**Executive Summary**

This referendum proposal is designed to provide critical funding for the customer service operations at the Students First Center (SFC). The proposed funds would cover the cost of operating the Student Customer Support Team. This team is solely comprised of student staff. The referendum funds would cover the cost to employ these students.

**Context for Referendum Proposal**

The SFC is a One Stop shop for Enrollment Management. SFC staff are cross-trained in Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar related inquiries and billing. The SFC was designed to operate on an 80/20-service model/benchmark. The goal of an 80/20-service model, or benchmark, is to resolve 80% of the inquiries at a “front counter” level and potentially refer the remaining 20% to a specialist in one of the home offices. Home offices include Admissions, Financial Aid, and the Office of the Registrar.

The SFC was the first One Stop within the UC system. Leadership adopted this service model to create institutional efficiency and to provide holistic student support. The idea was that a centralized service model would eliminate the need for each home office to create and manage their own “front counter” operations, thus saving the institution money. In addition, students are able to receive assistance from one staff member, regarding all the aforementioned topics, instead of having to visit multiple locations.

The customer service standards for the SFC are rooted in UC Merced’s definition of Student Success. We use “robust and meaningful evidence to inform decisions about programs, policies and practices.” This data drive our decisions regarding staffing levels, hours of operation, training, service deployment, and quality control. Furthermore, the support provided by a SFC staff member equips students with critical tools for achieving their educational goals.

The SFC has not received additional permanent staff FTE since 2006. The positions that have been created since then have been funded through Student Fee Advisory Committee (SFAC) requests or by the department taking on new responsibilities. For example, in 2012, the SFC assumed responsibility for managing the main campus phone line. This increase in responsibilities generated some much-needed funding for the department. This model was sustainable when the campus enrollment was below 7,800. Prior to this enrollment level, the SFC could balance the ability to keep wait times low and to ensure all students were receiving the support they need. However, in the summer months leading up to fall 2018 our wait times drastically increased, and our customer service began to suffer. In the month of August 2018 some customers experienced phone wait times of up to 2 hours. In addition, the daily voicemail count exceeded 100 messages.

Furthermore, since 2006 campus enrollment has increased by 587%. The amount of student cases the SFC has supported has increased by 238%. To address this increase in services the SFC has implemented creative funding strategies. Most recently, the SFC implemented a Student Customer Support Team. This model has allowed us to decrease wait times and improve our overall efficiency. Unfortunately, the department does not have funds to sustain this model beyond June 2020. The cost to support the current team is $58,500 annually. This year’s operations are being funded through a combination of carryforward Student Services Fees and Summer Session funding. These funds will be depleted at this year’s fiscal close.

**Assessment**

The implementation of our Student Customer Support Team enabled us to improve customer service in multiple ways. First, through our bi-annual customer service survey, the SFC collected data that showed an increase in overall customer satisfaction. This survey measures the department’s ability to meet student’s needs and uphold the SFC’s Quality Standards. Quality Standards represent the ideal level of service our students should receive. The standards are ranked below in the order of importance, the fall 2019 survey indicated student perceived improvements in all areas.

* *Personal* – Treat each student as an individual. Create a Co-authored experience when providing service. Employ a “warm” referral practice.
* *Efficient* – Limit the “run-around.” Provide seamless service from a student perspective. Watch for opportunities for improving operations. Teach students how to self-serve. Provide them with the tools they need to navigate the University.
* *Knowledgeable* – Stay up to date with policies and procedures. Identify areas for growth and communicate this to your supervisor.
* *Model Unit* – Set an example. The SFC’s customer service should exemplify excellence and set the standard for other departments.

In addition to measuring our ability to meet our Quality Standards, the SFC also monitors and analyzes our phone operational data. This data track the amount of calls that are received, the amount that are abandoned (calls that are missed), the amount of time it takes to answer a call, the time customers wait on hold, and the length of our conversations. This data help us determine trends in services and allow us to plan for operational improvements. In fall 2019 the SFC was able to decrease phone wait times by 88%. This data were collected between the fall fee payment deadline and the last day to add or drop courses for the fall term. Data were compared between fall 2018 and fall 2019.

The SFC also uses Salesforce, a Customer Relationship Management tool, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding all of our customer support. A “case” is created for every student interaction. This “case” provides information about the type of question the student asked, the length of time it took to resolve the issue, whether the case was referred, the contact method, and the overall experience. Student-initiated “cases” are created upon check-in, when an email is sent, when a webform is completed, or when a voicemail is received. During fall 2019 start of term, the SFC was able to respond to all student-initiated cases within two business days. This was a service level agreement we were not able to achieve during fall 2018 start of term.

Finally, the SFC creates and monitors annual assessment goals and participates in the Student Affairs 7-year Program Review cycle. All of the aforementioned assessment practices help us ensure students are receiving the support they need. Furthermore, the data are used to drive department initiatives and improve operations. The proposed referendum is an example of a need that was identified through the evaluation of this data.

**Ballot Language**

The SFC Student Customer Support Fee is designed to provide critical funding for the customer service operations at the Students First Center (SFC). The funds would cover the cost of operating the Student Customer Support Team, which is solely comprised of student staff. The referendum funds would cover the cost to employ these students and 25% of all revenue would be used for financial aid.

Our current Student Customer Support Team is comprised of nine student employees and costs $58,500 to operate on an annual basis. This student staffing model has permitted us to maximize the use of our funds while gaining additional coverage for phones, email, and in-person questions. In addition, this staffing model allowed us to decrease phone wait times by 88% and increase our overall customer satisfaction. This year’s operations have been funded by a combination of carryforward Student Services Fees and Summer Session funding, and these funds will be depleted by June 2020.

This proposed new fee of $7.00 per semester will be assessed to all undergraduate students during the fall and spring semesters, beginning in fall 2020. The proposed fee of $7.00 per undergraduate student per semester would generate an annual amount of $114,114.00 in academic year 2020-21. The increase in funding will help our department address the rise in minimum wage, provide our student staff with professional development, and hire additional students to further improve service. Increase in student enrollment would provide for additional funds that could be used for future growth. All funds collected through this referendum will go directly into the hands of UC Merced students. This is accomplished through student employment, quality customer service, and financial aid awards. **If this referendum does not pass our Student Customer Support Team may be terminated, wait times will increase and overall customer satisfaction will decrease. Do you support a fee of $7.00 per undergraduate student per semester to cover the cost of operating the Student Customer Support Team?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I hereby support the SFC Student Customer Support Fee.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I hereby do not support the SFC Student Customer Support Fee.

\_\_\_\_\_ I abstain from voting on the SFC Student Customer Support Fee.

**Referendum Details**

Starting in fall 2020, all undergraduates would pay this fee of $7.00 per semester and the fee would be assessed each fall and spring semester. The cost to support the current team is $58,500 annually. This is close to the equivalent for employing a mid-level professional staff member. Instead of investing in one professional position, the SFC chose to invest in multiple student positions. The organization of our student staffing model allowed us to maximize the use of our funds while gaining additional coverage for phones, email, and in-person questions. The annual amount of $58,500 provides funding for nine student positions. The increase in student enrollment would provide for additional funds that could help the SFC expand this team. The following is a breakdown of the proposed cost for the referendum. If this referendum does not pass wait times at the Students First Center will increase and overall customer satisfaction may be impacted.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Fall Semester** | **Spring Semester** | **Annual Amount** |
|  | **% of fee** |  |  |  |
| **Students First Center** | **75%** | **$5.25** | **$5.25** | **$10.50** |
| **Financial Aid** | **25%** | **$1.75** | **$1.75** | **$3.50** |
| **Total** | **100%** | **$7.00** | **$7.00** | **$14.00** |