



CASE STUDY

# UFA FAST Fund at the University of Montana



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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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The college affordability and housing affordability crises really threaten the promise of higher ed, 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.

DR. DAISY ROOKS • UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA



UFA (University Faculty Association) FAST Fund leader, Dr. Daisy Rooks, recalls learning about the program at the 2018 #RealCollege conference at Temple University. She was part of a team that the University of Montana sent and attended a session facilitated by Dr. Michael Rosen about the program. As a self-described “union person who cares deeply about inequality”, she found the union-backed, faculty-engaged concept unique and compelling. She added that what made it all click, though, was that it could be run independently from her institution.

The UFA FAST Fund at the University of Montana was officially launched in March of 2020, so it took their team about a year and a half to get started. Modeling key aspects of their program after the FAST Fund at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), such as recruiting retirees to volunteer with program administration, they were quickly able to leverage their initial \$5,000 investment from Believe in Students into about \$20,000 in donations when they opened their fund.

The UFA FAST Fund committee engaged in early discussions about expanding access to their FAST Fund to a neighboring community college (Missoula College). This suggestion was received favorably, and the UFA as well



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## Union Backing Brings Distinct, Powerful Influence

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as the faculty union at the community college both invested money to support students at the community college. When the UFA FAST Fund re-opened in spring 2022, the team at the University of Montana continued to examine its program scope, specifically whether or not FAST Fund dollars should be made available to graduate students. Ultimately, the 5-person steering committee voted to focus FAST Fund dollars on undergraduate students, and direct non-FAST Fund emergency aid dollars to graduate students in need.

**\$300**

FOR MANY STUDENT RECIPIENTS, THE UFA FAST FUND IS ABLE TO “MAKE A DENT AND DIFFERENCE” QUICKLY, AND THAT EVEN A BUFFER OF \$300 CAN IMPACT RETENTION.



From the start, a formal partnership was established with the University of Montana’s basic needs office, Bear Necessities, and the Director of the office was asked to join the steering committee for the UFA FAST Fund. The basic needs office also houses the university’s food pantry, so their team is able to directly connect UFA FAST Fund recipients to other services and federally-funded programs (such as SNAP/WIC) available to them. The FAST Fund team has also maintained a solid and supportive partnership with the UFA, their local faculty union – financially and otherwise. For instance, the union has provided a couple of rounds of funding for the program, used its communications platforms to raise awareness of the fund and solicit donations from individual union members, and has supported logistical components such as processing checks. When reflecting on this partnership, Daisy remarked “this is a project of our local faculty union...and we’re really proud of it.”

Daisy described the impact of the UFA FAST Fund as a program that allows low-income students to breathe. She added that what she hears the most from student recipients is that it quickly relieves their stress in difficult situations, especially those that come on suddenly. Commenting that while the UFA FAST Fund is not necessarily designed to “change anybody’s life forever”, the program can be and often is the difference between a student staying housed another month or not. Daisy also indicated that their students are commuting longer distances to campus recently, because of skyrocketing housing costs in the area, so the fund has seen an uptick in transportation-related requests (i.e., parking permits, tires, etc.).

Further, Daisy shared that for many student recipients, the UFA FAST Fund is able to “make a dent and difference” quickly, and that even a buffer of \$300 can impact retention. For the broader campus community, Daisy and her colleague who directs the basic needs office on campus regularly monitor the funds application data, share insights from the data with university administration, and use them to make data-informed arguments for institutional policy changes. She also noted that as a unionized tenured-faculty member, she is able to advocate for low-income students in this way without fear of losing her job. As is the case with the UFA FAST Fund program at the University of Montana, her faculty union helps make this possible.



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# Local 212/MATC FAST Fund

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