UNPRECEDENTED TIMES,
EXTRAORDINARY SUPPORT

Thank you, Gustavson alumni donors, for helping our students when they needed it most

by Andrea Felix de la Rosa

In the wake of a quickly advancing COVID-19 pandemic, the UVic community came together in early 2020 to help the university meet the overwhelming demand for student support.

Close to 2,000 UVic students received assistance from the COVID-19 Support Bursary, helping to alleviate some of the financial challenges they were facing because of the pandemic.

All in all, the contributions of hundreds of alumni, staff, faculty and community members, augmented by government and university funding, added up to more than $1.4 million in disbursements between March and June 2020.

The economic effects of the lockdown were immediate and far-reaching, and some of the first to feel these effects were students who rely on part-time and co-op jobs. As non-essential businesses closed their doors and made difficult staffing choices during the spring, many students found themselves without paycheques. The bursary offered assistance with basic living needs like food and shelter.

“I could not secure a co-op position that would meet both BCom co-op requirements and my expectations, so I switched to an academic term for summer,” says Mizuki Ode, an international BCom student from Tokyo, Japan. “Thanks to the financial support provided by Gustavson alumni and other UVic advocates, I could complete an international business specialization this summer and meet wonderful peers and professors.”

Navleen Bassi had a similar experience. “Following the hit of COVID-19, many of the positions I had applied for emailed me back saying the position was cancelled or no longer available.”

Initiatives to bolster co-op opportunities have since been put in motion, including a partnership between Gustavson Co-op and the research non-profit Mitacs, to support co-op terms that help small-to-medium businesses adapt to COVID-19.

Cancel co-ops were not the only challenge students faced. The bursary fund also helped international students safely return home to their families, and make the transition to online learning.

BCom Carl Haynes said the bursary enabled him to purchase equipment to study remotely “without growing debt or delaying a semester, making quarantine a whole lot easier.”

Despite COVID-19 affecting individuals as well as companies, there was an outpouring of response from Gustavson alumni as they responded to the urgent call for student support. “As much as I had to adjust to working from home and sheltering in place, I thought about students and how their adjustments were probably much more drastic than mine,” says James Toy, MGB ’16, from his home in New Jersey. “I was particularly thinking about students with significant financial responsibilities who are also navigating a new environment—university—that is now even more complicated due to COVID-19. However I can, I want to remove obstacles that prevent students from making the most of their time at UVic.”

With lockdown, cancelled co-ops and adapting to online learning, 2020 is probably not what most students had imagined. However, in true Gustavson fashion, students managed to pull together and find a little good in the midst of uncertainty.

“Despite the challenges faced, I found my classmates inspiring at many times—they would fundraise for people in need, and constantly share their advice on how to cope with the uncertainty of it all,” says fourth-year Behzad Valizadeh. “The school did a wonderful job adapting the BCom program to an online focus and made it a seamless transition. I am very grateful for my colleagues and school during this time.”

While it’s safe to say there are unusual times still to come, financial support from the university continues to evolve alongside student needs.
More from Gustavson student bursary recipients:

“Having access to the bursary allowed me the opportunity to complete summer courses while becoming a temporary healthcare worker and providing home care to one of my close friends who is quadriplegic. My summer courses and healthcare work both proved to be very rewarding experiences.”

Eddie May, BCom student from Calgary, AB

“I am incredibly thankful for the support that the business alumni community provided me. As a first generation immigrant in Canada, I am thrilled to see how encouraged we are to pursue a post-secondary education. I hope to one day be able to offer financial support to students in need.”

Angelica Largo, BCom student from Tsawwassen, BC

“I am very grateful to Gustavson alumni for their support. In such an unstable environment, they gave us great encouragement.”

Ke Xing, BCom student from Nanjing, China

“When the pandemic hit, I couldn’t imagine how difficult it would have been for students to have their support networks temporarily taken away from them. I am glad that not being able to earn an income. When UVic launched the COVID-19 Student Support Bursary, a donation felt like the least I could do to help.”

April Gagnon, BCom ’07, from London, UK

“I would like to thank the business school alumni greatly for their generosity. To know our UVic community supports us students when we really need it has me lost for words.”

Sophia Seemann, BCom student from Sooke, BC