Student Services Fee Proposal: UArizona Basic Needs Center

How does this project support the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management mission?
The Student Affairs and Enrollment Management mission states that initiatives and projects will make a “measurable and positive impact on the development and retention of students and contribute to the well-being and advancement of our community.” The UArizona Basic Needs Center is an initiative of the Associated Students of The University of Arizona (ASUA) and the Student Unions that works to assist students, faculty and staff at UArizona who are experiencing basic needs insecurity. Currently our basic needs offerings consist of the UA Campus Pantry, Campus Closet, Student Legal Services and Fostering Success. The Center works closely with the Dean of Students office and the Center for Financial Literacy to provide support with housing, financial wellness, mental health counseling and SNAP application support (food stamps). This proposal is seeking financial support to create a central hub on campus where basic needs issues are addressed and expand on current offerings that the UArizona Community utilizes.

Currently, the Pantry is staffed by a full-time coordinator, graduate assistant, student director (selected by ASUA) 5 paid student staff and supplemental help from volunteers and interns. The Campus Closet is staffed by one student director (selected by ASUA) and overseen by the Campus Pantry coordinator. However, with the massive growth of the Pantry and Closet, there has been a demand to increase distributions and inventory for both programs. With additional assistance to help with staffing these programs for extended hours, the Basic Needs Center will continue to meet the SAEM mission by working on eradicating basic needs insecurity on campus and providing on-campus employment opportunities for students to use their educational experiences to help manage the center’s growth.

What is the reason for creating/maintaining this program?
Overall, basic needs insecurity creates a burden for students who are trying to earn their degrees by negatively affecting their ability to stay enrolled in classes (Dubick, Matthews & Cady, 2016). The need to create the Basic Needs Center was made evident from the massive growth of uses during the 2019-2020 academic year, through the fall 2020 semester. In the fall of 2019, the Campus Pantry had roughly 850 visits per week which increased to 1,050 by March of 2020. When the COVID-19 Pandemic moved courses to on online format, the Pantry remained on campus and was ready to serve the 500 individuals who were using the pantry over 750 times per week. The pandemic brought additional hardships to many of the UArizona community, and the Pantry saw an increase in the number of new users that needed our services. This past fall, the pantry distributed roughly 63,723 pounds of food (estimated at $96,859) over the course of 50 distributions.

The Campus Closet works to provide students with business and casual clothing at no cost. During the fall 2020 semester the Campus Closet hosted its first distribution which served 30 students and provided 97 items of clothing. Over the full course of the semester, the Closet saw 129 visits, distributed 430 articles of clothing and was able to provide students with professional headshots and connections to Career Services and community resources.

Due to the current growth and anticipated increase in services, the Basic Needs Center will be needing additional funds to manage the Pantry and Closet expansion. The current professional staff member is needed to handle administrative tasks, such as ordering food items, manage time keeping, scheduling food donations from the Community Food Bank, coordinate fundraising efforts with donors and the UA Foundation, conduct assessment on services and create long term partnerships across campus with academic and student support units to expand the pantry’s reach. Hourly student employment is needed for “on ground” tasks, such as managing daily distributions, inventory and stocking items, facilitating donation pick-ups, overseeing marketing, and assisting volunteers with their roles. This year, the student staff members roles will change as they become employees of the Basic Needs Center as a whole. The
students will be cross-trained to handle both food and clothing handling, which have their own regulations on distribution and fiscal reporting.

**How many students will be directly impacted?**
Based on the 2016 Campus Climate Survey, around 29% of undergraduate students and 11% of graduate students often or always skipped meals due to a lack of finances (Campus Climate Survey, 2016). Last year the Pantry served roughly 1,050 students per week pre-COVID-19 and we expect these numbers to remain consistent as more students return to Campus. The Campus Closet has already seen 129 visits over the 5 distributions that have taken place this semester. During the 2019-2020 academic year, the Pantry served over 1,700 unique users each semester made up of 67% graduate students, 33% undergraduate students, 33% international students, 42% first generation students and 50% Pell eligible or Pell-grant recipients. In addition, the Campus Pantry supported roughly 315 staff members at the University, many of which were affected by the campus layoffs.

**How will the success of this initiative will be assessed?**
With the incorporation of additional student staff and the full-time staff, these individuals can focus their efforts on increasing distributions and securing additional funds. Starting in Spring 2019 the Campus Pantry began swiping the CatCards of each user to gain additional data on student demographics that have helped the Pantry apply for outside grants. Using this data, we have applied and received grants from the Food Bank of Southern Arizona, the Arizona Food Bank Network and the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona. In addition, the Pantry and Closet both conduct client surveys to ensure items met students' needs.

**How are you ensuring the longevity of this program?**
Longevity is helped through strategic partnerships across campus. The Student Union assists the Pantry through providing a 3,000 square foot space, warehouse staff assistance and use of the wholesale ordering system. In addition, the Student Union provides support with our Boxing Up Hunger Program which packages leftover food from catering events to be distributed through the Pantry; and the Rooftop Greenhouse. The microwavable meals and fresh produce items are the most requested items by our users each semester and as the Basic Needs Center grows, we will continue to work with the Student Union to expand these programs as well.

The Campus Pantry also partners with the Community Food Bank, for bread and fruits/vegetables and with Coca-Cola which has provided water deliveries for distribution. Since the Campus Closet is a new program to campus, there are not as many official partnerships on campus, but the Closet will be working closely with Career Services to provide additional job search and interview resources. Both programs have a strong relationship with the Dean of Students Office and continue to build relationships with cultural/resource centers across campus.

The Pantry receives fundraising assistance from both the UA Foundation and UA Cares, which brings in funds to help purchase food items for distributions. In addition, the Pantry receives an appropriation on $143,900 annually from central administration to help with expansion of the Campus Pantry. These funds were allocated towards hiring a Graduate Assistant, providing support for the Rooftop Garden at the Student Union Memorial Center and for purchasing food. The funding was not earmarked for housing and professional staff, so support from the Student Services Fee will help the Pantry grow and serve more UA Students, Faculty and Staff who face food insecurity.