Vanderbilt’s Endowment: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the endowment?
The role of Vanderbilt’s endowment is to provide a permanent source of support for the university’s students, faculty and programs. While current-use gifts support the university’s immediate needs, the endowment ensures long-term sustainability.

Vanderbilt’s $6.9 billion endowment includes more than 2,900 individual funds with unique restrictions and designations. As with a mutual fund, these assets are pooled and invested collectively. When donors make endowed gifts, shares are purchased in the university’s endowed pool. The value of the shares reflects investment returns after the annual endowment payout.

Who manages Vanderbilt’s endowment?
The university’s Office of Investments manages the endowment under the direction of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust Investment Committee. Vanderbilt maintains a highly diversified investment portfolio designed to mitigate downturns in any one sector of the economy. The Board of Trust also periodically reviews the endowment’s payout rate to ensure that the university’s current needs are met while also safeguarding the endowment’s future.

What does Vanderbilt’s endowment support?
The endowment provides a permanent source of support to advance the university’s mission of teaching, research and service. See the Endowment by Use chart on the left for more information.

Why does so much of Vanderbilt’s endowment support financial aid?
In academic year 2019–20, more than 64 percent of undergraduate students and more than 83 percent of graduate and professional students received financial assistance. This is a result of our generous endowment donors’ intentions to support scholarships, allowing Vanderbilt to recruit increasingly talented and diverse students. The university launched Opportunity Vanderbilt in 2008, its bold initiative to replace all undergraduate need-based student loans with grants and scholarships. Scholarship support is a top priority for all undergraduate, graduate and professional schools.
VANDERBILT ENDOWMENT MARKET VALUE GROWTH
Over the past half-century, Vanderbilt’s endowment has grown 72-fold.

How did Vanderbilt’s endowment grow this year?
During fiscal year 2020, Vanderbilt’s endowment portfolio grew to $6.9 billion. This growth is due to a set of factors including university investment in the endowment and the addition of new endowed gifts which allowed Vanderbilt to make more than $311 million in distributions.

What is the payout?
A portion of the endowment’s value is distributed monthly to support the donor-designated purpose such as scholarship, faculty or program support. This distribution is known as the payout. Currently, the payout rate is 5 percent of the average per unit market value for the prior three calendar years. In fiscal year 2020, the endowment paid out more than $311 million.

What percentage of Vanderbilt’s annual budget does the endowment fund?
In fiscal year 2020, endowment distributions comprised 25 percent of the university’s operating budget. The remaining 75 percent came from other sources such as grants and contracts, student tuition and fees, and current-use philanthropy.

Can I further the impact of an endowment through my estate?
Absolutely! The vast majority of testamentary gifts are directed for endowed purposes. Such gifts can become a donor’s legacy at the university, benefiting students, faculty, programs or other special interests. To learn more about how you can leave a lasting legacy at Vanderbilt, visit vu.edu/leaveyourlegacy.

If you would like to know more about Vanderbilt’s endowment: Contact Office of Stewardship at stewardship@vanderbilt.edu | Call 615-343-6196