

Center for Student Advocacy and Community – SFAC Request FY27

Cougar Cupboard Food Funds -Staples [FY27OTa_CSAC]

The Cougar Cupboard opened in January 2020 serving close to 70 students a week prior to COVID-19. Since, the Cupboard has grown exponentially. In FY24, because of the generosity and support of the Student Fee Advisory Committee, the cupboard transitioned to a new location in the University Lofts. In the short two months of open operation (i.e. April and May), the program distributed over 97,000 pounds of free food to over 3,200 student visitors per month. Even with record-breaking service and usage, national research suggests that a campus our size should anticipate serving over double that many students.

It is our goal to be a nationally recognized pantry for our ability to adequately meet our diverse student needs and alleviate food insecurity as a barrier for student success. It is a practice of the cupboard to provide service to our students with dignity and includes offering practical, healthy, culturally responsive food options. We aim to accommodate a variety of preferences and dietary needs of our students. As a result of visiting the cupboard each week, we hope that they feel supported and empowered to persist in their degree attainment.

The Cougar Cupboard operations are supported by the Houston Food Bank, which provides free food deliveries of primarily fresh produce. TDECU also provides an annual sponsorship of \$20,000. Despite these resources, ongoing food drives, individual donors, and other occasional corporate sponsorships, the student' needs still outweighs what these partners can provide.

Milk	
Cost per gallon (discounted, including delivery):	\$2.15
Students served per month, Peak Months (Sept–Nov, Feb–Apr):	2,400
Cost per month:	\$5,160
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$30,960
Students served per month, Non-Peak Months (May–Aug):	500
Cost per month:	\$1,074
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	\$3,222
Total Cost:	\$34,182 ASKING \$20,000
Bread	
Estimated cost per loaf (including delivery):	\$1
Students served per month, Peak Months:	2,400
Cost per month:	\$2,400
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$14,400
Students served per month, Non-Peak Months:	500
Cost per month:	\$500
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	\$2,000
Total Cost:	\$16,400 ASKING \$10,000
Culturally Relevant Foods	
Cost per month, Peak Months:	\$4,000
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$24,000
Cost per month, Non-Peak Months:	\$1000
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	\$4,000
Total Cost:	\$28,000 ASKING \$20,000
Nonperishables	
Cost per month, Peak Months:	\$1,700
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$10,200
Cost per month, Non-Peak Months:	\$1,200
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	\$4,800

Total Cost:	\$15,000
Eggs (NEW)	
Estimated cost per dozen (including delivery):	\$5.00
Students served per month, Peak Months:	2,400
Cost per month:	\$12,000
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$72,000
Students served per month, Non-Peak Months:	500
Cost per month:	\$2,500
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	74,500 ASKING \$10,000

DSA Strategic Initiative:

Increase the retention rate of Pell-eligible FTIC students

- Having access to the Cougar Cupboard alleviates financial stress so students can focus on academics.
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Integrity

Increased Alumni Engagement/Giving to DSA

- Students who have used the Cougar Cupboard have graduated and continue to support the cause either by volunteering or donating items.
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Empowerment

Increased Grants/Donations to DSA

- Cougar Cupboard is a program that donors and corporate sponsors want to support; it is a growing program that requires investment.
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Care

Lowering Costs for Economically Disadvantaged Students

- Any enrolled student can utilize the Cougar Cupboard and receive up to 30 pounds of groceries per week.
- DSA Values: Community, Care

Increased Student Engagement

- Students volunteer for the Cougar Cupboard and collaborate with academic and campus partners.
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Care, Community

Funding Request

Milk	\$20,000
Bread	\$10,000
Culturally Relevant Foods	\$20,000
Nonperishables	\$15,000
Eggs (New)	\$10,000
Subtotal	\$75,000
Admin Fee	\$4,500
Total	\$79,500

Cougar Cupboard Food Funds (Produce) [FY27OTb_CSAC]

Fresh produce is consistently one of the most requested items at the Cougar Cupboard. Fruits and vegetables are essential for a balanced diet, yet they remain difficult for many students to afford, particularly those facing food insecurity. The Houston Food Bank provides fresh produce, but the supply is inconsistent, and the quantity rarely meets student demand.

Students have expressed through surveys and direct feedback the importance of accessing fresh produce that aligns with their cultural and dietary preferences. Research also shows that students experiencing food insecurity report worse physical and mental health outcomes, which directly impacts their ability to persist in higher education. Providing a consistent supply of fruits and vegetables at the Cupboard will significantly enhance the nutritional value of food packages and align with national best practices in college pantry operations.

To meet this need, the Cougar Cupboard is exploring partnerships with local farms, distributors, and community organizations (such as Houston Food Bank, Urban Harvest, and area produce wholesalers). Dedicated funding will allow us to purchase bulk produce at discounted rates and expand our capacity to provide culturally relevant fresh food options.

Produce (Fruits and Vegetables)	
Estimated cost per pound (including delivery):	\$1.00
Students served per month, Peak Months:	2400
Cost per month (2lb per student)	\$4,800
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$28,800
Students served per month, Non-Peak Months:	500
Cost per month:	\$1,000
Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	\$4,000
Total Cost:	\$32,800

DSA Strategic Initiative:

Increase the retention rate of Pell-eligible FTIC students

- Providing fresh fruits and vegetables reduces barriers to a healthy diet, which supports physical well-being and academic focus. Students who are well-nourished are more likely to persist to graduation.
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Integrity

Lowering Costs for Economically Disadvantaged Students

- Fresh produce is one of the most expensive grocery categories. By subsidizing this cost through the Cupboard, UH ensures all students can access healthy, affordable meals.
- DSA Values: Community, Care

Increased Student Engagement

- Offering a consistent selection of produce encourages students to return weekly and engage with Cougar Cupboard programming. Partnerships with local farms and food networks also expand volunteer and educational opportunities.
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Care, Community

Funding Request

Produce	\$32,800
Admin Fee	\$1,968
Total	\$34,768

Cougar Cupboard Operational Funds (NCWS, Supplies, Recurring PantrySoft fee) [FY27OTc_CSAC]

The Cougar Cupboard is one of the University of Houston's most utilized student basic needs resources, serving over 19,500 students in FY25 with consistent monthly traffic. To maintain high-quality service and meet the increasing demands of our student body, operational funding is critical. These funds cover essential staffing, technology, and supply costs that ensure the Cupboard operates smoothly, safely, and with accountability.

Unlike food funding, which directly supports inventory, operational funds sustain the infrastructure required to distribute food and resources effectively. Without these supports, the Cupboard's ability to meet student needs would be severely limited, threatening student food security, retention, and well-being.

Components:**Student Assistants (Non-College Work Study – NCWS) – \$46,250**

- Calculation: 5 students x 20 hrs/week x 32 weeks (fall/spring) x \$13/hr = \$41,600 + \$1,600 (summer coverage). Wages + Fringe = \$43,200 + \$432 = \$43,632. + admin fee = \$46,250
- Justification: These positions provide front-line service, including intake, stocking, and distribution. College Work Study positions cannot fully staff the pantry due to financial aid restrictions, making NCWS hires essential. Peer institutions (UT Austin, Texas A&M) also rely on student staffing models at comparable pay rates.

Supplies & Maintenance – \$8,000

- Calculation: Average \$650/month for 12 months = \$7,800 (rounded).
- Justification: Includes pantry bags, cleaning products, shelving, gloves, and other consumables required for safe food handling. Historical spending has consistently exceeded current allocation, requiring supplemental funds.

PantrySoft Recurring Fee – \$3,600

- Calculation: \$300/month x 12 months = \$3,600.
- Justification: PantrySoft is a nationally recognized pantry tracking software that ensures equitable distribution, prevents misuse, and provides data reporting for SFAC accountability. UH adopted PantrySoft in FY25, and continued funding is required to maintain this system.

DSA Strategic Initiative:***Increased student engagement***

- Operational funding supports more consistent staffing, expanded service hours, and improved infrastructure, allowing the pantry to serve a wider range of students, including commuters and non-traditional students.
- DSA Values: Care, Empowerment, Community

Increased the retention rate of Pell-eligible FTIC

- By ensuring reliable pantry operations (staffing, supplies, and PantrySoft tracking), students receive not just food assistance but also opportunities for engagement through volunteerism, educational workshops, and peer connection. These supports reduce barriers to persistence and promote belonging.
- DSA Values: Care, Innovation, Community

Lowering costs for economically disadvantaged

- A dedicated staff member can focus on promoting the pantry's services through events, social media, and partnerships with other campus organizations, raising awareness and driving more student participation in the Cougar Cupboard services.
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Integrity, Community

Funding Request

Student Assistants (NCWS)	\$46,250
Supplies & Maintenance	\$8,000
PantrySoft Recurring Fee	\$3,600
Subtotal	\$57,850
Admin fee	\$3,471
Total	\$61,321

Cougar Cupboard Hygiene Products [FY27OTd_CSAC]

In addition to food insecurity, many UH students experience financial barriers to affording hygiene products such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, and menstrual supplies. These items are essential to maintaining health, dignity, and academic focus, yet they are not regularly available through the Houston Food Bank or other existing partnerships.

National research highlights the connection between unmet basic needs and student success: the Hope Center (2023) reported that **47% of students struggled to afford hygiene or personal care items**, and these students were significantly more likely to report stress, absenteeism, and difficulty concentrating in class. At UH, Cougar Cupboard staff frequently receive requests for these products, with many students sharing that they must choose between groceries and hygiene products when funds are limited.

Providing hygiene products through the Cougar Cupboard not only addresses this gap but also supports the holistic well-being of students. Offering these supplies affirms that student dignity and self-care are integral to academic persistence and success.

Hygiene Products	
Estimated cost order (including delivery):	\$5
Students served per month, Peak Months:	2400
Cost per month:	\$12,000
Total Cost, Peak Months:	\$36,000
Students served per month, Non-Peak Months:	500
Cost per month:	\$2500

Total Cost, Non-Peak Months:	37,000 ASKING \$8,000
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Meeting hygiene needs is directly tied to student confidence, classroom participation, and mental health. By addressing this gap, the Cougar Cupboard can more fully meet the basic needs of UH students.

DSA Strategic Initiative:

Increase the retention rate of Pell-eligible FTIC students

- Providing hygiene products reduces financial strain, allowing students to allocate resources toward tuition, textbooks, and other academic expenses. This support alleviates stress and encourages persistence.
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Integrity

Lowering Costs for Economically Disadvantaged Students

- By supplying essential hygiene items at no cost, the Cougar Cupboard decreases the monthly expenses of students already facing financial challenges.
- DSA Values: Community, Care

Increased Student Engagement

- Expanding Cupboard services beyond food encourages more students to utilize and engage with the program, creating opportunities for peer connection and volunteer involvement.
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Care, Community

Funding Request

Hygiene Product	\$8,000
Admin fee	\$480
Total	\$8,480

Department Highlights

The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) has experienced a transformative three years since launching our office, focusing on growth, alignment, and deepening student impact. FY25 marked record levels of student engagement, expanded partnerships, and meaningful progress toward the department's three-year strategic plan.

Key Highlights from FY25:

- **Historic Growth in Engagement:** Welcomed 7,826 total student visits, including 1,356 unique guests—more than double the previous year's total. CSAC events reached over 9,100 participants across 56 programs, reflecting increased visibility and student trust.
- **Cougar Cupboard Expansion:** Served 5,001 unique students with 19,569 total visits and distributed over 259,000 pounds of food—a 60% increase from the prior year.
- **Retention Impact:** FTIC students who engaged with CSAC had a 10% higher retention rate (96.2%) than non-users, and Pell-eligible students saw an even greater impact with 97.6% retention, underscoring CSAC's critical role in persistence and success.
- **Launch of Resource Coaching:** Introduced a holistic, case management-style service that provides one-on-one support to help students navigate complex systems, build self-advocacy skills, and strengthen resilience.
- **Strategic Planning and Assessment:** Developed both the CSAC 3-Year Strategic Plan and the Cougar Cupboard Strategic Framework, aligning departmental goals with University and DSA priorities around belonging, basic needs, and student success.
- **Fundraising Success:** Secured over \$100,000 in sponsorships, private donations, and grants, including support from Kroger, ARPA, TDECU, Baytex, and the American Heart Association.
- **Accessibility Improvements:** Advanced ADA-accessible door installation at the Cougar Cupboard, supported by SFAC funding, to increase inclusivity for all students.
- **Signature Programming:** Hosted UH's first-ever **Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Day**, **AANAPISI Day**, and **Juneteenth Celebration**, drawing more than **320 attendees** to the summer Juneteenth event alone.

Department New Initiatives for FY27

1. Essential Needs Assessment and Data Strategy

CSAC is exploring the development of a comprehensive Essential Needs Survey to better understand the scope of student experiences with food insecurity, housing instability, transportation, childcare, and other core needs. Pending approval, this initiative would strengthen CSAC's data-informed approach by identifying service gaps, supporting Division-wide planning, and guiding resource allocation to better address barriers to student success.

2. Program Expansion and Service Integration

Building on the successful implementation of PantrySoft, CSAC will continue expanding essential needs programming through technology integration and individualized student support:

- **PantrySoft Optimization:** Use data analytics to assess usage trends, improve service efficiency, and identify opportunities for early outreach.

- **Resource Coaching Model:** Develop a structured approach for staff to provide personalized guidance connecting students to food, financial, and community resources.
- **Operational and Training Enhancements:** Refine processes and training to improve consistency, responsiveness, and data accuracy across CSAC services.

3. Program Alignment and Cultural Celebration

- **Transition from HSI Day to Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration:** In compliance with state policy changes, CSAC will shift from hosting an HSI Day to supporting a Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration that uplifts cultural recognition and belonging through educational and community-focused programming.
- **Policy Alignment:** Continue to review and adjust CSAC programs to remain compliant with evolving federal and state guidance related to essential needs support, food distribution, and higher education policy.

These initiatives reflect CSAC's continued evolution toward a comprehensive, responsive model of student advocacy, care, and cultural engagement.

Budget Information (FY27 Request Overview)

CSAC's FY27 funding requests focus on sustaining high-impact, high-demand services that directly align with Division of Student Affairs (DSA) strategic initiatives around student retention, engagement, and increased access to essential needs resources. The Cougar Cupboard and CommUNITY programs continue to experience record participation and measurable contributions to student persistence, particularly among Pell-eligible and first-time-in-college students.

FY27 Budget Summary

- **Cougar Cupboard Food Funds – Staples [FY27OTa_CSAC]:**
Requesting **\$79,500** to support staple food items including milk, bread, culturally relevant foods, nonperishables, and eggs. These funds ensure consistent access to nutritious, culturally responsive grocery options for more than 2,400 students monthly.
- **Cougar Cupboard Food Funds – Produce [FY27OTb_CSAC]:**
Requesting **\$34,768** to provide fresh fruits and vegetables through new partnerships with local farms and wholesalers. Dedicated produce funding allows the pantry to offer nutritionally balanced and culturally aligned food packages.
- **Cougar Cupboard Operational Funds [FY27OTc_CSAC]:**
Requesting **\$61,321** to sustain pantry operations, including non-college work study student assistants, essential supplies, and the PantrySoft tracking system. These funds maintain the infrastructure that supports over 19,500 student visits annually.
- **Cougar Cupboard Hygiene Products [FY27OTd_CSAC]:**
Requesting **\$8,480** to provide hygiene items such as soap, shampoo, toothpaste, and menstrual products—addressing a critical but often unmet component of student basic needs.

Total FY27 Request: \$184,069

This request supports CSAC's mission to advance student success through advocacy, belonging, and essential needs fulfillment. Funding will allow the department to meet increased student demand, sustain operational excellence, and expand programming that fosters dignity, empowerment, and persistence for all Cougars.