



Dr. Marilyn Macik-Frey
Dean, College of Business Administration
Nicholls State University

Office of the Dean

College of Business and
Economics
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252

August 10, 2021

The following proposal for the 2021 Societal Impact Award is submitted to the Southern Business Administration Association by Sabrina Viscomi on behalf of the College of Business and Economics at Towson University and endorsed by Dean Shohreh Kaynama (skaynama@towson.edu).

Thank you,

Dr. Sabrina Viscomi
Assistant Dean of Students, Budgets, and Operations
College of Business and Economics



Project Summary

Fundamental to the mission of Towson University's College of Business and Economics (CBE) is the transformation of students into professionals who will have a positive societal impact within the state of Maryland and beyond. The College prides itself on preparing students for the workforce through internships, student competitions, mock interviews, and networking opportunities. It is through these activities that the College saw the need to provide the **Well-Suited Wardrobe** – a career closet offering new and lightly worn professional attire for job interviews and other professional occasions. The CBE's Well-Suited Wardrobe officially launched in February of 2020 with the goal of enhancing the College's culture of philanthropy, equity, and inclusion and helping students project the confidence needed to succeed in the workplace.

Program Description

In the fall of 2019, CBE's Faculty Council became aware of a student who was quickly approaching graduation. Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, she found herself living in her car and struggling to finish school. She had an upcoming interview for a promising job in her field, but no professional attire. Faculty in several departments of the College shared similar experiences of being asked where students could find or borrow business clothing for events and interviews. In response, the Well-Suited Wardrobe was born.

The Wardrobe is the first resource of its kind on the TU campus. College faculty, staff, alumni and employer partners have donated the Wardrobe's inventory of gently used suits and separates. Financial contributions have been used to purchase shoes, ties, panty hose and other accessories for a complete, professional look. Students use an online form to confidentially request appointments to view and try on clothing. All items are free of charge and given to the students to keep. To safeguard privacy, students are not required to prove financial need.

Before being sidelined by the University's physical shutdown in March of 2020 due to Covid-19, the Wardrobe brought in more than 95 donated suits and gave away nine outfits. Even while classes were entirely online, the College continued collecting donations of professional, currently-styled items in new or excellent condition. As students return to campus full time in fall 2021 and more career related events are held in person, the College expects heavy use of The Well-Suited Wardrobe.

The Well-Suited Wardrobe Fund

In May 2021, McCormick & Company awarded the career closet an additional \$10,000 to expand the program's reach. As long-time neighbors and partners, TU and McCormick & Company have a fantastic relationship. McCormick & Company employs many TU alumni and the company has supported many impactful programs at the university. Moreover, the Wardrobe's ability to assist underprivileged students aligns perfectly with McCormick & Company's Diversity & Inclusion strategy, which is focused on four areas: Workforce, Workforce Environment, Marketplace and the Community.

The funds donated by McCormick & Company will be used for highly needed items that are not typically donated (dress shirts, hosiery, etc.), missing sizes, dry-cleaning, and student employees who will be responsible for managing inventory and running daily operations of the Wardrobe. McCormick's financial contribution alone will allow the College to provide professional attire to 100 students.

Societal Impact

Towson University is the largest university in the Baltimore area and the second-largest university in the University System of Maryland – the 12th-largest public university system in America. TU has over 22,000 students, of which nearly 10,000 demonstrate financial need. In fact, more than 30% of TU undergraduate students (5,863) receive [Pell Grants](#). The College of Business and Economics is home to over 3,000 students, with nearly 1,000 needing financial assistance.

Consistent with CBE's mission to transform students into business professionals, all business and accounting majors must complete a professional internship as part of their degree requirements. In any given year, students participate in an average of 700 professional internships. As approximately 1/3 of CBE students have financial need, the Well-Suited Wardrobe will continue to facilitate the inclusion of a diverse student body into professional settings.

For many students who juggle work, family, student loans and more, purchasing a new business suit and accessories can be a burdensome or insurmountable cost. Dean Shohreh Kaynama explains "It's our job to help every single student get the best start to their careers, including having proper business clothing. The Wardrobe helps us achieve that." The response

from students has been clear: Professional attire gives students the confidence they need to worry less about looking competitive, but rather focus on demonstrating their career readiness.

Assistant professor of Marketing, Sarah Magnotta, who spearheaded the project, shares that students “are overwhelmed with the steps CBE is taking to help them with their career development and light up with excitement to try something on. They walk out smiling every single time. It’s amazing what a new suit can do!”



Applicability & Transferability

TU's student population is not unique in their need for financial help. According to the [APA](#) (2019), "More than a third of college students in the United States lack enough to eat and stable housing." In their survey of 43,000 students, 36% identified as food insecure and another 36% as home insecure (APA, 2019). This means, that of the roughly [20 million](#) college students in the U.S., over 7.2 million face significant financial challenges. One can imagine that students lacking basic necessities such as a stable food source and shelter also lack the expendable funds for professional attire, which can easily cost several hundred dollars. Colleges and universities across the country can use CBE's model to create their own career closets to fill this much needed gap in the career cycle. The future of millions of students depends on it.

