

Supporting UC Davis' Own in a Time of Need

Emergency Funds Have Raised Nearly \$245,000 to Aid Students, Health Care Providers and COVID-19 Research

By Joan Fischer on May 11, 2020 in [University](#)



The Aggie Compass Basic Needs Center continues to distribute groceries to those in need, while allowing people picking up the bags to maintain social distancing. (Karin Higgins/UC Davis)

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the UC Davis community showed what it cared about: supporting students struggling with basic needs like food and housing, along with aiding health care providers saving lives on the front lines and medical researchers racing to find solutions.

Those priorities were emphasized by Chancellor Gary S. May and other university leaders as well as schools, colleges and other units across the UC Davis and UC Davis Health campuses, who set up emergency funds aiding those groups as the crisis unfolded in March.

The pandemic changed the nature of this year's Give Day, the university's biggest annual fundraising event, as organizers pivoted to prioritize emergency needs.

And donors came through. Some 400 donors gave \$85,290 to the emergency funds in the weeks prior to Give Day, which took place April 17–18. By Give Day's end, a total of over 1,400 donors had given more than \$237,000. Since then, an additional \$7,650 has come in, for a total of \$244,650 to the emergency funds thus far.

"We have been overwhelmed by the generosity that so many people have shown our students during this time," said Emily Galindo, interim vice chancellor for Student Affairs, which oversees the Aggie Compass Basic Needs Center and other crucial services. "We already know that too many of our students face daily challenges as they pursue their education. The current circumstances have elevated these, so it's wonderful to see the positive support."

The emergency funds, which now number 19 in all, support undergraduate and graduate students from a wide variety of schools and colleges, as well as services for basic needs. On the health side, funds support medical and nursing students and health care professionals as well as COVID–19 research.

What have these generous donations meant for our students and medical professionals? Here are some highlights:

Student Emergency Relief Aid helps student replace lost income

As a first-generation student from a low-income background, Aiden Lafreniere '20, a double major in economics and political science, was working four jobs to pay her bills. Then along came COVID–19—and pushed her situation from challenging to unmanageable.

"This pandemic has cut my hours in half and is threatening to cut them even further. I am now left with uncertainty about whether I will be able to afford my housing, food, utilities, school supplies and more this month," Lafreniere wrote in an application to Student Emergency Relief Aid.

The SERA program, a collaboration of the Student Foundation and Financial Aid, offers quick cash awards—issued in a matter of days—to students with dire needs not covered by other forms of assistance.

Lafreniere received an award covering two months' rent—enough to pull her through a critical period. "Getting the award made it possible for me to stay in school and finish my undergraduate degree," she said. "Without that help, I don't know where I would be right now."

Emergency Funds help propel research into treatment

From the start of the crisis, UC Davis Health has been a global leader in developing testing and treatment for COVID-19. Another priority: supporting students, health care providers and staff facing financial hardship during the crisis.

On the research side, teams are working together on diagnostic tests and a vaccine for the coronavirus, including a dermal patch for vaccine delivery. Clinical trials are evaluating the safety and effectiveness of two promising drugs. And a new rapid test for coronavirus immediately saved the lives of three transplant patients by quickly assuring the safety of donor kidneys.

Allison Brashear, dean of the School of Medicine, credits emergency funds for galvanizing research and ensuring the well-being of professionals working around the clock to deliver quality patient care and treatment.

“The hardship funds and the COVID-19 research fund are making a difference for our students, trainees, staff and faculty,” said Brashear. “And they’re really impacting the research that we’re able to get expedited in a quick fashion so we can make a difference.”

Student finds new housing and guaranteed food

The Aggie Compass Basic Needs Center has always been a hardworking hub connecting students with everything from fresh produce and CalFresh to housing, financial assistance, mental health counseling and more.

But since the COVID-19 outbreak and suspension of campus operations, Aggie Compass has been working double-time to provide crucial services at a distance. One example: Aggie Compass partners with the ASUCD Pantry—whose doors closed when campus suspended operations—in a grocery bag pickup program providing pantry foods, fresh produce and toiletries to some 300 students each week.

Another critical need: housing. “We were working with a student who was living in his car,” Galindo said. “With COVID-19 and an unfortunate burglary of his car, we were able to convince him that it was unhealthy for him to remain in that type of living situation.

“We were able to cover his expenses to stay in a hotel for a few nights and then to move him into one of our empty residence hall rooms and provide him with a meal card to the dining commons. He will graduate in June.”

Laptops help students move to remote learning

Moving spring quarter classes remote was the best solution for a public health crisis that demanded social distancing. Support from the Annual Fund, an unrestricted fund directed by Chancellor May, assisted in the conversion to online instruction and ensured access for all students.

Because it is unrestricted, the Annual Fund allows the chancellor to respond quickly to emerging urgent needs. “I can think of no better example than protecting our students at this particular moment in time,” said Chancellor May.

That included purchasing some 600 laptop computers for loan to students in need.

“I would have been in a deep financial hole if I had had to invest in a new laptop after mine recently broke down,” said Emily Mijangos ’20, a first-generation international relations major.

Like many students, Mijangos picked up her computer at Shields Library. “I have used it for classes, interview calls, meetings and so much more. It’s been a lifesaver.”

You can make a gift any time to these and other Emergency Funds.