

UC Davis

UCD launches new fellowship for grad students

By Sarah Colwell From page B5 | June 08, 2016



Michelle Dean, a UCD graduate student and a participant in the Guardian Professions Program, is one of the new fellowship recipients. She is pursuing a master's degree in community development. UC Davis/Courtesy photo

In an effort to encourage donors to establish more endowed funds for graduate fellowships in eligible programs, UC Davis recently launched the Graduate Student Fellowship Matching Initiative.

With this initiative, Graduate Studies has committed matching gifts to more than 90 qualifying graduate programs, greatly increasing the impact of philanthropic funds on students' lives.

One such student is Michelle Dean, a UCD graduate student and a participant in the Guardian Professions Program. In and out of foster care from ages 12 through 18, she attended 10 different high school and independent-study programs. When she began her postsecondary education, she had time to take only one or two classes per semester because she needed to work multiple jobs.

Now, she is pursuing a master's degree in community development and serves as an outreach coordinator for the Guardian Professions Program, which serves former foster youths who want to pursue a graduate degree. Thanks to a fellowship made possible by this new UCD initiative, she can focus on her education and does not need to juggle multiple jobs to pay for school.

"Alumni and donors who give back to UC Davis allow others to follow their dreams and goals that maybe wouldn't have been a reality without their gifts," said Dean, who received the fellowship this month.

"The fellowship I received through GPP gives me the flexibility to pursue additional educational interests and the ability to focus on my education and thesis work instead of having to stress as much about financial responsibilities. This allows me to enjoy my time as a graduate student and definitely improves my quality of life."

New support

To help more students like Dean pursue graduate degrees, the UCD Office of Graduate Studies is committed to increasing the current number of about 25 graduate fellows. In addition, the Graduate Student Fellowship Matching Initiative will reduce the amount of time it takes for fellowships to be awarded. Awards will be given out earlier than is typical and will be permanent, thereby increasing access to education for generations to come.

Here's how it works: Graduate Studies funds the payments initially while waiting for the endowed fund to grow. This provides a significant benefit to students immediately and accelerates the impact of donors' gifts through a matching commitment.

With this new matching model, a \$50,000 endowment gift is estimated to double in 12 years instead of the traditional 30 years. The annual payout to the student can be up to \$16,000.

“We are delighted to serve graduate students in a new way through the Graduate Student Fellowship Matching Initiative,” said Prasant Mohapatra, vice provost of graduate education and dean of graduate studies. “If we want to continue to be a leading university, it’s important that we attract the best and brightest.

“And it’s essential that we offer our students resources so that they may pursue their educational goals without taking on a significant financial burden. Too often, finances are the main barrier to talented students pursuing a graduate degree.”

Inspired to give

The new matching initiative already has inspired many donors, such as Davis resident Judy Wydick, to give.

Wydick grew up in Missouri with college-educated, supportive parents who encouraged her in educational pursuits. Her sons both attended college and work in education, her eldest having attended UCD for his undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Wydick said she felt compelled to give to GPP through the Graduate Matching Fund because she recognizes the immense obstacle of not having any kind of family support in pursuing an education.

“Students who really have no family to fall back on — they’re pretty much on their own,” she said. “I just feel strongly they should have what opportunities they can.

“The Guardian Professions Program is a marvelous program, and to make the kind of commitment the university has with the matching initiative — well, it’s extremely important, and it needs others to come along and offer their support.”

Matching fund options

The matching initiative will support more than 90 graduate programs at UCD.

For students like Dean, graduate funding means an open doorway to a promising future — and a clear path to making a positive impact on the world.

For her long-term career, Dean hopes to become the director of a similar Guardian program that serves undergraduate students — a testament to how access to both education and financial and emotional support has affected her life.

“The people in these programs who have assisted me in my academic career deserve so much thanks and gratitude and have helped change my life,” she said. “I want to do the same for others.”

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