

Essay 01

Ever since I can remember, my parents have been a member of the Congressional Federal Credit Union. While they joined when they worked on Capitol Hill, they continued their membership even when leaving those jobs and eventually moving across the country. I remember when we moved to Colorado, I asked my dad if he was going to find a new bank since he could no longer get to a local branch of the credit union. He smiled when he responded and said that he would rather be a “member” of a distant credit union than a “customer” at a local bank. It took me a while to understand what he meant. But when I was doing research for this application, I now understand that a credit union is truly a community of people whose primary mission to serve each other, while a bank is a business whose primary mission is to make a profit for its owners or shareholders. Much like being a member of your family, no matter if you move across the country, you are still a member wherever you are physically located.

Seeing the impact that the Congressional Federal Credit Union has had on my family has shown me how much of a positive impact the credit union can have on me and my peers. With the economy being volatile to change and loans difficult to come by, home ownership is a distant dream for many people of my generation. Knowing that the credit union is member-owned provides security in taking out a home loan because I know they aren't trying to only turn a profit and instead are trying to help me become as financially stable as possible. Seeing an organization care about its members instills confidence in the financial decisions I will make in the future.

From a young age I have been taught the importance of having good credit if I ever wanted to take out a loan. Unfortunately, many banks and credit card companies don't make learning proper credit management easy, but that's where the credit union is able to help my generation. By providing a secure environment to learn how to manage debt and build good credit, I can lay the foundation for a financially successful future. Not only does the credit union provide a stable environment to learn about proper loan and debt management, there are a plethora of resources that can educate me on the topics. This is a contrast to the less personal nature of banks where their primary motivation is to make profit, rather than proper treatment of their patrons. This was particularly evident with the administration of the recent payroll protection legislation where big national banks made it difficult for small businesses and individuals to go through the application process. Not only does the credit union provide resources on credit and loan management, but there are also resources and contacts for learning proper accounting and investment. A large part of a retirement fund is often investing your money into the stock or real estate markets. Schools often do a sub-par job of educating about these topics and therefore having a money management support network is incredibly important for myself and my peers to retire at a reasonable age.

The benefits to being a member of a credit union are immeasurable. In this digital age of constant change, the credit union provides the groundwork for a stable financial future which normal banks will not often provide. The credit union can best serve me and my peers by continuing the work of providing a member oriented support network, resources for learning credit and debt management, teaching us how to invest for our future, and laying the groundwork so that everyone has a chance at a stable financial future.

Essay 02

Unfortunately, the last thing on any graduating high school senior's mind right now is credit unions. My friends are tied up in worries about handling college, how COVID-19 is going to affect their semesters, and how they are going to pay tuition with such widespread financial insecurity. As trying as the past few months have been for the world as a whole, there is certainly good to be gleaned from it. People are outside more. Families are bonding. The collective efforts to end the pandemic have brought people together no matter how many miles apart they may actually be. These past few months have also made clear to me that the primary issue on the mind of every graduating high school senior is security. So while my peers might not be thinking about the Congressional Federal Credit Union right now, it is exactly what can help offer relevant, accessible information on regaining financial security in this uncertain time.

The pandemic has moved everything that could possibly be made digital to the internet, meaning this is the prime time for the Congressional Federal Credit Union to undertake online outreaches--not only because everything is moving online, but because this is the time where my peers are determining how they will pay for college, and are navigating difficulties due to COVID-19 that the credit union can help them with. Maintaining any community, especially that of the credit union, requires reaching out to my generation. This outreach is most effectively done through social media. Almost all my friends use Instagram, which is a fantastic way for Congressional Federal Credit Union to build an online social media presence that directly interacts with my generation. Instagram's options for interactive livestreaming allows viewers to ask questions, making it ideal to communicate the benefits of Congressional Federal Credit Union and answer inquiries about the ways they serve students. An Instagram account can also advertise services, and link to the website. Although the credit union already offers many online resources and great opportunities for taking student loans, publicizing these benefits through a widely used social media platform will reach students directly.

The most relevant financial topic to myself and my peers at this time in our lives is student loans. My education has left me with the ability to easily analyze Hamlet's soliloquies, but a complete lack of knowledge about finance. Many of my peers are in the same boat, struggling to figure out the best way to approach student loans, which almost every student applying to college must consider. The credit union could assist us by filling that lack in the American education system, and offering basic information online about the financial needs we are encountering at this point in our lives. Addressing even the most simple questions online--such as how one takes student loans, what smart financial decisions are for taking loans, and how they will impact the student later--would not only help us, but also help raise awareness for the Congressional Federal Credit Union and its benefits in regards to taking loans. This would be especially helpful in the fall, when high school seniors begin the college application process, and in the spring, when they receive admission letters and are discussing financial options. This outreach to distribute basic, accessible information will help the credit union create a new, financially-conscious generation that recognizes the importance of small credit unions. This outreach, either done through social media or simply the credit union website, not only benefits my peers and I, but also the Congressional Federal Credit union in spreading information about the benefits of membership.

With student loans being the top concern of my generation and the added stress of COVID-19 instability, many entirely put aside saving for future purchases, like a home or a car. However, knowing how to approach these financial challenges and knowing that they are possible, despite the crisis, are crucial landmarks in maturity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the homeowner's rate has gone down with just about every generation. The Congressional Federal Credit Union could help break this trend by providing information on becoming financially independent in the first years of adulthood. Even just offering a basic plan on how young adults can save for these expenses and approach loans would aid my generation in defying the statistics, and gives us incentive to become involved in the credit union. Affirming that attaining these things are still possible through the credit union would help serve my peers through the pandemic.

By providing online programs specifically geared toward my generation, the Congressional Federal Credit Union can forge a path for maintaining its unique, community-oriented financial benefits in an uncertain time. By publicizing its benefits in ways that are accessible to myself and my peers, the credit union guarantees that we will share this knowledge with our friends, creating a more informed and financially conscious community. The usage of social media has only grown with the coronavirus crisis and the increasing availability of online information, so there is no better time to create an Instagram presence. Outreaches to my generation about our specific financial challenges will aid both the credit unions and its members, retain community, and create a generation confident about its financial future.

Essay 03

One way the Congressional Federal Credit Union can assist graduating students is to provide financial literacy programs and low-interest rate student loans to qualifying students. A requirement of the student loan agreement should include that the student is required to participate in free webinars on various aspects of financial literacy such as understanding credit, high-interest rates on savings accounts, and low-interest credit cards. I firmly believe that these are life skills that are much needed not only for young adults of my generation but for persons of any age.

As a high school senior, I have received several advertisements in the mail, which encouraged me to apply for a credit card with various companies to start building my credit history. Initially, when I received these advertisements, I thought to myself, "I don't have a job. How can I afford a credit card?". However, after speaking with my father, I was told that this would be an excellent opportunity to establish a credit history. After researching the pros and cons of building good credit, I then understood how applying, receiving, and responsibly maintaining a credit card will positively affect my credit profile. I learned that credit ratings affect different facets of your life, including job opportunities, home buying, and loan approval. I was enlightened to learn that some employers perform credit checks on potential candidates to assess how responsible the individual is with their credit. Using this information, employers believe that whether or not an individual is a good steward over their finances, this is a sign of how responsible and credible of an employee they will be. Many of life's larger purchases, such as graduate school, houses, and cars, require financing. The major part of financing is creditworthiness.

Low-interest rate credit cards will assist students in establishing a credit history. Like me, many college freshman have not held a "real job" and do not have a credit fingerprint. Some companies will provide students with credit cards at an inflated interest rate of 20 to 23 percent with a credit limit of \$300. While I have no issues with the initial limit of \$300 a lower interest rate and mandated financial literacy training, students will have a higher chance of success in this area. While building credit is essential, students must also understand the importance of saving. Increasing interest rates on savings account for college students would make saving money more attractive. People also like to receive perks. Congressional Federal Credit Union can provide quarterly incentives for amounts deposited during that time period. For example, persons who make five or more deposits a month will have 5 dollars deposited for each month into that savings account at the end of the quarter.

Historically financial literacy is not a subject discussed in many African American households. Possibly due to elders in the community not having a full understanding of the ability to financially plan past the present need for survival expenses. Becoming financially literate allows people to become self-reliant. Harnessing the ability to save money, distinguish the difference between wants and needs, manage a budget, pay bills, buy a home, pay for college, and plan for retirement.