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# Faculty And Students Together

THE IMPACT AND PROMISE OF ENGAGING FACULTY  
TO SUPPORT STUDENT BASIC NEEDS

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Believe in Students  
Empowering college student for success

# Sitting with Sam in a small office in Milwaukee Area Technical College's faculty union building, I listened intently and held onto tears while he talked about his morning's exam ...

He hadn't done well this time, he explained, though he'd sure wanted to. He was just exhausted. Nothing left to give. Nights of parking his truck around Milwaukee to catch some zzzs had been ok - until now. Last night he'd decided to revisit his grandma's old place, where she lived before moving down south with family. It was quiet, he had fond memories there, and after sliding into the driveway he slept deeply. But a sudden rap on the window revealed a pistol and an angry man behind it, throwing him awake and threatening his life.

Over Sam's right shoulder, through a crack in the door, I could see Michael Rosen sitting in the Local 212 lounge with several other students. Like Sam, many were going hungry trying to get their college degrees. Some, including Sam, were homeless. Mike was always there, always listening, eager to help. But he wasn't a social worker or a student affairs professional - he was a teacher. An economics professor. By professional norms he was supposed to be talking equations, not public benefits programs.

I too was a professor, a sociologist, visiting to interview Sam and other students for my latest book. But my research never felt like quite enough thanks for what I owed them, given all I learned and gained personally when *Paying the Price* was published in 2016. I appeared on the Daily Show with Trevor Noah while they struggled to make rent. It wasn't just.

If I gave money to their college, experience told me that it would get lost in the financial aid bureaucracy and take forever to reach them. I could hand out money myself, but that wasn't easy or sustainable—I now lived in Philadelphia. But Mike, the guy who already had their trust, could help. In fact, I was pretty sure he was already digging in his own pocket to support them. Suddenly, I knew what to do.

From the start, the FAST Fund had twin purposes: (1) Get money to students who need it, fast. (2) Ensure that Faculty and Students Together (FAST!) solved the problem. Educators and students are nothing without one another. I wanted to underline that truth and give them something to do together—educators as supporters with money to give, and students as teachers helping faculty learn about their lives. A mutually beneficial arrangement, I hoped. Money would flow quickly because faculty would be empowered—even required—to believe in students—to believe their truths—and to give them help.

At the time very few colleges and universities offered emergency aid. Those that did required extensive applications and vetting processes, so I made sure that the FAST Fund did the opposite. We gave money to faculty and they gave it to students. Period. That was a subversive move, to be sure. The funds didn't count as official financial aid to students or required forms; it was more like a bit of help from a friend. Plus it was easy and cheap—we were able to focus dollars on students, not administrative hassle.

First it was just a few faculty and several dozen students, \$5,000 here and there. But within a few years the effort grew, and nowhere more than in Milwaukee. Mike's commitment was contagious, and students like Sam responded to the efforts, supported the work, and built the fund. Staff and faculty at Local 212 helped by providing the energy and organizing capabilities to sustain the effort. And seven years later the MATC administration finally secured a rapid-deployment emergency aid system for the entire college.

That system can't and won't replace the FAST Fund. While money now reaches students more quickly, the critical role of faculty and students together remains. There is so much in the world of higher education that pushes those two groups apart. With the FAST Fund, Believe in Students is bringing them into contact for substantive discussions. It's professional development for professors who otherwise don't often get to know their students' outside the classroom experiences. It affects their knowledge of how student financing and financial aid works, what college staff and administrators do, and even where and how state and federal policies work and fail. Students learn about the role that their educators can play when they teach with care and develop as powerful advocates because someone believes in them.

Sam is now an MATC graduate and an activist. Mike and the FAST Fund helped him and so many, many others. This is just the beginning. A recent evaluation of emergency grants at a college much like Milwaukee suggested that those funds can double graduation rates. This is a strategy that works, even for students who don't seem like college material and would otherwise be left behind—students who sleep in their cars, still pay their parents' bills, or are raising young children while also attending classes. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that philanthropy and government must work together to meet students' basic needs—there is no other way to produce and sustain a college-educated workforce. Professors are essential to that effort to support students as human beings, and in turn they reveal their humanity too. Together, believing.



*Sara Goldrick-Rab*

Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, Founder, Believe in Students

A close-up photograph of a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie. He is looking down and writing in a notebook with a pen. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a library or study area. The lighting is soft and focused on the man's face and hands.

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The college affordability and housing affordability crises really threaten the promise of higher education, and the FAST Fund tries – in many ways across the country – to keep that promise alive. Often we’re making a small dent, but that can sometimes be at the core of ensuring [low-income] students can stay in college. Which, for better or worse, they need to do to realize a middle-class lifestyle.

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DR. DAISY ROOKS,  
FAST FUND LEADER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

[LEARN MORE](#)

# The Crisis of Paying for College

There is no doubt that postsecondary education offers one of the surest pathways toward upward economic mobility. Associate's degree holders [earn more at the median](#) than those who have earned a high school diploma only, while bachelor's degree holders make, on average, about [\\$1.2 million dollars more in lifetime earnings](#) than their peers with a high school diploma. In 2021, median income for recent college graduates reached nearly \$53,000, in comparison to \$30,000 in median earnings among high school graduates in the same age range. Roughly [86% of all college graduates are employed](#), compared to 68% of those with a high school diploma only, while college graduates have a [3.5 times lower poverty rate](#).

There are also well-documented benefits of a college education beyond financial gains. College graduates are 47% more likely to have health insurance and greater access to retirement plans, are more likely to persistently vote, and can expect to live (on average) seven years longer than their peers with no postsecondary education. Taken together, students who finish their college degree significantly improve their employment and earning prospects, remain on a key route out of poverty, and are positioned to invest in themselves, their families, and society over time. And yet, navigating the costs to get there can be excruciating for many students.

In her book *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*, Dr. Goldrick-Rab examined the dynamics of college affordability, debunking age-old explanations about college completion that assign responsibility to student aptitude while absolving higher education policies and practices of accountability. Not only does her work shine a light on the relationship between declining public funding for higher education and waning federal aid and skyrocketing tuition costs; it underscores that the price of college education transcends merely tuition alone. In fact, she posits that it is students' basic living expenses, rather than tuition and fees, that are the foremost drivers of cost.



## A Critical Crossroad

Students who struggle to meet basic needs, the majority of whom are low-income students, can be one step from having an unexpected emergency delay or altogether derail their academic dreams.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT FAST FUNDS](#)



# The benefits of emergency aid programs

Studies show that emergencies pertaining to basic needs insecurity can affect nearly every metric used to evaluate student success, including persistence, academic performance, mental health, perceptions of belongingness, and graduation rates. Higher education institutions have made efforts to respond, and particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency aid programs have become a common institutional response. There is increasing evidence that emergency aid programs [have the potential to keep students on track](#), including a [2021 study that indicated](#) well-timed grants of \$250 had a significant impact on graduation rates.





# The limitations of emergency aid programs

Historically, emergency aid programs have been plagued by challenges that have been resistant to innovation. In 2016, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (now NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education), produced the most [comprehensive research of institution-run emergency aid programs](#) at that time, including more than 500 campuses.

Five years later, The Hope Center on College, Community and Justice conducted a survey of over 100 institutional emergency aid programs. The latter study found that little had changed, even as substantial federal investment in emergency funds found most schools with a large influx of available funds.



In 2016, the NASPA study found that the most common form of communication about emergency funds was “word of mouth.” Less than one in five institutions proactively advertised the availability of emergency funds, primarily because there was not sufficient funding available to meet the needs that they saw. By 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, the Hope Center found that only 44% of schools extensively advertised available funds to students.



In 2016, the NASPA study indicated the importance of getting timely emergency funding to students. By 2021, just 44% felt they could deliver funds within 48 hours.



In 2021, the Hope Center reported that only one in four campus emergency funds was available to students outside standard business hours. This likely relates to the 2016 finding that 59% of institutions reported having inadequate staff capacity to help coordinate student emergency aid and other available supports – even before the unprecedented demand of the pandemic.



As a result, the Hope Center found that even in the midst of a pandemic, where emergency supports both within and outside of higher education were widely available, only one in three students knew emergency aid was available, and less than 20% of students surveyed ended up applying for support.



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One thing that is guaranteed for all students is that they *will* interact with faculty. They may not ever meet with a financial aid officer or counselor throughout the course of their college career, but at minimum they will engage with their professors. So faculty are the front-line support and get the truest sense of what our students are actually going through.

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DR. ELYNAR MORENO, FAST FUND LEADER  
AT LOS ANGELES SOUTHWEST COLLEGE

[LEARN MORE](#)



# An Innovative Response: The FAST Fund

In 2016, the FAST Fund was developed as the flagship program of Believe in Students in response to these limitations. **The FAST Fund is a faculty-led emergency aid program designed to provide students experiencing basic needs insecurity with swift financial assistance so they can remain enrolled in college and focused on their courses, and ultimately obtain their academic credential.** FAST is an acronym that stands for “Faculty and Students Together,” and the goal is to create a simple, stigma-free process to get funds to students, quickly.



## Better Together

Critical reforms in higher education require engagement from multiple campus stakeholders to meaningfully enhance student outcomes. College faculty are often overlooked and underutilized in discussions about the conditions needed to establish a transformational culture of care, and the FAST Fund was developed with the clear conviction that faculty are integral contributors to students’ academic success and their personal wellbeing. At the same time, we are clear that faculty don’t - and shouldn’t - do this work alone. We celebrate the invaluable contributions professional, non-faculty partners who provide critical and equally meaningful leadership to FAST Funds every day. In this paper we highlight the unique benefit of engaging faculty while acknowledging that strong FAST Funds involve both faculty and other higher ed professionals as leaders.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT FAST FUNDS](#)



## The FAST Fund: An Innovative Response

The FAST Fund has minimal requirements for students beyond a commitment to pursuing a college education. Beyond this, FAST Fund leaders at each institution have the flexibility to create a place-based structure undergirded by [four evidence-based principles](#):



### HELP STUDENTS

Put your care for them front and center.



### HASSLE FREE APPLICATION PROCESS

Don't ask students to do prohibitive paperwork. (i.e., FAFSA)



### MOVE QUICKLY

Make a decision without imposing a waiting period.



### JUST GIVE

No need to name the donor, thank the Fund or file a lot of paperwork.

In addition to the principles above, we have identified several key program learnings to help ensure prompt and equitable distribution of funds while maintaining sustainable operations.

- 1. EMERGENCIES SHOULD NOT AFFECT FINANCIAL AID.** FAST Funds operate as programs of Believe in Students, keeping them independent of campus administrative offices and improving students' ability to get help without concern about affecting their financial aid package.
- 2. IDENTIFYING A TEAM AT THE ONSET IS ESSENTIAL.** Faculty often have many competing priorities, and administering the FAST Fund is a volunteer effort. Working collaboratively with a group – which may include turning day-to-day management over to advisors or other professionals–minimizes burnout and helps connect the program across campus.
- 3. CLEAR DATA TRACKING INFORMS GOOD DECISION-MAKING.** Closely monitoring and assessing the amount of aid that each student requests, and the primary area(s) of need being indicated, helps FAST Fund teams set program parameters to maximize resources.
- 4. A PIPELINE FOR ONGOING FISCAL SUPPORT IMPROVES STAYING POWER.** FAST Fund leaders are not professional fundraisers, so establishing strong campus and community partnerships assists with sustaining the program.
- 5. REGULAR ENGAGEMENT WITH A PEER NETWORK PROVIDES LEARNING AND SUPPORT.** Actively connecting with FAST Fund colleagues across the country fosters an ethos where bringing both challenges and successes to the group is welcomed and affirmed.



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## The FAST Fund: A Fundamental Shift

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**The FAST Fund has grown and changed since the early days of development. Throughout that process, two critical concepts have emerged that inform our path moving forward:**

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### **Faculty need to be empowered to respond to student needs**

Faculty are both well-positioned and underutilized in helping college campuses reimagine how to support students. Faculty [are often regarded as trusted advisors](#), and are among the first to notice challenges impacting students' engagement, whether or not they are submitting assignments, and ultimately their progress toward graduation. Thus, they are particularly well-suited to identify students facing challenges, help normalize those challenges, and connect students to support. Recognizing this, Believe in Students has built a [network of college faculty across the country](#) who - in addition to their full-time teaching and often administrative responsibilities - volunteer their time to develop and lead a FAST Fund on their campus. The FAST Fund gives faculty members a concrete solution they can share with students, and opens a doorway to conversations, learning, and connections that might not otherwise happen.

### **Union and association partnerships can be powerful approaches to change**

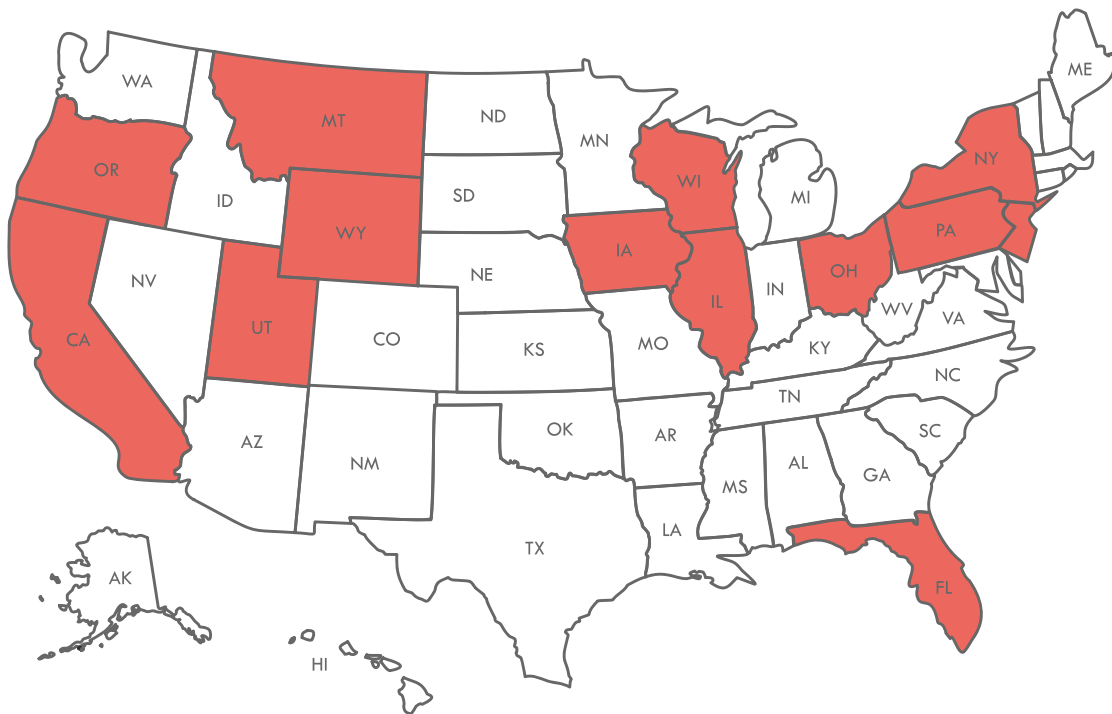
Higher education unions provide a powerful partnership for expansion. As early as 2018, Believe in Students began working closely with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to solicit applications from its local unions, offering seed funding to ensure campuses had a solid financial start. The communications and organizing infrastructure of union locals helps to build connections, raise funds, and create campus-based change, and leverages the power of faculty and other professionals in a unique way. Unions typically have a direct line of communication with school administration and in many cases, have more power than other constituents in making sure their voice is heard - which is useful when promoting needed institutional change. In the fall of 2021, [AFT committed a landmark \\$100,000 investment in Believe in Students](#) to support and expand FAST Fund programs at two- and four-year colleges. Today, the American Federation of Teachers and Believe in Students have established a formal partnership, [culminating in an AFT resolution](#) to support the development and expansion of FAST Fund programs at institutions across the country.

# The Impact: Addressing Student Needs

The FAST Fund has served students experiencing basic needs insecurity on 45 campuses since it was launched, spanning 22 states across the United States. Today, Believe in Students is partnering with site leaders at 28 higher education institutions who are administering the FAST Fund program on their campus. The institutions are diverse in composition and include:

- 14 public two-year community, technical, and/or vocational colleges
- 13 public regional or flagship research universities
- 1 private liberal arts university

Note: 12 FAST Fund campuses are also federally designated [Minority Serving Institutions](#) (MSIs).



 FAST Fund campuses



## The Impact: Addressing Student Needs

While each individual emergency grant from the FAST Fund may be relatively small depending on need – hundreds of dollars rather than thousands – the figures below reflect the vital role that the FAST Fund has played to advance the promise of emergency aid as a key lever for persistence (and completion) for students in need.

**45**

CAMPUSES IMPACTED  
SINCE 2016

**28**

CURRENTLY ACTIVE FAST  
FUND PROGRAMS

**2,700**

STUDENTS SERVED BY THE FAST  
FUND SINCE INCEPTION

**1,500**

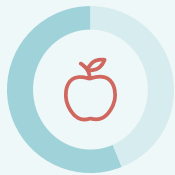
FAST FUND RECIPIENTS IN  
2021-22 ACADEMIC YEAR

**\$1M**

TOTAL DIRECT EMERGENCY AID  
TO STUDENTS SINCE INCEPTION

**\$400K**

DIRECT EMERGENCY AID TO STUDENTS  
IN 2021-22 ACADEMIC YEAR



**51%**

FOOD



**47%**

BOOKS & SUPPLIES



**41%**

TRANSPORTATION



**33%**

HOUSING

NOTE: These percentages are based on reporting data received from FAST Fund campuses during the 2021-22 academic year. Some students requested funding for more than one need at the same time. This aggregate data is expressed in a summary form for Believe in Students and is not intended to yield broader conclusions for research.



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It's a very different world and we have to be empathetic. Schools that may want to start a FAST Fund need to understand that emergencies our students have are very real for them – so a student not having food at the time may mean that they might not come to campus. Even \$200 can be 'life or death' now when it may not have been before.

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NIKKI WILLIAMS, FAST FUND TEAM MEMBER  
AT COMPTON COLLEGE

[LEARN MORE](#)

# The Impact: Creating Change on Campus

Students' interactions with faculty have an impact on whether they [feel engaged or develop a sense of belonging in college](#). For marginalized students in particular, instructors who focus intentionally on strategies to support students' sense of belonging help them [feel connected socially and academically on campus, and avoid dropping out](#). Not only that, through supportive and consistent relationships with their students, they are instrumental in [counterbalancing structural inequities on their campuses](#) (such as where financial aid falls short), and serve as [important connectors](#) to other helpful campus and public assistance resources.

In the same ways, our FAST Fund site leaders demonstrate a clear level of urgency about fostering a [culture of care](#) for their students. They understand the ways that students' financial challenges affect their lives and academic outcomes, and they see themselves as change agents who want to alleviate as many of these constraints to their success as possible. Recognizing that, as one FAST Fund site lead put it, "students have a lot more to worry about than their homework", our network of leaders use a range of intentional practices to reach students and raise awareness about the FAST Fund.

These include:

- [A statement on basic needs security](#) in their course syllabus to reduce stigma;
- Discussing the program during department and other college-wide meetings, which have yielded same-day donations to the FAST Fund;
- Closely monitoring their FAST Fund application trends to advocate for broader institutional change; and
- Interactive social media campaigns to meet students where they often are.

All of this, and more, transpired amid a global pandemic just a couple of years into the FAST Fund's conception, testing a bold approach to student success that embraced the inclusion of faculty. The insights contextualized below, while not exhaustive, are a testament to the collective impact of FAST Fund site leaders actively responding to disparities in student outcomes at their institutions.

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The FAST Fund serves as a bridge. With every student we help, they will pay it forward. That's the bridge.

LIZ FRANCYK, FAST FUND LEADER  
AT MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE



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## The Impact: Creating Changes on Campus

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### INSIGHT 1

#### **Recognizing barriers and developing a pathway to overcoming them increases students' sense of belonging.**

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Faculty who openly acknowledge how basic needs challenges can interfere with their students' academic plans not only help to reduce feelings of shame and ambivalence, but can also develop increased levels of connectedness in and out of the classroom. For example, when discussing the FAST Fund's impact at Los Angeles Southwest College (called Invest In U), Dr. Elynar Moreno emphasized the centrality of faculty who have the "truest sense" of students' in-and out of class experiences. As an adjunct instructor at LASC, Elynar says that because her students actually know her and she has "always provided resources" that connect students experiencing basic needs insecurity, they trust her and are more open about their challenges. Reflecting on this further, Elynar referenced a former student of hers who was a single mother and having attendance issues, ultimately because she needed help moving. Given the established rapport with the student, not only was Elynar comfortable checking in on her, but she was also able to directly connect the student with the FAST Fund to assist with her moving.

Amanda Flanagan, who provides leadership to the UUP FAST Fund at Stony Brook University, saw similar outcomes. In particular, her creative partnership strategy - which involved requesting 10-minutes during different departmental meetings to discuss the FAST Fund - established an active, bi-directional pipeline of support for students. And this paid off. A first-generation student in her senior year at Stony Brook was two semesters away from finishing her degree. At no fault of her own, she encountered an unexpected financial emergency, was unable to receive any assistance from her family, and did not qualify for any private loans. Fearing that she might have to drop-out, she was connected to Amanda and the FAST Fund. The FAST Fund was able to cover a portion of the student's need, and, because of the bi-directional pipelines of support that the Stony Brook cultivated, the student was connected to the university's [Finish in 4 team](#) and received the remaining financial assistance needed to cover her balance. Amanda then brought her on as a student worker, and she graduated with her bachelor's degree shortly thereafter.





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## The Impact: Creating Changes on Campus

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### INSIGHT 2

#### **Faculty are invested and critical partners to facilitate campus change.**

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[While research demonstrates](#) the importance of engaging faculty in campus efforts to improve student success, they are often underutilized as drivers of institutional change. However, important practices used by our site leaders since being involved with the FAST Fund highlight the advantages of such engagement for faculty. For example, Judy Crozier – who teaches in the Department of English and leads the FAST Fund at Compton College – and her campus team uncovered an important institutional need shortly after launching their program. Information about accessing their FAST Fund was widely circulated on Compton’s campus, and many professors even shared the information with students in Canvas. Judy and team saw a major influx of requests coming from low-income nursing students who could not afford the necessary medical kits for their program. While the costs of the kits exceeded what the Compton College FAST Fund team could award themselves, they were able to elevate this student barrier to university administration to discuss solutions.

Similarly, Dr. Daisy Rooks, who leads the UFA FAST Fund at the University of Montana, shared that what she hears most from student recipients is that the FAST Fund quickly relieves their stress in difficult situations, especially those that come on suddenly. One of those sudden stressors that the UFA FAST Fund team uncovered was transportation. More specifically, many of their students are now commuting longer distances to campus, citing skyrocketing housing costs in the area as the reason. Consequently, the UFA FAST Fund team saw a noticeable uptick in transportation-related requests (i.e., parking permits, tires, etc.). Fortunately, Daisy began working closely with her colleague who directs the basic needs office on campus to regularly monitor their FAST Fund application data. Today, they organize these insights – such as the increase in transportation-related issues for commuter students – that are shared with university administration for the purpose of making data-informed arguments for institutional policy changes.



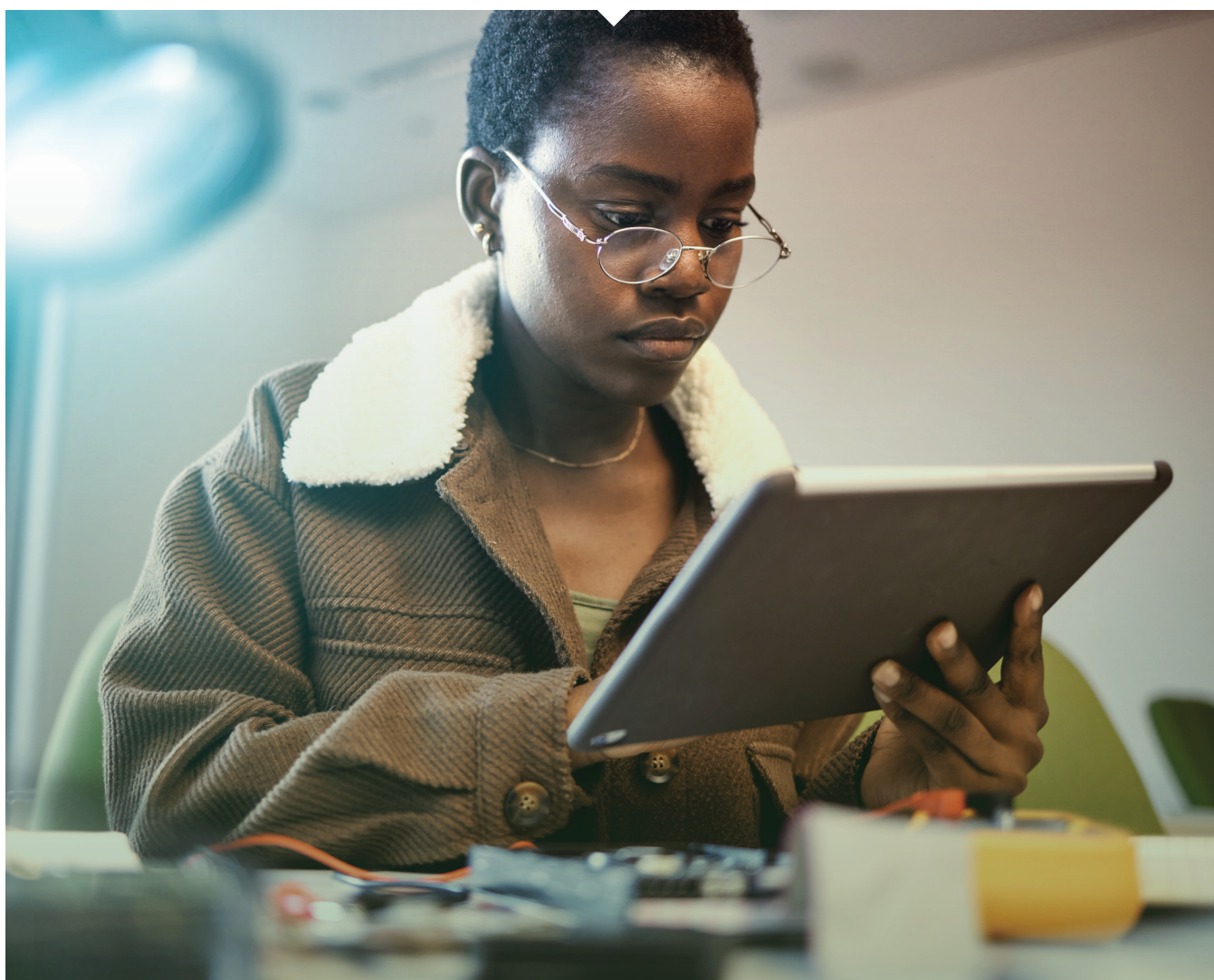
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## The Impact: Creating Changes on Campus

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### MATC CASE STUDY

**Empowered faculty leadership can meaningfully influence a more supportive and inclusive campus environment.**



It's no surprise that educators who are given the encouragement and support necessary to take measured risks and use resources in ways that meet students' needs also [positively impact student outcomes at an institution](#). This has been key to the success and sustainability of the FAST Fund from the beginning, where engaged faculty and a rallying union local promote growth mindsets and directly influence campus change for students experiencing basic needs insecurity.

During the summer and fall of 2016, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab and her Wisconsin HOPE Lab research team interviewed students at the Local 212 offices at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) as part of a study exploring college student food and housing insecurity. [This research underscored the ominous reality](#) that for many MATC students, unexpected expenses such as car trouble, reductions in work hours, and/or delayed financial aid could often be the difference between attending classes and dropping out altogether.

This same year, Goldrick-Rab's newly formed Believe in Students invested \$5,000 at MATC to develop the initial FAST Fund model. She worked closely with Dr. Michael Rosen - who had spent 29 years as an economics professor at MATC, 17 of which were also spent as President of AFT Local 212 - to use the seed funding to provide rapid assistance to students experiencing financial emergencies at the institution. In its first year, Local 212 raised an additional \$2,500 from faculty and retirees who were deeply concerned about the volume of students that did not complete their courses due to housing or food insecurity as well as other emergencies. Altogether, this funding assisted 26 students, where nearly 40% of the need cited was preventing evictions and/or securing housing for homeless students.

By the 2017-2018 academic year, Michael and his colleagues further galvanized campus and community support in a number of ways. This included asking attendees to contribute to the FAST Fund in lieu of gifts at his own retirement celebration, matching dollars received from anonymous [donors as well as Goldrick-Rab](#), faculty write-ins during MATC's annual Giving Campaign, and momentum from empathetic donors beyond MATC who learned about the [program via the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#). The collective dollars raised that year soared to \$47,000 and the program's impact grew by 319%, serving 109 students.

Undoubtedly, the structural backing of the union from the onset was powerful and proved critical for expanding the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund into a sustainable operation. From the start, the union has provided office space and other administrative support at no cost. Additionally, the union backing has augmented accountability and institutional legitimacy for the program, particularly among MATC faculty and retirees who want their union engaged in efforts that foster equity in student outcomes and community collaboration, and who are primary and longstanding sources of financial support. Further, union sponsorship made it possible for the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund to hold its first gala and silent auction in 2019, which attracted support from Wisconsin's major professional sports teams and local businesses.

The Local 212/MATC FAST Fund has blossomed into an [independent, 501\(c\)\(3\) nonprofit organization](#) and is led by Liz Franczyk who, in addition to serving as Executive Director, is also a member of Local 212 and an adjunct Spanish instructor at MATC. Liz works closely with a group of volunteers that includes MATC retirees and former Local 212 members to manage the program and its finances. Building on Michael's legacy, Liz has continued to bolster support for the FAST Fund, which has steadily grown in financial contributions and programmatic impact. By the 2021-2022 academic year, the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund aided 765 students experiencing financial emergencies with \$220,000 in grants.

Liz emphasized that partnerships, both on and off campus, have been instrumental in not only operating the program, but also boosting the network of support available to students beyond the FAST Fund. This includes connecting students to [external resources like Community Advocates](#) and the [Social Development Commission](#), both of which provide Milwaukee residents with a wide-range of basic needs resources (i.e. rental assistance, emergency shelter, nutrition services, etc.), and the [MATC Student Emergency Assistance Grant program](#) (formerly the MATC Dreamkeepers program), which shares the goal of assisting students with financial challenges to remain focused on their coursework.

When asked about the collective impact of the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund, Liz was clear that the primary purpose remains helping students overcome emergencies so that their progress toward completion is not derailed. Even so, she added that the FAST Fund is merely a bridge and cannot solve the more deeply rooted problems of poverty that impact our society. However, what it can do is “move the needle” by unearthing areas where policy, practice, and perception changes are warranted. And the Local 212/MATC FAST Fund has used its influence and experience to do just that – advocate for systemic and institutional change. This includes:

| <b>Worked to increase emergency allocations to students</b>  | <b>Influenced eligibility for institutional emergency funds</b>   | <b>Advocated for changes in HEERF allocation formula</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Using the union’s influence to get a seat on the campus committee that determined how the CARES Act emergency relief funding would be allocated. Through this involvement, per student allocations were raised from \$500 to \$1,000.</p> | <p>Lobbying to get MATC to include DACA and students impacted by the 150% rule<sup>2</sup> as eligible for emergency aid.</p> <p><small><sup>2</sup>Advocating for MATC’s institutional emergency aid program to expand eligibility to include two key groups: DACA students, and those who are ineligible for federal financial aid because they have previously attempted more than 150% of the credits needed to complete their program, known as the “150% rule</small></p> | <p>Collaborating with the Wisconsin Technical College System and other national organizations to successfully lobby Congress to change the formula used to distribute the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) that disproportionately awarded dollars to elite institutions, while overlooking working-class colleges, like MATC, with large minority student populations.</p> |




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My approach to supporting students has changed since I have joined (the FAST Fund). I really enjoy interacting with students and learning their stories. Each of them are in such different places and have very different needs. It has opened up my eyes to looking at things through different perspectives.

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TORIE BERTAGNOLLI, FAST FUND TEAM MEMBER  
AT WESTERN WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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When students  
tell us what they need,  
we believe them.

FACULTY & STUDENTS TOGETHER

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Believe in Students

Empowering college student for success

# Looking Ahead ...

When the FAST Fund network was founded, there was no formal infrastructure or staff, just a bunch of volunteers who saw the resilience of their students in the midst of the battles they were facing, and wanted to help. However, what was clear then, and remains so today, is that traditional financial aid systems in higher education simply aren't sufficient to meet the financial needs of today's college students. The coronavirus pandemic only [exacerbated and even presented new challenges for these systems](#), disproportionately affecting students who experienced or were at risk of basic needs insecurity.

This program is a critical lifeline for students who need a small boost – both financial and psychological – to stay on track for their dreams. And yet, there is more we can do. As our name implies, we believe in students, not just to achieve their academic goals, but as credible experts on the kind of reforms our higher education system needs to better support them and others like them. We have indeed seen that even as FAST Funds provide support to students, the students in turn educate campus professionals about the realities of their lives and the ways that old approaches no longer serve today's students.

As we look ahead, we will continue to invest in our FAST Funds, growing the network and dedicating more resources to supporting student basic living expenses. At the same time, we are leaning into our key insights about the critical role of engaging the powerful, underutilized allyship of faculty in addressing these important issues, and the scaling power of partnering with a national membership group like the AFT to chart a path toward change at a system level. With this goal in mind, we will continue to grow and engage our network of Faculty And Students Together to pursue more systemic solutions to transform policy and practice to serve today's #RealCollege students.

## OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL:

- 1. STRENGTHEN OUR EXISTING FAST FUND NETWORK** by bolstering the elements of the program model that yield the best outcomes, while also experimenting with new approaches to standardize end-to-end services (i.e., from application to aid distribution to reporting) more equitably and efficiently.
- 2. EXPAND OUR REACH ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES** through faculty and student coalitions, empowering student leadership and building joint efforts to advocate for continuous quality improvement on campus to adjust and refine systems, policies, and practice that lead to meaningful institutional change.
- 3. GROW OUR VIRTUAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES** by developing and testing an online curriculum for faculty and other higher ed professionals that offers evidence-based, immersive and interactive educational modules about the needs of today's #RealCollege students, with a central focus on better understanding and responding to basic needs insecurity on college campuses.

Since our founding, we have been relentless believers in the talent, motivation, and hearts of today's college students and the people who educate them. We are committed to developing and testing bold and innovative solutions that help students today and in the future. And we believe that by forming new, powerful partnerships, we can transform our higher education systems to better serve today's students, and to live into our unique national promise that education is the pathway for every American to have an equal chance for success.



*Traci Kirtley*

Traci Kirtley, Executive Director

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# Faculty & Students Together

THE IMPACT AND PROMISE OF ENGAGING FACULTY  
TO SUPPORT STUDENT BASIC NEEDS



**Believe in Students**  
Empowering college student for success

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