

BECAUSE OF YOU

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A Case for Gator Pledge

Green River College has learned much in the 50 years we have been educating students. One of the most important lessons learned is that students need more than tuition and books in order to be successful. Stable housing, food, bills paid, time to study, and the right frame of mind are all essential to learn and achieve.

Sometimes, it is a student needing a pair of glasses. A professor shared a story about one of their students who discovered they needed glasses but could not afford them. With the help of Gator Pledge, that student was able to get glasses, which changed their whole class experience.

"It's been a difficult year for everyone and with my husband losing his job so unexpectedly as well as many other things that have been thrown at us. I can't tell you how much I appreciate the work you've done to help me as well as many other students." -Jordan, GRC Student

If students encounter an unexpected hurdle, a ripple effect can flow throughout their life, causing them to pause their education or drop out of school. Green River College Foundation is committed to preventing that and Gator Pledge is a vehicle for fulfilling that commitment.

In 2009, through a collaborative effort, GRC Foundation Board, faculty, and staff created the SAFE Fund. This fund aided students who were facing an unexpected budgetary crisis, from a utility bill to computer access or textbooks. During the first year of the SAFE Fund, a total of \$7,200 was awarded to help 23 students in need.

In 2015, as part of the 50th Anniversary Major Gift Campaign, the SAFE Fund transitioned to the Gator Pledge. This pledge established a fund for all students at Green River that would help remove financial barriers to their success.

In two short years, Gator Pledge requests grew to a proportion that we could have never imagined. In 2017-18 the Foundation awarded \$41,000 to 228 students. By 2019-20, \$321,000 went to 964 individuals for financial support, an average of \$332 per student. The year over year increase was phenomenal and the Foundation and Green River College suspected that the need was far greater than we knew or had seen.

In 2019-20 Green River College participated in the Real College Survey through the nationally recognized Hope Center. This survey measured the realities that our students face when it comes to basic needs insecurity. It showed that over 52% of Green River students experienced at least one form of basic need insecurity in the past year (food, housing, and homelessness).

In 2020, the world turned upside down. Our students were struggling, and help was needed. With the partnerships of Gator Pledge, Federal Grant Money (CARES Act), United Way of King County, Ellucian Path Grant, Campus Grant, and SEAG Grant, a total of \$2.8 million dollars went directly to students. With the funding and partnership in place, the college was able, for the first time, to allow students to directly apply for support instead of being referred to by faculty or staff. Since May of 2020 we have had over 5,000 requests from students, asking for help. And that number grows daily.



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Green River College has been fortunate to be there for our students at their time of greatest need. However, Federal, State, and grant dollars will be depleted, and we will still have students in need.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart and I know my children would say the same. Being able to proceed with my degree enables my family to have a stable future. I know you probably hear it all the time but, I came from a very unstable background and all I've wanted to do is show my children perseverance through adversity and give us all a future. You all make that possible, I just cannot express in words how amazing you are. I have never felt judged or belittled. Thank you all so much.” -Leah, GRC Student

Why now, and our challenge to you!

An advisory committee of offices across campus including Workforce, the Completion Center, Financial Aid, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, United Way Benefits Hub and others has allowed us the opportunity to partner and connect students with areas on campus who can best meet their current needs.

What started as a small program to help students when they need it most has grown into a large support network that is a campus wide collaborative effort. With the discovery of the TRUE need Green River College students have, we are now, more than ever, in need of a long-term sustainable funding source to ensure student success.

The growing need for sustainable emergency funding is apparent. The increase in requests and amount has shown us that our students need greater and more flexible resources in addition to our traditional scholarship program. Currently, the Foundation budgets 20K in emergency support dollars and relies on grants and partnerships to fill the gap. Those grants and partnerships are not guaranteed - we need more help.

Because of the longevity of our emergency funding program, we have data that shows what investment is needed to keep students enrolled in class for the quarter and beyond. In 2019, before the pandemic, we had over 600 requests to Gator Pledge and 500 were fulfilled with the average award of \$300. With this support nearly 80% of students completed the quarter and over 75% enrolled in the following quarter. Helping students when they need it most is a proven intervention that can pave the way to their goal of obtaining an education, and thus, success.

In response to our awareness and reality of what our students need, the Green River College Foundation is launching an endowment campaign for Gator Pledge with the goal of raising one million dollars to help students in perpetuity.

Once a minimum of \$1 million in capital is raised, the Foundation will create The Gator Pledge Endowment Fund. The Foundation will be able to draw (an estimated) \$50K per year to use towards Gator Pledge Emergency requests. The endowment will also give donors a clear fund destination, assuring that their gift will be one that will sustain students for years to come.

