Next Steps Center Student Fee Request
Project Description
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Each year, the University of Arizona’s Office of Admissions processes over 40,000 undergraduate applications for freshmen and transfer students. From this number the UA yields (converts from an admitted student to an enrolled student) approximately 36% of the freshman admits and 65% of the transfer admits; in fall 2011 this provided the campus with a total of over 7200 new freshman and 2000 new transfers. While the results of the fall 2011 recruitment and enrollment cycle provided record growth in enrollment, continued growth in yield and quality is imperative and requested by the President. To continue to reach and exceed this goal, even with our advantages of a beautiful campus and world-renowned academic rankings, a dedicated focus to bringing in a larger and more diverse class is necessary.

In an effort to increase yield and enroll more undergraduates, the Next Steps Center was created and implemented (following the Student Affairs Transformation process) on October 1, 2009, to assist in the enrollment of the fall 2010 freshman and transfer class. The Next Steps Center provides admitted undergraduate students with a positive, seamless pre-enrollment experience to the University of Arizona. Through collaboration with the units and departments involved in the pre-enrollment processes, the Center offers a virtual, dynamic portal to UA services and support. In addition to the virtual portal, the Office of Admissions reception area, Old Main – lower level, serves as a hub for newly admitted students to get questions answered about UA in a central location.

Our student team model supports the mission of Student Affairs. Current UA students are serving as the Next Steps Center staff, serving students virtually via instant messaging chat, over the phone and in-person. The student staff currently ranges from 15 to 20 with the hope of increasing this number with new funding. The work environment and training provided to our student employees promotes workforce readiness and builds strong skills for future positions in areas such as: Business Management, Marketing, Development, Public Relations, Communications and Customer Service. In addition, by offering students campus work in a diverse and inclusive environment, we increase the student’s connection to the UA and help develop students’ social, emotional and cultural competencies.

Our student team engages with thousands of prospective students and parents and learns the art of collaboration and the importance of listening while honing their time management skills. It is also important to note that these students cross-train with numerous departments so they are versed in all the vital UA facts. This center is the one-stop shop and the students need to be trained in all areas that pertain to enrollment and matriculation. The Office of Admissions provides a positive work environment while challenging our students to develop and shine. In the last five years,
Admissions has hired six previous student workers and several others have joined various campus departments in full-time roles.

The Next Steps Center operation has a direct impact on current and future students. Funding from the incoming class affects all students, both current and future. Their tuition dollars help set budgetary items and goals for this institution. Not only will the Next Steps Center provide campus jobs and support for current UA students (8 or more), the student employees will have a direct impact on the UA admitted student making the decision about where to enroll. Last year, UA admitted over 24,000 potential freshmen and transfer students and at least half of these students call, instant message or come and visit in person. Given this, our Next Steps student staff will directly impact approximately 12,000 newly admitted and/or enrolled UA students. The student-to-student impact is noteworthy. Our prospective students and parents want to talk to “real” UA students given their authenticity about campus life. The impact is significant and cannot be ignored.

The best indicator of success is the enrollment growth seen in the fall 2010 class and future success shown in class of 2011. The goal and request by the President to increase quality and yield of our incoming class, which will be evident in the number of newly enrolled students. In addition, it will be important to provide the Next Steps Center student team with feedback about performance. To do this we will conduct follow up surveys for the prospective students to allow them to comment about assistance provided and rate how helpful the student team member was in influencing their decision to enroll at UA. After year one, we will increase assessment and feedback.

We look forward to having the opportunity to move forward with the expansion of our program. We are thankful for the funding we have received in the past year and look forward to what’s to come in the future. By increasing our funding, we are able to hire more students- especially as they all do not work the maximum of 20 hours per week. The Next Steps Center staff is vital to increasing enrollment and retention, which in return creates an increase in university funding. The current students we hire provide invaluable advice and experience as well as superior customer service. It truly makes a difference when a student answers the phone and shares their passion and personal experiences with the caller. In the near future, we hope to move forward into a new and larger space. This would also allow our department to collaborate with Residence Life and Financial Aid to form the “super call center”. We are currently asking 8 students from the aforementioned departments to partake in a pilot internship program. They are eager and excited to learn from the other departments and share their knowledge with peer student workers. This has been made possible through our funding from the Student Services Fee. We look forward to continuing to support students through our department, responsibly balancing our budget and collaborating with campus partners. We look forward to continuing to work toward our long term goal of creating a universal call center and continuing to extend employment and professional development opportunities to students. Thank you all for your time and consideration.