Bill # 70-05

The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University

of the 70th Assembly
June 11, 2020

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Funding of LionCash+ Gift Cards
Allocating Funds to provide LionCash+ gift cards to students in need
(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

Nature of the Situation:

Graduate and professional students at Penn State and throughout the nation struggle with food insecurity, defined as a lack of access to affordable and nutritious food. Project Cahir partnered with Student Affairs Research and Assessment (SARA) to conduct a survey¹ of undergraduate and graduate students in 2019 showing that:

- For 51% of students, the cost of food is one of the main barriers keeping them from the food that they wanted
- 20% cut the size of or skipped a meal in the last 7 days due to lack of funds
- 22% could not afford to eat balanced meals “sometimes” or “often” in the last month

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing economic hardship and Penn State anticipates an increased financial need from the student population as we enter the 2020-2021 academic year. In Spring 2020, a Task Force was formed at Penn State to address food and housing insecurity at our university. Discussion on this task force led to an initiative for the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) and the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) to collaborate on implementing a program to mitigate food insecurity concerns by purchasing LionCash+ gift cards for students. This program is similar to one at University of Maryland that

¹ https://psu.box.com/s/tsc83iq1un5lga1y8kzui9pqfr0ar0b6
provided students with meal vouchers to dining commons, which were distributed through student affairs.²

On June 3, 2020, members of GPSA, UPUA, Student Trustee Bryan Culler, the Student Care and Advocacy Office, and members of the Food and Housing Insecurity Task Force met via Zoom to discuss implementing a program to address food insecurity. LionCash+ gift cards will be used to subsidize food and other costs for students, like hygienic products. The gift cards will be distributed by the Student Care and Advocacy Office at Penn State, which provides support to students in response to food and housing insecurity, hospitalization, mental health concerns, medical emergencies, and academic distress, among other issues³. A $20 gift card would serve as a tool for the Student Care and Advocacy Office to immediately alleviate student food insecurity concerns by providing at least two on-campus meals or purchases from off-campus establishments including, but not limited to, food and toiletries. The gift cards will be accompanied by resource business cards relaying available LionCash+ vendors and promoting relevant resources like Counseling and Psychological Services, Financial Literacy and Wellness Center, Penn State Student Aid, Lion’s Pantry, Project Cahir: Penn State Student Against Poverty, among others. LionCash+ is accepted at several locations both on and off campus across State College (list of merchants: https://idcard.psu.edu/merchants); developed in collaboration with the Student Care and Advocacy Office.

UPUA approved funds for 750 gift cards ($20 each) and 1,000 business cards on June 10, 2020. All gift cards donated by GPSA and UPUA will be pooled together and available to all University Park students. The Student Care and Advocacy Office will provide monthly reports of their use to UPUA and GPSA, including data on the use by graduate and professional students.

Recommended Course of Action:

The Graduate and Professional Student Association authorizes the Executive Board to purchase 75 LionCash+ gift cards for the amount of $20 each. The gift cards will be distributed by the Penn State Student Care and Advocacy Office following their case management process. This allows for the office to evaluate the needs of the student and provide all tools available based on their needs (including the LionCash+ gift cards). The Student Care and Advocacy Office will record the number of graduate and professional students that utilize this resource for future consideration and will provide a monthly report to GPSA.

GPSA will promote the Student Care and Advocacy Office resources through our newsletter and social media outlets. The advertisement may include information about the donation of gift cards by GPSA to help students in need but will focus on highlighting the resources offered by the Student Care and Advocacy Office.

In the event that the gift cards are used quickly, the Assembly may consider passing future legislation to provide additional funds to this initiative for 2020-2021. This is an initiative designed to learn more about gift cards as a mechanism to address immediate and temporary food insecurity; by no means is this meant to be an effort to address the perpetual and long-term food insecurity

---

² https://www.umdsga.com/emergency-meal-fund
³ https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/studentcare
issues. The newly formed Food and Housing Insecurity Task Force aims to address these latter issues in a more substantial way in the future.

Total Requested: $1,500

Respectfully submitted,

Terry J. Torres Cruz
Delegate, College of Agricultural Sciences

Amanda Burton
Delegate, College of Agricultural Sciences

President ___________________________________________________  Affirm  Veto

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The Graduate and Professional Student Association