Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: To even the playing field and to break the cycle of poverty, Missouri State University has taken a stance. The university is making it easier to access a college education, because we know that higher education helps people overcome socioeconomic boundaries and achieve personal and professional success. I'm Nicki Donnelson. Today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Ryan Reed. He is the coordinator of access programs at Missouri State. His office develops partnerships and scholarship programs with community organizations and foundations in order to improve the retention and persistence rates of first generation and low income students. He tells us more.

Ryan Reed: It's really been a point of emphasis to really increase our student body as far as the population that we serve. So Clif Smart and the board really want to make Missouri State University look like the state of Missouri as a statewide institution, and so creating opportunities for students who might not otherwise be able to come to Missouri State is important for us. So we're really trying to help diversify our student population, to bring in students who are from a low income background, that making college affordable for them, opening the doors to first in their family to go to college, so what we would call a first generation student. So really just providing opportunities for everybody in the state of Missouri to go to school, regardless of where they come from or what their financial backgrounds are, or what their family life is like. And it's part of our public affairs mission to really serve everyone through our cultural competency, ethical leadership, community engagement. These programs I think really help Missouri State in broadening that mission throughout the state.

Nicki Donnelson: Currently access programs partners with Kauffman Scholars, Wyman Center, CollegeBound, Kipp St. Louis, 100 Black Men of St. Louis, all the Boys and Girls Clubs in Missouri, Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri, and The Ellis Foundation. For the students that choose Missouri State, Reed talks about what they can expect.

Ryan Reed: Our agreements with the students are that they would have a monthly meeting with me. And so in those meetings we just kind of check in on where they're at, how they're doing, trying to see what their classes are like, their adjustment to campus, finances, and use that time to either help them solve their problems that they're facing or connect them to resources on campus. Because we have a lot of resources for a variety of things, from academic help in our tutoring centers to, you know, there's food pantries on campus for students who might be needing some extra meals, and there's clothing closets. We have resources for a lot of different things, and students just might not know what those are. So we use our monthly or sometimes more than once a month meetings to really help them identify what's going on and help them get connected, and sometimes it's just a conversation and kind of a motivational talk, and sometimes it's really connecting them to a resource on campus, whether that's the health center, the counseling center, or talking to a financial aid counselor who's just really helping them get connected to where they need to be.

Nicki Donnelson: These access program partnerships lower the entry barrier. They allow everyone an opportunity to get a degree. Since the students come from families with fewer financial resources and less familiarity with the higher ed system and may also come from less academically rigorous schools, Reed talks about the main challenges he tries to help the students conquer.

Ryan Reed: Finances is a big one, so we work really hard to make college affordable as possible. Missouri State does a good job as a whole, keeping the cost of tuition down, keeping the cost of room and board down. The scholarship program helps. But there are opportunities for them to still need books or still need, if they're not living on campus, if they're a local student they might need more support transportation wise, back and forth to campus, or just food. So we work really hard on making sure that they are getting those resources financially. And then I think all students coming into college just struggle with the academics. It's a lot harder than high school and if you come from an underperforming high school, it can be even harder. So we work really hard to help them adjust, help them get the resources, help them learn to study.

Nicki Donnelson: According to Reed, you can help these students, too. One way is to donate to the Missouri State University Foundations Emergency Scholarship. He also says that you can help students in your local area get a leg up by supporting local community organizations like Big Brothers, Big Sisters or Boys and Girls Clubs. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397.