



INTREPID AMBITION

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIVER VALLEY

University of Arkansas – Fort Smith
Case for Support



UNIVERSITY *of* ARKANSAS
FORT SMITH.



“Over the past 20 years, we have undergone a tremendous transformation as an institution. But our core mission to meet the needs of every facet of our community is unchanged. This institution is tenacious and dynamic. It’s nimble enough to create a curriculum that will ensure our students are beyond prepared on the day they graduate and ready to work right here in the River Valley. Our faculty go above and beyond anything I’ve experienced in higher education because the amazing people who have chosen to make this place their home believe in making a meaningful difference in the lives of everyone we serve.”

- Terisa C. Riley, Ph.D. Chancellor

Dear friends of the UAFS community,

For nearly 100 years, the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith’s ambition has driven the growth of the River Valley. We know that the success of our university and our region are deeply intertwined and that every advancement we make at this institution is a milestone for this community, a marker of our united quest for excellence.

Two decades into our life as a four-year university, UAFS has become synonymous with exceptionally prepared graduates and steadfast economic development – but we didn’t get here alone. Your desire to empower your children, educate your employees, and build your businesses has fueled our progress.

Time and again, we have been partners, rising to face the challenges of our collective future head-on and always emerging stronger and better for having done so. Now, we ask you to rise with us once more as we embark on the most significant fundraising journey in our university’s history.

This is our time to prove the strength of the River Valley and to fortify the ways our university transforms its people and its industries every day.

With your support, we can go further than ever before.

- We can support our students, removing the barriers that prevent their access to the life-changing power of education.
- We can invest in our people, the exceptional faculty and staff who live and work here in the River Valley. These are the people who give their time, talent, and expertise not only to educate students but to help our community revolutionize the ways we do business and engage in organizations that add to our quality of life.
- We can ensure that every member of our community – from master’s degree candidates to technicians earning a new certification – is ready for a meaningful career right here in the River Valley or wherever the world calls them.

You can be the reason we all succeed, today, tomorrow, together.

Terisa C. Riley, Ph. D., Chancellor

Redefining What it Means to Serve Our Community

What distinguishes The University of Arkansas - Fort Smith, even more than our nearly 100-year history and our continual growth and transformation as an institution, is our approach to higher education.

At UAFS, we have never aimed to replicate the way things have always been done. Just as the passionate professionals of the River Valley have been transforming our region into a destination for advanced technology and the arts, we have been redefining the mission of a regional public university. We’ve broken the mold of higher education, so we can truly serve our students and our community. UAFS serves not just one type of student but everyone from high school seniors to seasoned professionals, first-generation students to corporate climbers looking for a new start.

- We offer a wide range of learning opportunities, from traditional four-year undergraduate degrees to credential programs for working adults and non-credit programs that support growth and innovation across the River Valley.
- We provide every student, no matter their study, with practical, experiential learning opportunities so they develop the real-world skills they need to thrive in the workplace.
- We break the barriers students face at most other colleges, making sure UAFS stays accessible to all. We take pride in being the best stewards of your investments and ensuring our university resources truly fulfil our mission.

Our holistic educational experience means our students succeed at more than academics. UAFS transforms their lives and the lives of their families for generations to come. We fuel the region’s economy, making a \$142.7 million annual impact in Sebastian County alone, and provide the businesses of Arkansas and the world with employees who can hit the ground running as soon as they cross the commencement stage. Every day the students, faculty, staff, and graduates of UAFS make the River Valley a better place to live and work because they believe in the future of this region.



“UAFS has completely transformed my life for the better. I became the first person in my family to graduate from college. I was cared for and appreciated and really invested in because people wanted me to succeed.”
- Karen Barrerra Leon, MSOM

Intrepid Ambition | The Campaign for the River Valley

The template for higher education is broken. The real mission isn’t about the number of programs or majors we offer. It’s not about the faculty-to-student ratio or even the high-tech facilities and beautiful campuses.

It’s about our ability to serve. At UAFS, we serve you—the people and businesses who drive our region—so your companies achieve new levels of success, and the River Valley becomes a healthier, more prosperous place for all of us. When we serve our community well, we create a community where your future executives want to stay, grow, and build. Every year this institution equips the deeply skilled employees who drive your businesses’ success today and fuel their growth tomorrow.

Intrepid Ambition isn’t just going to move this institution forward. It’s going to enable us to empower radical change as a means to spur the River Valley’s growth, innovation, and prosperity.

- 1. We will empower the future of the River Valley through transformational scholarships that make education accessible to all who seek it and support programs that ensure every individual brave enough to believe in the power of learning has the tools to make it to graduation.
- 2. We will revolutionize the experience of working for UAFS through teaching and learning centers that keep our people on the cutting edge and wellness programs that ensure they are as passionate about their workplace as they are about their work.
- 3. We will enhance the comprehensive career-centered initiatives that set our students apart from the crowd and invest in programs to elevate the industries that fuel our region.

We know that when UAFS students excel, the River Valley follows suit. But we also know that without the innovation and education we provide our students and our local workforce, our region risks stagnation.

Your support of **Intrepid Ambition** will transform the lives of UAFS students in perpetuity, strengthen our university to meet the needs of the future, and advance the River Valley for years to come.



The Power of Access

When Ashley Gerhardson, '07, completed her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction in 2015, she was just 28 years old. How did she manage to achieve so much so quickly? Ask Ashley, and she’ll tell you it was the full scholarship she received as an undergraduate at UAFS. “That scholarship gave me the ability to pursue my vision and to accelerate my trajectory. I wasn’t stressed about how I was going to make my goals happen, so I could pour all my energy into making them happen.” Graduating without debt meant “there was nothing that held me back from taking the next step,” she explained.

Today, Ashley is the Director of Data Analytics and Institutional Research for Arkansas Colleges of Health Education and serves on the education committee of the Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce. She is a leader in our community and passionate about new opportunities to support student success through the TBD Campaign. “If I hadn’t had a full scholarship, it would have been difficult to begin college, let alone achieve my future goals. The entire trajectory of my life would have changed.” For Ashley, growing endowed scholarships is essential to developing the River Valley’s next generation of leaders. “Scholarships open doors to more than an undergraduate education,” says Ashley. “They set students up for a lifetime of success. They did for me.”

PRIORITY 1

Priority 1: Supporting Student Access and Opportunity

At UAFS, access is core to our mission and our values. We know that talent is distributed equally, but that opportunity seldom is. And we want to change that. We want every student who dares to take on the challenge of higher education to feel supported from Cub Camp to commencement. We want them to start their careers exceptionally trained, ready to thrive, free from the crushing weight of college debt. And we know that when we make higher education affordable, we empower the most ambitious minds of Arkansas to think bigger.

More than half of all UAFS students are Pell Grant Eligible, meaning they face the most extreme economic hardships. For these students, a college education means making tremendous sacrifices.

Scholarships help lessen those sacrifices and empower students to focus on learning – instead of how they'll pay for their next meal. They mean that a flat tire doesn't put an entire degree plan at risk, and an unexpected textbook doesn't mean being late on rent. For these students, and many more at UAFS, scholarships aren't just considerations – they're the deciding factor.

Through Intrepid Ambition, we will grow our endowed scholarships/ scholarship pool by X million/X percent.

"I'm passionate about scholarships. I believe the biggest thing you can do for a young person is to get them to college and help them through financially. When you do, you transform their lives and the lives of their families." – Doug Babb, UAFS Foundation, Chair.

A robust scholarship endowment means our students can focus on learning, and our graduates can focus on their future without being weighed down by their past.



"97 percent of our students receive scholarship or grants, and even still, the financial commitment can be daunting. For many of our students the concern isn't just whether or not they'll receive aid, it's whether the actual cost of attendance—including books, housing, and time away from work—is possible for the duration of their education. A few of thousand dollars can make all the difference between dropping out and completing their courses, especially for first year students who typically face the largest barrier to entry and get the least state aid." - Dr. Blake Bedsole, UAFS Director of Admissions

Your gift to endowed scholarships will put the exceptional education at UAFS within reach for thousands of students whose financial capacity is limited but whose aptitude, ability, and ambitions are not.

Study after study shows that scholarship recipients are indelibly changed by the understanding that donors have chosen to support them. Your belief in these students translates to a belief in themselves and a charge to honor your investment in their futures.



The Impact of Opportunity

Truly empowering students to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them at UAfS means developing services and support systems that ensure they make it to graduation. We have developed a vast slate of programs that drive student success—from bridge programs that help high school students acclimate to the rigor of collegiate education to credentialing and adult degree completion programs that enable working adults to advance their education and their careers.

More than 60 percent of students at UAfS are the first in their families to attend college, and that number grows every year. First-generation students are shaping the trajectory of their families for decades to come, but blazing trails can mean facing incredible barriers.

We have developed comprehensive support systems to ensure these students don't fall through the cracks. From bridge programs that foster first-year readiness to mechanisms that support adult education, and from academic initiatives that offer advanced tutoring to intrusive advising to catch speedbumps before they become blockades, we take our commitment to support these students seriously.

Through Intrepid Ambition, we will:

- **Expand academic support** programs proven to set students up for success.
- **Grow retention programs** that guide students through their collegiate careers so they thrive academically and graduate on time.
- **Develop offerings for working professionals** and adults who stopped out before earning their degrees through completion programs, accelerated programs, and night, weekend, and online course options.



PRIORITY 2

Priority #2 Investing in our People

Delivering on our promise of a top-quality education begins with our faculty and staff. The careers of the future require employees who have been trained by the brightest minds in the field - faculty who not only teach but who are continually growing, researching, and innovating. We need your help to support:

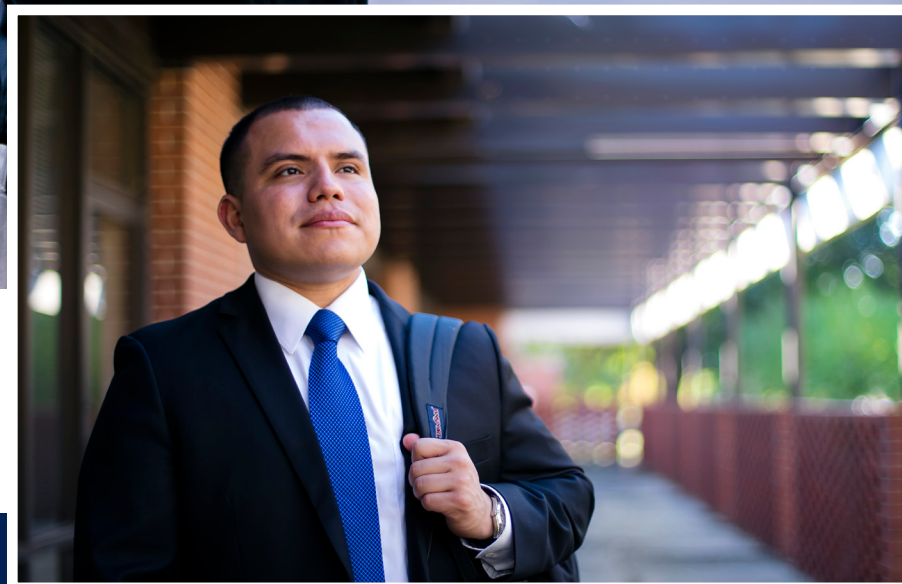
- **Continued development of our educators:** By establishing a center for learning and pedagogy, we will ensure that the faculty who have chosen to share their deep industry knowledge with students are able to do so with a full understanding of educational best practices.
- **Competitive compensation:** Through endowed leadership positions in the arts, sciences, and health and human sciences, we will ensure that the region's intellectual capital grows, that the top scholars in these rapidly changing industries are the ones teaching our students—and advancing our region—and that the professionals who are changing the landscape of their fields are empowered to teach, lead, and research.
- **Enhanced opportunities for research:** From grassland preservation and the removal of microplastics from water supplies to new treatments for cancer using gold nanoparticles, our faculty's research supports the betterment of our world and ensures the continued growth of the River Valley and our nation. Such research requires our support.
- **Expanded Wellness programs:** Recruiting talented faculty and staff is only half the battle. We must create a campus culture that supports our faculty and staff long-term. Through comprehensive wellness initiatives, we can ensure our 1,000-plus employees feel valued and supported, keeping these thought leaders in the River Valley for years to come.

As one of the River Valley's largest employers, UAFS moves our region's economy forward at incredible speed, and our financial impact expands exponentially from the great minds in our classrooms. To be a truly great university, to be a university that changes what it means to get a degree, we must be a truly great employer.

Through **Intrepid Ambition**, we will invest in this place and these people so we can attract and retain the masterful experts who make a UAFS education so esteemed.

"It's time to change the narrative. Research isn't just academic. It has a real connection to economic development because it's through research that we help students develop the industry-level skills that make them marketable."

– Jeffrey Shaver, Professor, Biology



The Value of Research to Student Success

Pioneers of the River Valley

“Microplastics are everywhere,” says Dr. Jordan Mader, Assistant Professor of Organic Chemistry. “In food, water, and air; in clouds two miles above us, trapped in ice on glaciers, and in fat and muscle tissues.”

Closer to home, scientists have discovered them in the Arkansas River. That’s concerning because the Arkansas River plays an outsized role in Arkansas agriculture, transportation, and recreation. Just how contaminated is the Arkansas River? That’s the question Mader and Dr. Maurice Testa, Assistant Professor of Geoscience, set out to answer in 2019.

They soon found that, unlike other contaminants, there “was no scientifically agreed-upon standard for clumping microplastics together so they could be counted,” says Mader.

“If we wanted to measure the number of microplastics in the Arkansas river, we were going to have to build that foundation ourselves.”

Three years later, UAFS is leading microplastic research innovation thanks to Mader and Testa’s work. Accompanied by teams of undergraduate students, they are refining a method using a surfactant to get microplastics to clump together. They are excited about the opportunities that **Intrepid Ambition** will make possible for faculty like them, especially when it comes to supporting advanced research that has far-reaching implications for the health of the very river in our backyard.

“The projects that students are pursuing at UAFS in Physical Sciences not only have a direct impact on their student experience and their journey post-graduation,” says Mader, “but they also allow for a chance to improve the quality of the environment in the River Valley, across Arkansas as a whole, and may lead to a publication in the scientific literature that allows scholars and researchers across the world to benefit from their work.”



“This was the first time anyone had ever done this,” explains Professor Maurice Testa, Assistant Professor of Geosciences, about the research he undertook with Professor Jordan Mayer to identify a method for clumping microplastics together so that their concentration in our water supply can be quantified.

What makes research like Mader and Testa’s even more remarkable is that, unlike large institutions where students often get their first glance at research while working on their master’s or doctoral program, UAFS students can serve as research assistants throughout their academic careers. Over two dozen students have worked alongside Mader and Testa in recent years, many presenting at national conferences and authoring research papers.

Working directly with these game-changing faculty bolsters resumes and inspires passion in the students who participate—one more reason Mader and Testa are excited about the expanded opportunities for faculty research in **Intrepid Ambition**.

“Our students are getting an almost graduate-level experience,” says Mader. Not only do they develop key reading, writing, collaboration, and presentation skills, “but they are very successful in their regular classes,” says Testa, “and they develop close ties with their UAFS community.” Many of the students involved in research, says Testa, “leave the lab as completely different

people. They do a 180.” And as a result of their research experiences, UAFS students have a strong track record of getting into graduate programs and finding jobs that build on the skills they developed through research.

One of those students is Emily Blitz, ‘21, now in medical school at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. “We all played a role in the microplastics research— students and professors— reading, writing, designing, and implementing,” she says. Even though Emily didn’t go the geo-chemical route post-graduation, she believes the skills students gain by participating in research will help them find success no matter the field they pursue. She supports the expanded research opportunities for UAFS faculty and students that **Intrepid Ambition** will make possible. “When you are in the lab with professors, it’s more than a mentorship. You develop a relationship where you learn to trust their critiques because you know you are going to get all the support you need to succeed.”



“One of the best things about UAFS is its low faculty-to-student ratio. Your professors are directly involved in you and your education. Dr. Mader and Dr. Testa were my mentors.” – Emily Blitz

Priority #3 Advancing Career Readiness and Growing Our Economic Impact

At UAFS, we take pride in being rooted in the region. We were founded nearly 100 years ago to build our community up, and our success and the success of the River Valley have been inextricably tied ever since.

Serving you—helping you innovate, grow, and build—is our guiding principle. As we look toward what this region will need in the years ahead, we know that we must align our programs with the industries that drive it. With your help, we have built a university that is nimble and can rapidly advance to train the productive, capable, and inspired employees this community needs. And we graduate them right here in Fort Smith, so the folks you hire to grow your bottom line are as invested in your company’s success as you are.

That’s why advancing career-centered programs is the final core component of **Intrepid Ambition**.

- Through **non-credit programs**, we will grow comprehensive entrepreneur and economic development programs at the UAFS Center for Economic Development that will bring creative ambition to life – and train the region’s future leaders to grow their businesses sustainably.
- Through **for-credit programs**, we will expand and deepen partnerships with area businesses that ensure our traditional degree programs and stackable credentials meet their needs and grow internship opportunities that provide students with hands-on, experiential learning so they are ready to excel on site the day they graduate – and sometimes before.
- In **advanced career services**, we will create an even more robust system for helping students explore career opportunities and skillfully navigate the job search and interview process.
- In **new facilities**, we will scale our science, technology, and business classrooms and laboratories with the exact equipment industry leaders use to conduct business today and grow their businesses tomorrow. From welding machinery to advanced robotics to comprehensive chemical analyzers and digital radiography equipment, your investment will advance the careers of our students and the industries they enter.

You can be one of the reasons UAFS students are competitive in the job market, adept at transitioning from academia to work, and ready to contribute effectively to their internships, externships, and full-time jobs from day one. Because our economic development programs are dynamic in serving River Valley residents and UAFS students alike, your gift will not just support your university; it will support your whole region.



“We look at UAFS as a key driver to our future—especially when it comes to our talent pipeline. UAFS is a true partner. They help us grow because they are able to flex and evolve as we evolve—responding to and integrating into their classes what we see changing in the future, whether it’s robotics, finance, or automatic vehicles. As a result, individuals from our community are making a big impact at ABB and contributing to the success of the electric motor industry across the world.”
– Jesse Henson, President, NEMA Motors - ABB



The Strength of Career Readiness

Eddie Vansell, '08, began his UAFS journey back in high school when the UAFS Western Arkansas Technical Center partnered with his high school to offer concurrent college classes. Two years after entering collegiate Graphic Design courses through WATC, Eddie officially enrolled at UAFS with solid relationships with his professors and an academic scholarship in hand. “UAFS was the next logical step,” he says.

For Eddie, what sets a UAFS education apart is the university’s focus on employing students while they are in school and after graduation. “They really focus on what’s marketable—what is going to be usable following graduation,” says Eddie. “I benefited from that. My senior year internship turned into my first job. I was employed prior to graduation.”

Today Eddie serves as Creative Services Manager for NEMA Motors-ABB and as an adjunct professor for UAFS. “I am excited to have the opportunity to give back,” he says. “One of the best things I can do for students is to help them make pragmatic sense of what they are learning and how it will apply to their future because when that clicks, they have much more ownership and agency over the education,” he explains.

Eddie is excited about this campaign because he believes advancing career readiness is crucial to the UAFS mission. “That’s the point of a college education. It’s not to hang a piece of paper on your wall but to give you certain tools in your toolset that make you ready for what lies ahead. I am proud that UAFS continues to focus on that because that’s what it’s all about.”



Even at almost 100 years old, the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith feels incredibly young. We've only been a four-year institution for 20 years, and our ambition and drive boast all the vibrancy and fervor of youth. We have a solid foundation laid thoughtfully by the same people who built this region. We have new, bold leaders to propel us forward and the determination to make a profound impact on the River Valley in the years ahead.

Our small size means that the investments you make through this campaign will impact every student's experience at UAFS—from the adult stepping back into the classroom to increase their earning potential through advanced credentials to the new undergraduate student gaining the research experience in the lab that will inspire their future medical degree.

When you support UAFS, you don't just give students the means to meet their academic needs and goals. You provide the population of this community with the education that propels the River Valley toward new levels of prosperity.

Your gift will ensure a UAFS education is within reach of every student who wants it, and it will keep students on track to reach their goals.

Your gift will help us attract and retain high-quality faculty and staff, growing our region's intellectual capital, encouraging innovation in the laboratory and in the field, and fostering wellness throughout our community.

Your gift will enhance the comprehensive career readiness programs that set our students up for success after UAFS, meet River Valley employers' needs, and expand UAFS' economic impact.

You are the key to unlocking the synergy that grows this university and this entire region. You are the key to ensuring our students' success, our university's success, and your success today, tomorrow, and in the years to come.

"The education students receive at UAFS is the foundation upon which they build their futures. It equips them with the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to succeed in the world and provides opportunities to make a positive impact in their communities and in the lives of others. When those graduates begin their careers at ArcBest, we know they will thrive because their purpose and our values are aligned."

– Judy R. McReynolds, Chairman, President, and CEO of ArcBest

