Student Life Referendum

2019 Referendum

1. **Referendum Title**

Student Life Referendum

1. **Ballot Language**

The Office of Student Life (OSL) was established in 2005 to provide co-curricular experiences for students and receives funds from a $15.00 per student/semester student fee. Since 2005, the OSL student fee has not increased; however, programs have since grown substantially, for example:

* Registered clubs and organizations have grown from 20 to 200+ clubs (***900% increase***).
* Fraternities and sororities have grown from zero to 20 organizations (***2000% increase***).
* Student employees have grown from three to 25 annually (***733% increase***).
* Social Justice initiatives (LGBTQ+, Womxns Programs, etc.) staffing has grown from one to three (***200% increase***).
* Summer programs increased from three to 15 events (***400% increase***). This increase was supported through intentional collaborations with 10 campus units.

For these reasons, the Student Life fee has exceeded its’ financial capacity to expand or improve programs and services to meet the increasing diverse needs of our undergraduate population. Given the growth of the campus and the need to expand co-curricular experiences and opportunities, we are proposing a $35.00 increase to the existing Student Life Fee, for a total of $50.00 per undergraduate student per semester. If approved, undergraduate students will be assessed the fee during fall, spring, and summer semesters beginning fall 2020. The fee will be assessed only one-time during the summer. The fee will increase for inflation every five years (using the Consumer Price Index) beginning with fall 2024.

Increasing the Student Life Fee will ensure that UC Merced students have access to:

* Resources (e.g. expanded event support, additional student staff hires, skill building and leadership trainings) for Registered student Clubs and Organizations (RCOs),
* Expansion for Fraternity and Sorority Life
* Funding for current and future cultural centers/affinity spaces
* Resources for equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives
* Certifications and Professional Development Trainings
* Increased summer programming
* Additional student employment opportunities

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the entire fee ($12.50 in academic year 2020-21) would be returned to UC Merced undergraduate students in the form of financial aid. After the return to aid, the remaining $37.50 will be used for the aforementioned programs, services, and student employment. **Do you support increasing the Student Life Fee from $15.00 (current rate) to $50.00 (proposed new rate) per semester to ensure UC Merced undergraduates have access to enhanced Student Life programs, services, and resources?**

\_\_\_\_\_  Yes, I hereby support the Student Life Referendum.

\_\_\_\_\_  No, I hereby do not support the Student Life Referendum.

\_\_\_\_\_ I abstain from voting on the Student Life Referendum.

1. **Complete Text**

The Office of Student Life focuses on the critical development of undergraduate student population through co-curricular involvement. Co-Curricular experiences are essential to supporting student’s accomplishment of academic, career, and personal goals. Astin’s (1984, 1999) and Tinto’s (1993, 1997) research emphasizes the beneficial effects of academic engagement and asserts that students learn through involvement. Astin’s theory suggests that students play an integral role in determining their own degrees of involvement in academic courses, co-curricular activities, and social development. Astin states that the quality and quantity of the student’s involvement will influence the capacity for student learning, agency, and development.

The Office of Student Life provides opportunities for students to be engaged in more expansive ways than are acknowledged by studies that focus on academic endeavors. Further research has found that institutions of higher education that create robust experiences blending social and educational benefits impact their students’ quality of life by increasing involvement in activities outside of the classroom and integrating students’ learning in curricular and co-curricular areas (Kuh, 1996). Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt (1991) found that the quality of students’ undergraduate experience was related to students’ level of involvement in campus life. This proposal aligns with higher education research and student development best practices at UC Merced.

1. **Introduction Text**

Increasing the Student Life Fee will ensure that the Office of Student Life (OSL) provides UC Merced undergraduate students access to resources for student clubs and organizations, skill building, and leadership trainings, funding for current and future cultural centers/affinity spaces, expansion for Fraternity and Sorority Life, resources for equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives, restorative Justice trainings and certifications, increase summer programming offerings and additional student employment opportunities.

1. **Background**

The Office of Student Life at UC Merced was established in 2005 to support student needs outside the classroom, hereto referred as co-curricular experiences.  Currently the Office of Student Life has nine programmatic and service areas promoting co-curricular engagement and development of students. Those areas include: Clubs and Organizations (200 + student orgs), Fraternity and Sorority Life (20 FSL orgs), the Associated Students of the University of California Merced, Social Justice Initiatives (Multicultural Center spaces) Women’s Programs, LGBTQ+ Initiatives and Pride Center), the OSL Business Center, Activities and Events, and the Office of Student Conduct to meet student needs and interests. The Office of Student Life coordinates and supports hundreds of student-centered events each year in collaboration with student organizations, campus and community partners to promote student’s accomplishment of academic, career, and personal goals. Additionally, the Office of Student Life employs over two dozen UCM students each year to implement innovative student requested events, programs and services for the campus community.

Since UC Merced opened in 2005, the Office of Student Life has maintained a Student Life Fee of $15.00 per student/semester. This fee supports student salaries and student-based programs and events. With campus expansion there is an urgent need to strengthen and increase co-curricular opportunities and services for students. However, without the proposed fee increase, OSL will be unable to keep pace with student staffing, large- and small-scale activities, resource provision for current and future centers and affinity spaces, expansion of fraternity and sorority life, resources for student leadership capacity and skill building.

For many years OSL has fostered campus and community partnerships to expand funding for student engagement programs and services. However, those external funding sources can no longer sufficiently keep pace with the ever-growing programmatic needs of our campus community. Additional student-based fees are necessary to support increased OSL student employment and development opportunities.

Students continue to request more training and skill building opportunities for club/organization leaders, retreats for coalition building, affinity spaces and staffing, conflict management and communication workshops, more fraternity and sorority organizations, increased funding for student organizations, equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives and restorative justice certification, other trainings including but not limited to vulnerability, student agency, resiliency and additional student employment opportunities.  Requests for these programs and services have been received via direct request by student leaders, feedback collected at town hall meetings and focus groups, and through surveys and event evaluations.

1. **Purpose of the Fee**

The purpose of the fee is to address OSL’s financial capacity to expand and improve programs and services to meet the increasing diverse needs of our undergraduate population.

Increasing the student life fee will ensure that UC Merced students have access to:

* Resources (e.g. expanded event support, additional student staff hires, skill building and leadership trainings) for Registered Student Clubs and Organizations (RCOs),
* Expansion for Fraternity and Sorority Life
* Funding for current and future cultural centers/affinity spaces
* Resources for equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives
* Certifications and Professional Development Trainings
* Increased summer programming offerings
* Additional student employment opportunities
1. **Breakdown of the Fee**

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the fee would be returned to UC Merced undergraduate students in the form of financial aid. After the return to aid, the remaining funds will be used for the aforementioned programs, services and student employment.

If approved, undergraduate students will be assessed the increased fee during fall, spring, and summer semesters beginning fall 2020. The fee will be assessed only one-time during the summer.  The fee will increase for inflation every five years (using the Consumer Price Index) starting fall 2024.

Example Fee Breakdown

(Year 1-10 example)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Yr 1 Per | Yr 2 Per | Yr 3 Per | Yr 4 Per | Yr 5 Per | Yr 6 Per | Yr 7 Per | Yr 8 Per | Yr 9 Per | Yr 10 Per |
|  | % of fee | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt | Sem amt |
| Campus Unit | 75% | 37.50 | 37.50 | 37.50 | 37.50 | 38.60 | 38.60 | 38.60 | 38.60 | 38.60 | 39.75 |
| Financial Aid | 25% | 12.50 | 12.50 | 12.50 | 12.50 | 12.90 | 12.90 | 12.90 | 12.90 | 12.90 | 13.25 |
| Total Fee | 100% | 50.00 | 50.00 | 50.00 | 50.00 | 51.50 | 51.50 | 51.50 | 51.50 | 51.50 | 53.00 |

**VIII. Oversight of the Fee**

The Student Fee Advisory Committee is charged with evaluating Student Fee Funded Units and making recommendations on allocations of the Student Fees that every undergraduate and graduate student pays while attending UC Merced. SFAC will ensure that the proposed Student Fee is used in the best interests of students, the UC Merced community, and in compliance with existing University policies and guidelines. SFAC will have oversight, make recommendations, meet regularly with Student Life and request/review annual reports on the use of student fees. SFAC consists of twelve voting members, three non-voting advisors, and four non-voting ex-officio representatives from the Associated Students (AS) and the Graduate Students Association (GSA) and meets weekly during fall and spring semesters.