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## UPS plan helps students avoid debt

### Delivery service helps young employees with college program

By Darcel Rockett, The Star

Palos Hills resident Jennifer Zima did not want to work at the Hodgkins branch of UPS. The 19-year-old admits that she considered the task of handling packages to be hard work.

But after realizing that she could go to college free of charge with UPS' help via the Chicagoland Regional College Program, Zima said she quickly changed her mind about working there. Now the part-time UPS employee is looking at her second year at Moraine Valley Community College with cash in her pocket, free tuition and extra cash to reward her for her 4.0 grade point average.

"It's real hard to turn something like this down, so I'm sticking it out," she said. "UPS says they want you to be successful, and by participating in the program, they pay the school directly for tuition, fees and books — a total of about \$3,500 for the year, including the summer months if you want to go to school then."

The year-old program is a new academic-employment partnership between Chicago State University, Moraine Valley Community College and UPS. By allowing students to work part time at UPS, the program enables aspiring college students to achieve their educational goals without having to carry huge debts into the future.

According to Zima, the way it works is college students enrolled at these institutions go to work during either the sunrise shift (4 a.m. to 9 a.m.) or the night shift (10 p.m. to 3 a.m.), and are paid for their time like a regular job. In addition to that, UPS pays for all school-related costs, including up to \$700 in books, \$333 a month in room and board and a \$50 gas card every month.

Among the program's eligibility requirements, students must have a high school degree or equivalent; be accepted for admission at either CSU (a four-year institution) or MVCC (a two-year college); and successfully complete the CRCP admissions process, which includes a pre-enrollment interview and attendance at an open house.

Students also must be hired by UPS, where they will be paid to work part time as a package handler and receive employment benefits, including health care insurance. As long as a CSU or MVCC student is enrolled in the program, UPS keeps paying.

The only stipulations come in if and when a participant drops a class after the allotted time in which a full refund is allowed. In such cases, students have to pay for that class out of pocket. If the

student passes all classes and reaches certain milestones of various credits or hours, the student can potentially receive an additional \$1,000.

"The work is hard to schedule, especially for those who have a life," Zima said of the UPS work schedule. "And during the first semester I was working on just three hours of sleep a night. I took a lot of naps. But it taught me how to balance school with work."

Michael Colky, executive director of the program, said he is hoping other people take up the task of this balancing act. He remodeled the original UPS program concept introduced at Metro College in Louisville, Ky., to fit the Chicagoland area. The program has about 200 students involved — two-thirds at MVCC. Colky, who has overseen the program since February 2003, said CRCP is a win-win situation.

"I say win-win because you have to have a high school degree to participate in this program, so high schools win," he said. "UPS wins because they can stabilize their work force on the late night and early morning shifts. Moraine Valley and Chicago State University win because their student retention (rates) increase.

"The community wins in economic development because we provide \$4,000 for housing and participants become a part of the work force that pays taxes. And the government wins because UPS' free enterprise is not adding to the loan debt, and the student wins because they get an education."

Zima said about 10 to 12 students started in the program, which offers 20 to 25 hours of work a week. Now that number is down to five. She said that while some could not handle the hours, others, including a friend of hers, saw it as the only way to afford college.

"He was working two jobs and still couldn't afford to go to school," she said. "If he wasn't in this, he couldn't go because his parents couldn't afford to pay for him either."

Even though Zima is not fond of loading trucks, she is glad she is sticking to the program. She said her parents are glad, too. In fact, Zima is hoping the program will transfer over to other state colleges so she can get her bachelor's degree in psychology without any debt. But Colky said he wants to make sure the infrastructure is strategically planned out before they take on more academic partners.

"The program is budgeted for 400 to 500 students total, but we don't want to grow so fast that we aren't being effective," he said. "When we move at the appropriate time, we want to be successful."

Until then, Zima said she will be talking to other prospective students about her first-hand experience in the program.

"This program is about changing lives," said Savelure McMath, CRCP's director of marketing and recruitment in a press release. "Not only does CRCP help students avoid taking out loans for college, but many of our students are first-generation college students. They're pursuing degrees and vocational certificates that will lead to a better quality of life for them and their families, and at the same time positively impact our communities."

Those looking to sign up for UPS' Chicagoland Regional College Program should attend one of the program's open houses, scheduled for June 15 and June 24. Registration is at (866) 501-CRCP (2727) or online at [www.crcprogram.com](http://www.crcprogram.com).