You can learn much about TIP by seeing how many students it helps, but it is in hearing the individual stories of our TIP students, that its true value becomes clear. Shae Gibbs, a first-year Environmental Biology major from Grand Rapids is with me today. I’ve asked Shae to share his story with you.

Good morning. My name is Shae Gibbs, and I am a graduate of C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy in Grand Rapids. This is my first year at Ferris State University, and I am majoring in Environmental Biology.

I was adopted at a young age. It was challenging, being adopted. There were times when I felt like I didn’t fit in, or was accepted. Heading into high school, I was not sure college was in my future. My parents said they wanted me to go to college, but they never pushed me to. Also, no one in my immediate family has gone to college, so it was a completely new concept for me.

Later in life I had the opportunity to meet my birth parents. They were struggling financially and not in a position to encourage me to attend college or help me financially. However, I knew that in order to break this cycle I needed to pursue higher education. Hearing that Ferris State University had a really good science program, and how much they help their students, I decided to apply to Ferris. This was 100% my decision. I wasn’t sure how I was going to pay for tuition, or how I would pay for living on campus, but I knew this is what I was meant to do. As the financial aid deadline neared, I was shocked to learn that I was eligible for the Tuition Incentive Program – and that all of my tuition would be covered by this program. I am still in shock, honestly, that I have this opportunity.

I have five younger siblings, and my personal goal is to be the first in my family to graduate from college, to set an example for them, to encourage and help them get to college, so they too can have an opportunity to succeed. My career goal is to graduate with my bachelor’s degree in Environmental Biology and help find ways to make our earth’s resources more sustainable for the future. I am off to a great start, making over a B average and doing well living on campus.

Without TIP funding and the other financial aid I receive, I would not be able to attend Ferris State University. Or chase my dream of an education so I can make a better life for myself and my family someday. There are many TIP students at Ferris, who like me, need this support to make a college education possible. Your help will make an important difference for them and for me.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my story with you.
Allow me to share one such example with you of how important TIP funding is for our students and the difference a Ferris education can make.

After graduating from high school, Miranda was ready to attend college. However, she was not sure she could afford the tuition, room and board, and books. Her parents encouraged her to apply, as her brother found success after graduating from Ferris. Interested in a STEM career, Miranda enrolled at Ferris.

She qualified for TIP funding and the state assured her she would receive this. However, because the budget passed in 2017 capped the amount any institution could receive in TIP funding at $8.5 million, Miranda did not receive the TIP funding she was promised her last year of school. Even though she had received TIP support the previous year, there were no funds left for Miranda when she completed her paperwork.

Imagine the impact on any student, especially one from an economically challenged family, when they discover they have an $8,000 bill and no means to pay it. Our Financial Aid office dug as deep as they could to help this young student, and her community helped also. Miranda made the sacrifices to stay in school to get her degree. She worked two part-time jobs, in addition to going to school full-time. During the week, she traveled back and forth home to work in the high school gymnasium in the evenings, and during the weekend, she worked at a healthcare center there.

It literally would break your heart to hear this young woman’s story. In order to afford her last year at Ferris, Miranda had to give up everything she could not afford - access to the campus health services, our recreation facilities and more. The one thing she knew was important to her future was the living environment on campus. She feared as a commuter that she would not complete her degree. She was determined she would live on campus. To live on campus, she gave up her meal plan.

“I was devastated when I found out I would not receive TIP funding,” Miranda said. “I didn’t think I had any other options, and living on campus was important to me. I already had a lot of loans, but I wasn’t going to give up. Most of the kids I knew who left school didn’t return ... I didn’t want to do that.” This past May, Miranda earned her associate degree and she continues to do well today.

Miranda is an example of how funding decisions made at the state level impact our students, creating obstacles they should not need to face. In helping Miranda, we were fortunate that she was from Baldwin. Even though Lake County is among the poorest in our state, the rural Baldwin community is one of the state’s exemplary Promise Zones, and the Baldwin Promise is a source of great pride to this area and to our state.
Dymend Ross - 2018

Dymend, from Detroit, grew up largely in a single parent household. Her dad passed away after a lengthy illness, and her mother, who has disabilities, was left to raise her and three younger siblings. Although she had attended three different high schools, she maintained her grades and graduated in the top 25 students in her class. She is the first to graduate from high school in her family, and also the first to attend college.

Before her high school graduation, she initially had her sights set on attending another university. However, when she realized the cost of tuition, in addition to room and board and books, she began to think college was not in her future. Disappointed, she spoke with her high school counselor. She encouraged her to look at Ferris State University, because Ferris offers the Tuition Incentive Program. After her visit to Ferris, she applied and was accepted.

She says that without TIP funding, she simply would not have been able to afford college. With what her mother receives each month on disability, she was not able to help with college expenses.

“I value the TIP funding I receive so much,” she said. “This will help me achieve my dream of becoming a nurse, so I can help others like the nurses helped my dad when he was sick.”

Dymend, in her second semester as a freshman, is already thinking ahead for summer. She plans on taking 12 credits at a local community college so she can continue her studies toward her nursing degree.

When she is not studying she regularly volunteers on campus. Dymend is a College Positive Volunteer with our Office of Multicultural Student Services, interacting with middle and high school students who visit Ferris, providing them with information about college preparation, paying for college, career selection and financial resources. She also volunteers with the University’s GEAR UP program, which provides an opportunity for underrepresented students to discover first-hand the potential of a college education. She is also the vice president of the suicide prevention Registered Student Organization Flutter.

Dymend is a wonderful example of how the Tuition Incentive Program gives students a chance at an education they might not otherwise have and of how at Ferris State University we help these students succeed.
I want to introduce Tekarra Coleman. She is earning her associate degree in Health Information Technology and has 3.42 GPA. Tekarra...

Hello. My name is Tekarra Coleman and I am a sophomore at Ferris State University. I am a full-time student and am enrolled in the associate’s degree program in Health Information Technology and Health Information Management. When I’m not at school, I live in Battle Creek, Michigan with my Grandma. I have one older sister, two younger brothers and a younger sister. I am the first person in my family to go to college and I will be the first person in my family to earn a college degree.

When I was in high school I lived in Kalamazoo, so I qualified for the Kalamazoo Promise which would have paid for my first two years of college. But, because I moved to Battle Creek to live with my grandma, I didn’t graduate from a Kalamazoo school, which meant that I did not qualify for the Kalamazoo Promise after graduation. I felt like I had lost my chance to go to college.

When I was feeling like college might not be an option for me, I went and met with my high school counselor, Mrs. Townes. She helped me to see that college could still be in my future. Mrs. Townes told me about the TIP Grant and the Pell Grant and how they could help me to go to college. She told me about Ferris and how I could use TIP at Ferris. I had already applied to other schools, but something about Ferris stuck out to me. Mrs. Townes helped me to overcome my fears and uncertainties about going to college and I will always be grateful for that.

The summer after graduation, my grandad and I decided to take a trip up to Big Rapids and visit the campus. The first thing that I noticed was how small the town was. I told my grandad that the town was too small and it didn’t even have a mall. He talked to me the entire way home about how going to school was to further my education and get a career and not about how big the town was or if there was a mall there. My grandad told me that as long as I could get a good education that the town was a great place to be and that my education was all that mattered. My grandad was right.

I applied and was accepted to Ferris State University and today, I am proud to be a Bulldog. I qualified for the TIP Grant and a full Pell Grant which is how I am able to attend college. Without these grants, I would not be able to afford college.

When I first got to Ferris, I was a bit nervous, but the advisors and teachers made me feel more comfortable and helped me to believe that I could be a good college student. I started in the General Studies Program at Ferris so that I could improve my reading and writing skills and when I was ready, transferred to the College of Health Professions at Ferris to work on my degree in the health field.
Tekarra Coleman, cont.

Being a freshman at college is hard, but I had a lot of support from my advisor and teachers. At Ferris, all freshmen are required to take a freshman seminar class that teaches you how to be a college student and about the resources at Ferris. Shelly VandePanne was my seminar teacher and she was amazing. She worked with me from the time I came to campus for orientation and helped me to explore career options, which helped me to decide on my program that I am in now in Health Information Technology and Management. I am so grateful for her support and that she cared about helping me and for getting me that head start I needed to be successful in college. She helped me to see what steps I needed to complete which put me on the path to my future.

My associate degree from Ferris will prepare me to get a good job right after college. Getting the TIP Grant and Pell Grant has made my life a bit easier since I have help paying for college. I don’t have to worry about graduating from college with my associate’s degree with major debt. My goal is to graduate and get a good job and go back to school for my bachelor’s degree. I will graduate next year with my associate’s degree. Without TIP I wouldn’t be able to attend college and earn a degree that will make a difference in my life. I am very thankful to have this type of assistance to go to school and better myself. I know that TIP helps not only me but thousands of other students who need help as well.

Thank you for letting me tell you my story.
Kaylia Ervin - 2017

I want to introduce Kaylia Ervin. At our commencements I share student stories, and in May 2015 it was my honor to tell Kaylia’s story. Kaylia was a student in our Foster Youth Initiative and represents the 3% of foster youth who graduate from college. I talked about Kaylia in my testimony last year, but wanted you to hear from her firsthand. Kaylia...

Good morning and thank you for granting me the opportunity to elaborate on how the TIP Program has impacted my life. Ever since I was a child I knew I wanted more for my life. I was raised in and out of the foster care system and although I was intelligent and well-mannered I was still considered just another ghetto project kid. There weren’t many role models in my community and I hadn’t known anyone who had ever been to college other than my teachers. However, I knew my dream of obtaining more was possible.

It wasn’t until my senior year in high school that I began to think of how I would achieve more. I knew nothing about college or the process of getting accepted. My foster parents did not seem to care much about what I did upon graduating high school. I will never forget the six-word conversation my foster mother and I had about college. She simply asked “are you going to college?” And I replied “yes” and we never spoke of it again. She didn’t know what college I would go to, how I was getting there, how I was going to pay for it, or what I would major in. I guess she assumed since I was a foster child the State would write me a check to whatever college I decided to attend. Either way I was lost in the process and had no idea where to start.

I filled out a FASFA and applied to Ferris State University since it was my only school of interest without an application fee. Upon receiving an acceptance letter, I was given a $2,000 scholarship from Ferris and notice that I would receive a Pell Grant of just over $5,000. At the time it seemed like a lot of money and I was certain my aspirations of becoming a lawyer were on the verge. However, I was ignorant about how much college actually cost. With no family help or savings, I was told to look into loans.

One day after coming home from school I received a letter stating that I was eligible for the TIP Program. I spoke about it with my case worker and found out the program would cover my tuition in full for two years, leaving enough money for a room and board plan. I was ecstatic to learn that the only thing I needed to do was pack my bags and find a way to get to Ferris.

I said all this to say that today I have graduated from Ferris and I am now in my second year of law school at Michigan State University.
Kaylia Ervin, cont.

It was possible because the TIP Program saved me from having to finance my undergrad tuition completely in student loans. I had no other way of paying for college.

I worked all four years of my undergrad education and I can say with all certainty my minimum wage job would not have put a dent in my tuition fees. Three of my closest friends in college had to drop out mid-semester because they could no longer afford to pay for college. Millions of other students struggle each month to pay back outrageous student loan debt. I am sincerely grateful for a program like TIP. It gave me a chance to complete my bachelor’s degree and continue my education.
Melissa DeVietri - 2010

I am joined today by one of our TIP students, Melissa DiVietri, a first-year Printing Technology major. She has driven from Big Rapids so she could share her story with you.

Hi everyone. My name is Melissa DiVietri, 21 years old, a first-year student at Ferris State University. I am from Traverse City and raised in Jackson, Michigan. I'm a Print Management major and eCommerce minor, so I am studying for my Bachelors of Science and a Certification. I want to goto Ferris for the next four to five years. I know exactly what requirements I need to fulfill my education for my dream career.

I will be the first person in my family to get a Bachelor's degree. I am seventh of eight children and only three of us went to college and two graduated. My mother has an associates and my father went to a tech school. College is supposed to be my 'safe zone' before I begin working at a career level. The plan is to successfully get my degree at Ferris and enter the career field with that 'cushion' of having the education as well the college experience. I have two campus jobs and am involved in multiple groups on campus, committees and leadership roles. I work for Ferris as a student employee working on the Ferris website, updating pages and links. Being a student employee working in the field I am studying is giving me that extra bonus of education & work at the same time.

I attended Jackson Community College in 2007 using my C.A.R.E. scholarship, which funded my entire education. JCC didn't offer the programs that I needed, and I chose Ferris because they offered the classes with the equipment, technology and resources that were helpful towards my career. Ferris State is the third best university in the country for the printing program. I use the TIP Scholarship as well as other forms of financial aid to pay for my education and living arrangements. I have been looking for more scholarships on top of what I already have to help pay for my tuition, books, computer equipment and not to mention my apartment. I live off campus to avoid paying the room & board (meal plan) and I use the payment option at my apartment complex for my financial aid to pay a majority of my rent cost. That's very helpful, it saves me a lot of stress, but yet there isn't enough money for everything I still need. I am constantly looking for aid. My degree is the always changing 'technology,' and is constantly updating and I am at a lack of resources to use on my own.

If this scholarship changes, I may have to leave this university and go to a community college. I am worried that with all the changes that may happen, I won't be able to afford going to school because there isn't enough money to pay for everything I need. I am happy and very accommodated at Ferris. Ferris has helped me with my accommodations, education, and social involvement. I am learning it all here, at Ferris State University. If I have to, I'll do everything possible to stay here because I know the community colleges could not offer what I need to be successful in my education.