



CASE STUDY

# Invest in U FAST Fund at Los Angeles Southwest College



Believe in Students  
Empowering college student for success

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Invest in U

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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.

DR. ELYNAR MORENO • LOS ANGELES SOUTHWEST COLLEGE



Dr. Elynar Moreno, who leads the FAST Fund at Los Angeles Southwest College (LASC), first learned about the program through a call for proposals from Believe in Students, and was encouraged by a mentor to apply. As an adjunct professor without the direct connection on campus resources where she teaches, she resolved early on that she would need to helm the project.

Once she was awarded the initial funding, she contacted Dr. Michael Rosen, founding Director of the FAST Fund at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), who encouraged her to rally a team. Heeding this counsel, she connected with a former colleague and LASC alumni who helped her establish Invest in U.

Given that Invest in U started in the middle of the pandemic, operations were initially slow going - and community colleges in California have been slower to return to in-person instruction only. Early interest about the FAST Funds were expressed by AFT Local 1521, and Elynar is optimistic about the possibility of establishing a more viable channel for Invest in U to be financially supported by the union.

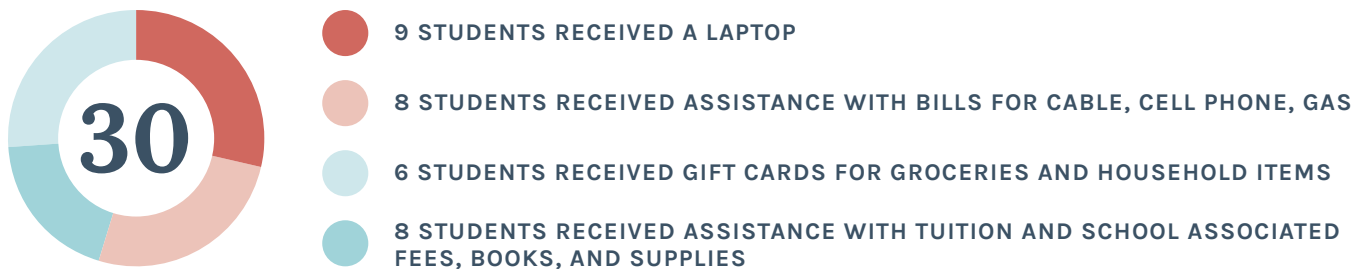


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## Faculty Have Front-Row View of Student Need

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Even so, Elynar has leveraged other community relationships to ensure students are aware of additional resources available to them, such as CalWorks – a public assistance program providing cash aid and services to families that have a child(ren) in the home. Further, to date, Invest in U has directly served 30 students: 9 students received a laptop, 8 students received assistance with bills (cable, cell phone, and gas), 6 students received gift cards for groceries and household items, and 8 students received assistance with tuition and school associated fees, books, and supplies.



When discussing the promise of the FAST Fund, Elynar emphasized the centrality of faculty who have the “truest sense” of students’ in-and-out of class experiences. As an instructor, she says that because her students actually know her and a level of trust exists, they are more open about their challenges. For example, Elynar referenced a student of hers who was a single mom and was having attendance issues because she needed help moving. Because of the established rapport, not only was Elynar comfortable checking in with the student, but she was also able to directly connect her with the FAST Fund. Elynar added that no other program(s) on campus (that she’s aware of) supports students’ moving expenses, but her students have those kinds of expenses and need them supported.

Further, Elynar describes the FAST Fund program as foundational, comparing it to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, and posited that in order for students to realize their fullest academic potential (i.e. self-actualize), higher education cannot ignore their basic need for food, care, and safety – which is where the program makes the most difference. She added that the FAST Fund is a swift and necessary solution to address a problem right away, but it cannot be expected to eliminate root problems. She offered that once a student’s situation is stabilized, she would love to expand the FAST Fund’s offering at LASC to services – including with other organizations with similar missions – that complement the emergency aid in an empowering way.



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