

## Union Plus offers free online college program

**T**he benefits available to NALC members through the Union Plus program add up to a long list. Did you know that they include free college courses?

Union Plus, a non-profit consumer benefits organization created by the AFL-CIO for members of its constituent unions, offers college courses in dozens of study areas at no charge. Students can even earn an associate degree.

The Free College program is offered through Union Plus academic partner Eastern Gateway Community College (EGCC). EGCC is an accredited, non-profit public institution that is part of the University System of Ohio. Students enroll in the distance-learning program and take classes online, so they can attend no matter where they live. Students with previous college credits may be able to transfer them to EGCC.

Students who apply to EGCC must have completed high school or a GED program. Students must apply for and use available federal student aid grants—a process the Free College program will help them navigate. To cover any tuition or other costs not covered by grants, the Free College program provides a “last dollar” scholarship.

Advising and tutoring services are available. Students can work at their own pace and do not have to take a full course load each term.

The Free College program is available to NALC members and retirees, as well as their spouses, children (or stepchildren) and grandchildren (or step-grandchildren), domestic partners and financial dependents. Thousands of union members and their family members have taken advantage of this special program, including 95 NALC members or family members to date.



**René Armer** of Reno, NV Branch 709 is working toward an accounting degree through the Union Plus Free College program. The 22-year NALC member was about to start at a different college when she heard about the Free College program at an Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs training session.

“I was going to pay \$900 or more a credit,” she said. “I was ready to pay and pick classes.”

Instead, she enrolled in the Free College program. “It was just so easy, so smooth, the whole process,” Armer said. “On the way back from the training, I was signing up for college on my phone.”

Armer estimates that she saved \$10,000 with the program. With her associate degree in accounting, Armer plans to work as a tax accountant after she retires from the Postal Service.

The Free College benefit program offers several associate degree programs along with two certificate programs. The degree programs are:

- Accounting
- Associate of Arts
- Business Management—with optional concentrations in: Advertising; Cyber Security; Data Science; Digital and Social Media; Entrepreneurship; Environmental and Conservation Studies; Finance; Hospitality: Food and Beverage Management or Hotel and Event Management; Human Resources; Information Systems/IT Help Desk;

Labor Studies; Marketing; Program-  
ming and Development

- Criminal Justice
- Teacher Education (Associate of Arts)
- Healthcare Administration
- Individualized Study
- Paralegal
- Professional Office Management
- Social Work

The two certificate programs are in business management, with an optional concentration in accounting, and patient navigation.

For more information and to apply, go to [unionplus.org/freecollege](http://unionplus.org/freecollege).

The program also offers a low-cost way to complete a bachelor’s degree in certain areas of study. The Bachelor Completion program is a complement to the Union Plus Free College associate degree program. When combined with the free associate degree program, the Bachelor Completion program means that members can earn a four-year bachelor’s degree for \$9,000 or less.

Eligible students who have an associate degree or who have earned 60 or more transferable credits can apply to attend at a highly discounted cost. Eligible students will receive a grant that will reduce their out-of-pocket cost to no more than \$4,500 per year for full-time students (and no more than \$4,000 for students who reside in Ohio).

During the pandemic, however, Union Plus is offering the Bachelor Completion program for free.

For information and to apply for the Bachelor Completion program, go to [bachelorsdegree.unionplus.org](http://bachelorsdegree.unionplus.org). **PR**