learn More About the Union Plus Scholarship Program

The Union Plus Scholarship Program, now in its 33rd year, awards scholarships based on outstanding academic achievement, personal character, financial need, and commitment to the values of organized labor. The program is offered through the Union Plus Education Foundation.

Since starting the program in 1991, Union Plus has awarded more than \$5.6 million in educational funding to more than 4,000 union members, spouses, and dependent children. Union Plus Scholarship awards are granted to students attending a two-year college, four-year college, graduate school, or recognized technical or trade school. The selection process is exceptionally competitive: 5,928 applications were received this year from 69 unions and all 50 states, the District of Columbia, three U.S. territories, and four Canadian provinces.

Visit [unionplus.org/scholarship](http://unionplus.org/scholarship) for applications and benefit eligibility.

### About Union Plus

Union Plus, founded by the AFL-CIO in 1986, uses the collective buying power of America's 12.5 million union members to deliver top-quality benefits and services at competitive prices to working families. In addition to the scholarship program, Union Plus offers the College Program with exclusive tuition discounts, financial aid, and grants, providing union members and their families the opportunity to earn an affordable, online degree that fits their schedule, interests, career goals, and budget. Union Plus also provides a wide range of other money-saving programs, including exclusive everyday discounts on wireless service, travel, and more. Visit [unionplus.org](http://unionplus.org) to explore Union Plus's 30-plus benefits.

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