

https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/wku-senior-recognized-for-non-profit-e-learning-company/article_eb6c5613-9a20-5f1f-b2b7-18c0bb89afec.html

WKU senior recognized for non-profit e-learning company

By MICHAEL J. COLLINS michael.collins@bgdailynews.com

Dec 15, 2023



Nessa Unseld (left) and Bill Buckman pose for a portrait on Dec. 11.

Submitted

Nessa Unseld, a 20-year-old Western Kentucky University senior, may be the youngest CEO at WKU's Innovation Campus.

Unseld received the Buckman Award last month at the campus's Summit of the South event for her non-profit company Coleus Academy, an online learning platform focused on life skills and civic understanding.

"In my experience and the experience of a lot of people close to me, the shared story I've heard is that once you're an adult, you're really expected to know how to do everything, but there's not an easy way to acquire that knowledge," Unseld said.

Her website, coleusacademy.org, aims to be "the encyclopedia of adulthood," Unseld said. It hosts quick lessons on topics ranging from education and citizenship to welfare and insurance – 21 categories total – and should see a hard launch by February.

The Buckman Award comes with start-up and legal aid as well as a sponsored desk at the Innovation Campus for two years. While Unseld has already registered her company as a non-profit, the award means she can stay at the campus even after she graduates in May.

Lessons from Coleus Academy are designed to be short and to the point, often no more than a few minutes of reading. Unseld said they offer a reliable alternative for people looking to learn outside of a multi-part course or series.

One “Health & Wellness” article explores the role of preservatives and processed foods and their impact on the body. Articles under the “Career Readiness” category explain how to build resumes, maintain a healthy digital presence and even explore labor rights and collective bargaining.

Unseld began designing the project and learning to code in 2021, later incorporating as a Kentucky non-profit in April 2022.

While it currently hosts a few dozen articles, Unseld said she’s looking to collaborate with industry professionals and experts in the future to fill out content across the site.

“Even though we’re just in the beginning, it really has been a multi-year labor of love,” Unseld said.

She said the support she’s received from both the Innovation Campus and the WKU Mahurin Honors College has been crucial in “nailing down what works and why certain things work.”

She said starting a business is always a slow process, but one that is “still going much faster than I imagined” in part thanks to the support around her, both professionally and from friends and family.

Unseld was thrilled this week to receive notice that Coleus Academy is now a federally recognized non-profit.

“That was a very loud, happy moment for me a couple of days ago,” Unseld said. “I definitely disturbed the peace a little bit when I found out.”

Unseld added she was caught off guard by the award.

“(Coleus Academy) was definitely something that I was committed to doing, but it did not hold much more weight in my mind than a pipe dream,” Unseld said. “Once I got to the Innovation Campus, it slowly morphed from a pipe dream to feasible.”

Bill Buckman, an entrepreneur and namesake of the award, began Buckman Jet Drilling, Inc. in 2000 and relocated to WKU’s Center for Research & Development, later the Innovation Campus, from 2007 to 2015.

Buckman helped fund the award to support “young people like Nessa to give them a boost to the start of their company,” he said.

“If you look at people like Bill Gates and Elon Musk, they started someplace, and they have changed the world that we live in,” Buckman said. “I think it’s very important that we provide incentives for young people and their ideas to be able to get them to market.”

Buckman said he’s pleased to see the award go to Unseld.

“She’s a smart girl,” Buckman said. “She has a great personality and I think she’s on to something that could be very worthwhile.”

— Follow education reporter and Report for America corps member
Michael J. Collins on X.com @MJCollinsNews or visit bgdailynews.com

Michael Collins

Reporter