UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON
COUNSELING CENTER

University of Washington, Seattle
Services & Activities Fee
Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request

Unit Leads
Natacha Foo Kune, Director
fookune@uw.edu

Contributors
Marilyn Carruth, Director Wellness Shared Services
carruthm@uw.edu

Budget Request Highlights

Our unit's request in FY23 was **$2,533,763** and our award was **$2,179,867**.
Our unit's request in FY24 was **$2,354,256** and our award was **$2,350,015**.
Our unit's request in FY25 was **$2,518,703** and our award was **$2,438,880**.
Our unit's request in FY26 was **$2,585,213** and our award was **$2,561,889**.
Our request for FY27 is **$2,715602,** which represents a **6% ($153,713)** from FY26**.**

In this section, please break each increase into its own sections (e.g. wage & benefits changes, increases in current employee hours/FTE, funding new positions, etc.). Example sections have been provided (you may delete the example sections).

Mandatory Wage & Benefits Increases **$100,718**

The projected mandatory increase in Classified and Professional staff wages is 2%. The benefit load rate for Classified is projected to remain the same, while Professional increases to 32.5% and Hourly to 18%.

50% Marketing and Communication position **$52,995**

How students find out about services is changing. Only 25% of students used the website to learn what to do if they were having an emergency, compared to 50% in 2019. The number of students utilizing the website to find out about our services is also decreasing from 86% in 2019 to 75% this past year. We need someone who is trained and has experience in how to convey information in a way that students will receive. This position will bring the necessary expertise the Counseling Center needs to make sure students know about our services and especially about crisis services.

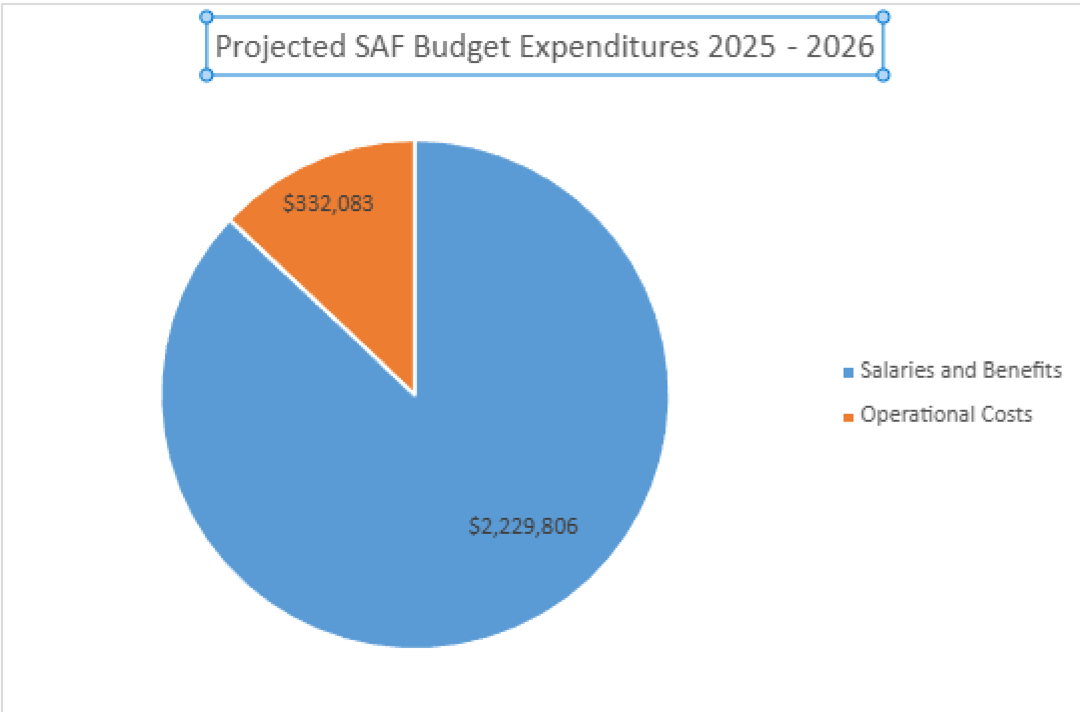
Full Budget Overview & Justification

In this section, you will have the opportunity to explain your request in greater detail via the guiding question(s) below. You are encouraged to use graphs, charts, or other visual tools. Your goal for this section is to provide the SAF committee (and the public) with sufficient (and substantive) context and justification for the use of these funds.

1. **How are expenditures distributed across the programs and/or services your unit offers? Please provide a general overview of how much spending is allocated to each category of expense, such as staffing, materials, etc., as is**

applicable.

The bulk of our expenditure is focused on salaries and benefits, to pay for clinicians who provide mental health services to students (see graph below).



The salaries and benefits for Counseling Center staff enable us to provide a range of mental health services for students including:

- short-term individual counseling
- group counseling
- psychiatry services
- drop-in Let's Talk sessions
- workshops
- crisis services
- Paws for a Break
- gender-affirming care services
- response after a student death or other difficult events
- Innovation to address student needs, such as a pilot project to provide psychological testing for ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder)

The operational expenses cover the following:

- Professional license renewals and professional development to make sure our staff remain current on current mental health treatments, gender-affirming care and complete the necessary continuing education to maintain their license. Having a current professional license makes it possible for them to provide counseling or medication management to students.

- Tech costs, which include computers, tech and phone fees, cost of our electronic health record and cost to manage insurance billing.
- Office supplies, including outreach/tabling supplies, tissues, masks, and cleaning supplies.

2. **Please give a summary elaborating on how SAF Funding has been used to support students** (*Please refer to dollar amounts in this discussion when possible*).

    a. In what ways has SAF funding been essential to supporting your unit's on-going services and role in the university? Please provide at least one specific example of a program/service.

SAF funding has been essential in supporting the Counseling Center. In FY25, the main use of the funds is for staff salary and benefits ($2,229,806). The remainder of the funds are used for operational expenditures ($332,083). Operational expenditures include electronic health record system, managing insurance billing, training required for mental health providers to maintain licensure and provide culturally responsive treatment, supplies, and technology fees.

The positive impact of SAF's funding to the Counseling Center is seen in our yearly client satisfaction survey. The Spring 2025 survey continues to show high satisfaction scores for every area assessed, from whether they would recommend the Counseling Center to others, to feeling that the counseling services helped them deal with their original problem(s). About 90% agreed they would return to the Counseling Center, shared feeling satisfied with their counselor and offered much praise for the counselor's responsiveness and making it easy for students to provide feedback. Here are examples of student quotes from our client satisfaction survey:

- *I absolutely loved my experience with the counseling center! Everyone I worked with was super kind, judgement free, and fostered an environment where I could be open about my emotions and concerns.*
- *The Counseling Center changed my life. I feel more confident and comfortable tackling the challenges I face, thanks to the work of the counselors at UWCC.*
- *My therapist was very sensitive and considerate with regard to my cultural and religious background and helping me work through some of the issues that came with that. I have nothing but good things to say about my experience with UWCC.*
- *I am so grateful for my experience... I like where my life is heading now, and I'm not sure I would be able to say that had I not gotten help."*

- *“It helped me when I was at my lowest and made me feel so much better about myself.”*
- *"Counseling has been a game-changer for me. I am grateful that there is an on-campus space where I can get access to services.*
- *I really love how my services are free so I don't have to worry about insurance or anything like that.*
- *I enjoyed the marginalized graduate student group I attended one quarter. It was helpful to hear about other marginalized graduate student experiences across campus.*
- *I just think there needs to be more therapists or a way to make the time between appointments less.*
- *I am very, very grateful that my experiences with the counseling center have always been very positive because based on past experiences (and knowledge), it is unfortunate that some other universities do not provide good counseling services. My experiences have not only been positive with the counselors I've seen, but also with the office. Thank you, thank you, thank you, and keep up the amazing work!!!*

SAF pays a sizable portion of our provider salaries and benefits, and the SAF funding is truly one of the crucial ingredients that make our services possible. Utilization of our services, especially crisis services, short-term counseling and Let’s Talk, went up in Fall 2025, suggesting an increase in the level of emotional distress among students. The SAF allocation supports multiple programs that cover a range of mental health needs from more severe needs (such as suicide risk) to prevention services for graduate and undergraduate students:

1. **Crisis services.** For students who are dealing with an immediate crisis, we have a counselor on duty who is able to prioritize seeing them. This includes more tailored responses after a sexual assault or a student death or suicidality. Providing emotional support and resources during this time of need can help the student cope better and prevent future mental health complications.
2. **Suicide Intervention Program.** The Counseling Center partners with LiveWell and Residential Life to deliver the Suicide Intervention Program (SIP). Students are enrolled in the SIP after referral by UW community members concerned about a student being suicidal. LiveWell and ResLife staff check in with the student and provide options. They connect the student with a counselor, frequently with a Counseling Center clinician, who can provide an assessment and recommendations to the student. Many students choose to continue seeing the counselor longer, as they realize the benefits of psychotherapy in helping them build a life that feels meaningful. This network of university support helps students feel less alone and get the treatment they need to reduce suicidality and increase a sense of empowerment in their own lives.
3. **Individual Counseling services.** Short-term counseling is the most popular service we provide for students to address a wide range of issues including

depression, anxiety, dealing with oppression, imposter phenomenon, family difficulties and sexual assault.

4. **Psychiatry services**. Medication management of complex mental health difficulties is a service has been in high demand, including referrals from Husky Health and referrals from hospitals who are discharging UW students after a psychiatric hospitalization.
5. **Programming to promote healthy behaviors that support mental health.** The strength that university students have is that they want to improve their lives. This programming seeks to build on that drive to flourish by teaching skills needed to improve protective factors for mental health. We developed a number of groups and workshops as well to address these issues, including:
   - Tabletop Role Playing Game Group for queer students – use of tabletop gaming and role-play in a fantasy setting to address social anxiety, identity and self-confidence.
   - Paws for a Break: our Pet Therapy has been very popular. Students come for the comfort they find from being with a dog, and they find they are also connecting with other students in the process.
   - Between Cultures: Healing from Not Belonging – for students who live in the borderlands between two or more cultures and struggle with a sense of not fully belonging.
6. **Let's Talk** is a great service for students who are not sure if they need counseling and offers consultation with a counselor. We are offering in-person drop-in options at four locations: Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center, Q Center, Mary Gates Hall, and CIRCLE (Center for International Relations and Cultural Leadership Engagement). The goal is to have a counselor be available in a space where marginalized students feel safe to help reduce barriers.

b. How have your unit's services and programming changed over time, and how have you adapted the use of SAF funding?

Recent Innovations
SAF funding allows us to innovate in response to student needs. Two such innovations include the partnership with Mission Connection to decrease barriers to Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) services for students. This program started in fall 2024 as a response to students with more severe mental health concerns, such as psychosis, persistent suicidal ideation, eating disorders, or severe substance use. In the past, students needed to drop out of school to be able to attend an IOP. Mission Connection has a more flexible structure which makes it more possible for students to remain in school while receiving the IOP treatment they need. 52 students were served during 2024-25.

The second innovation is that we started a pilot program to provide psychological testing for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders. Our advisory board provided input that neurodivergent student needs require more attention. There is a much larger need than we could meet, and the pilot focuses on students who could not get this testing done due to insurance barriers.

Billing insurance
In 2022, the Counseling Center started billing insurance, and this change was implemented smoothly. We worked with a consultant to build the necessary infrastructure. Our billing model is designed to reduce barriers to mental health care. For counseling services, the student's insurance is billed if available. Any portion that is the student's responsibility (co-pay, co-insurance, deductible, or entire cost of the session if the student does not have insurance) is billed against the SAF allocation to the Counseling Center. This means that the SAF/Counseling Center partnership allows no out-of-pocket cost to students for counseling.

Most students have adapted to the system without any issues. Some students have questions but are relieved to find out they have no out of pocket costs. A small portion chooses to not use their insurance.

We use the traditional billing model for psychiatry services. This means we will bill insurance for students receiving services, and students will be responsible for paying their portion (co-pay, co-insurance, deductible). This is because psychiatry is an expensive service, and this will ensure we remain within the boundaries of the SAF allocation for the student portion billed to SAF. We have a generous financial assistance program for students who need additional help.

Telehealth
With the pandemic, we built the infrastructure to provide mental health services via telehealth starting in 2020. Students, especially graduate students, found this modality very helpful, and we now offer telehealth services as a routine option, in addition to in-person services.

Gender Affirming Care
As of 2024, the entire staff can provide Gender Affirming Care. We have a Gender Affirming Care Committee that collaborates with Husky Health to be able to coordinate care for students. Our counselors are committed to affirming the genders of all our students, including trans and gender expansive students. We are responding to the need by decreasing barriers to gender affirming care.

Advisory Board
While this is not a change to our services, we created the Counseling Center Advisory Board in 2023-24, to get direct input from the campus about student needs. They have provided us with valuable insights into student mental health, loneliness, the impact of recent protests, and ways to reach students more effectively.

c. Are there programs/services that SAF has funded in the past that your unit no longer provides?

No.

d. Are you currently using your unit's allocation for new programs or services that were not originally requested as an item in your SAF budget request?

No.

3. **What is the nature of your reserves/fund balances? For what purposes do you hold reserves? How were they accrued?** (Reserves/Fund balances are termed and considered differently in every unit. If you are unsure of what these terms mean or would like clarification on anything, please reach out and ask.)

The Counseling Center's projected fund balance comes from two sources. First, we have larger salary savings because the university asked us to hold on filling positions wherever possible due to potential 5% to 10% cuts. The two current unfilled positions are for the Assistant Director for Campus Partnerships, and a psychologist position. Second, we maintain a fund reserve because we rely on insurance revenue. As we started billing three years ago, we did not know how reliable the income would be. This year, we were getting closer to using it for salaries. However, with changes to Medicaid, we expect that many students will lose their health coverage. About 20% of the students we serve are on Medicaid. We will continue serving all students regardless of insurance status, but it is likely that the insurance revenue from Medicaid will decrease. We want to wait one more year before moving forward with allocating salaries on the funds.

Budget Breakdown

In this section, please include a breakdown of your requested revenues/expenses for FY27 your unit's budget for FY26, and your unit's actuals for FY25.

The template and instructions can be found here: [SAF FY27 Budget Breakdown.xlsx]

Budget Breakdown				
Operating Revenues	**FY27 Request**	**FY26 Budgeted**	**FY25 Actuals**	**Notes**
SAF Funds	$ 2,715,602	$ 2,561,889	$ 2,438,880	
Core Funds	$ 1,597,792	$ 1,574,251	$ 1,628,936	
Grants	$ 64,000	$ 64,000	$ 64,000	Proviso
Other Student Fees				
Auxiliary Revenues	$ 850,618	$ 850,618	$ 822,506	
Total Revenue	$ 5,228,012	$ 5,050,758	$ 4,954,322	
Change From Previous FY (%)	3.51%	1.95%		
Operating Expenses	**FY27 Request**	**FY26 Budgeted**	**FY25 Actuals**	**Notes**
Salaries & Wages				
Permanent	$ 3,449,155	$ 3,113,531	$ 3,023,654	
Student/Temporary	$ 10,080	$ 10,080	$ 7,049	
Retirement & Benefits				
Permanent	$ 1,140,470	$ 1,025,123	$ 931,230	
Student/Temporary	$ 1,814	$ 1,532	$ 1,071	
Supplies and Materials	$ 230,212	$ 229,181	$ 228,912	
Professional & Purchased Services	$ 338,121	$ 322,239	$ 387,094	
Travel	$ 8,160	$ 8,000	$ 5,882	
Utilities				
External Funding Allocations				
Capital Projects/Expenditures	$ 50,000	$ 70,000	$ 195,500	
Other Operating Expenses				
Total Expenses	$ 5,228,012.00	$ 4,779,686.00	$ 4,780,392.00	
Change From Previous FY (%)	9.38%	-0.01%		
Fund Balance	**FY27 Request**	**FY26 Budgeted**	**FY25 Actuals**	**Notes**
Unallocated	$ 1,382,994	$ 1,382,994	$ 1,111,923	
Allocated				
Restricted	$ 203,108	$ 203,108	$ 178,003	Restricted funds are Gifts indended for specific purposes. Unallocated funds accumulated due to (1) salary savings due to waiting to fill two positions due to potential budget cuts; and (2) waiting for insurance revenue to stabilize before putting salaries on that budget.
Total Fund Balance	$ 1,586,102.00	$ 1,586,102.00	$ 1,289,926.00	
Change From Previous FY (%)	$ -	$ 0.23		
Total Change From Previous FY ($)	$ (271,072.00)	$ 393,318.00		
Total Change From Previous FY (%)	85.40%	126.87%		

Information on Other Revenues:

If you have other sources of revenue, please give an overview of those anticipated revenues (including new sources) and how you expect them to change in the coming years. If relevant, include a breakdown of services & positions funded by SAF vs other revenues.

- Core Funds (GOF/DOF): $1,574,251. We had to cut 5% of permanent GOF funding this past year. We were able to renegotiate our contract with the vendor who provides services for Husky Helpline. While no announcement has been made, the UW administration instructed us to plan for the possibility of a 5% to 10% additional cut this year.

- Grants (State Funding for Veteran Counselor): $64,000. This is not really a grant and instead is a proviso from the state legislature. We hope this will remain stable, but with projected income deficit at the state level, this funding could disappear.
- Auxiliary Revenues:
    - Insurance Billing Revenue: $ 762,766. We were seeing a stabilization of insurance revenue as most of our providers are now credentialed with multiple insurance companies now that we have been billing for three years. However, with federal changes to Medicaid, we expect a significant fluctuation in insurance revenue.
    - Embedded Counselor Fees: $59,740. One of the ways to increase mental health services on campus has been through Schools and Colleges who are willing to pay for the cost of a counselor to serve their unit. We charge an administrative fee to cover costs of tech, supplies and supervision. This also supports the central Counseling Center who serves the entire campus. The total amount may increase or decrease based on Schools/Colleges requesting a new embedded counselor or cutting an existing position. The academic units indicated they want to keep their embedded counselor for as long as possible, but budget cuts may mean their options are limited.

Additional Questions

1. **The following questions will help us understand your unit's priorities.**
    a. **How would you adjust your operations if you did not receive your full FY27 request? Please elaborate on the potential impact on staffing and services.**

If we did not receive the full FY27 request, we would need to use counselor time to work on marketing and communications. This effectively decreases counseling services to students, as there would be three counselors spending time on this project: one counselor for the website, one counselor for listserv and staff/faculty communication, and one counselor for social media and supervising student worker. The three counselors would each provide less direct counseling services to focus on marketing and communications tasks. Further, we would be using a much less effective tool (counselors who are good at psychotherapy but not trained for marketing) to do this work, and I believe this will have a negative impact on effective communication with students about how to access crisis and counseling resources on campus.

b. **What if you received 4% less than your FY26 allocation? Please elaborate on the potential impact on staffing and services.**

If we received 4% less than last year's allocation, that would mean a $62,970 deficit. We would be faced with the decision to increase staff time on providing counseling services (individual counseling is the most requested service by students) that help generate insurance billing revenue. This means reducing prevention services (Let's Talk, support groups, workshops, presentations, online engagement, etc.). We would also need to consider reducing the amount of time dedicated to crisis services, as we currently devote 45 hours of our counselors' time per week to be available if a student comes in crisis. Some of that time is not filled (which is common for crisis services) and therefore does not bring revenue. We would be forced to look at the utilization of crisis services and reducing the number of crisis hours provided per day. We are requesting what we believe is necessary to provide more accessible mental health services for students who need support and will continue to prioritize direct student service.

c. **What student services/programs are integral to your mission that you would not cut even if you received an amount less than your FY26 allocation? Why?**

Providing short-term counseling and crisis services is integral to our mission, and we would never cut these services entirely. However, depending on the decrease in allocation, we may have no choice but to decrease the total number of hours devoted to short-term counseling and crisis services.

2. **If you are projecting a net deficit for your overall FY27 budget, please provide additional context for this net deficit (e.g. reallocation of carryover funds from previous fiscal years, extraordinary expenses necessary to meet operational needs, etc.) and how this might impact your operations.** *(Optional – Answer "N/A" if not relevant to your unit)*

N/A

3. **What is one program/service your unit would like to work towards building to enhance students' out-of-class experience at the University? How much would it cost?**

We are seeing a larger number of students reporting attention difficulties, and our Advisory Board highlights the needs of neurodivergent students. However, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the trickiest diagnoses to make, as multiple other disorders cause attention problems (depressive and anxiety disorders, adjustment/stress/post-traumatic disorders, substance use disorders, etc.), and it requires expensive psychological assessment for an accurate diagnosis. Pairing attention issues with the pressure faced by many of our students, many students are seeking solutions to improve their attention level. We started an ADHD assessment pilot in 2023-24, and we had to put it on hiatus with the departure of our training director. Now that we have hired a new training director, we are resuming the pilot. To increase the number of testing provided, we would need to hire at least one assessment psychologist and there are costs associated with the test materials. We are currently using salary savings to cover these expenses. If we were to expand the assessment program, we may need to ask SAF for funding. An estimate of the initial cost would be $130,425.

4. **How does your unit ensure that student fees do not subsidize non-student, academic, research, and other costs that are the primary responsibility of the University and its colleges?**

The Counseling Center provides services only to currently enrolled UW students, and we check enrollment status before the student becomes a client. The only exception is that we allow students who initiated services when still a student to continue services for one quarter beyond the last quarter of enrollment. This allows for continuity of care for students who are taking a quarter off to focus on their mental health and other needs. For students who are graduating, this allows for continuity of care if needed as they move home and/or search for a job.

As a unit, we do not engage in academic or research pursuits. Our main goal is to provide the best services we can to students through direct counseling and psychiatry services, as well as helping the campus create a climate that promotes positive mental health for students.

5. **What active roles do students and their views play in your unit's decision making?**

We have an Advisory Board, that consists of a majority of students that meets monthly and provides input to the Counseling Center about what mental health issues that are present for students. They help us in multiple ways, including:

- Providing input about our services
- Providing input about current/emerging student needs
- Discussing more effective ways to market information to students.
- Acting as ambassadors for Counseling Center services

In addition, we conduct a yearly satisfaction survey to get feedback from students. Student feedback is crucial in how we make changes to our services.

6. **How are you utilizing the SAF logo? In what ways do you spread awareness of your affiliation with SAF? Attach an example if applicable.**

We utilize the SAF logo on our website, and from our client survey, 80% of students visit our website prior to making an appointment.

When we discuss cost for our services either on the website, during a presentation, or with individual clients, we talk about SAF funding being the reason why services are available at no out-of-pocket cost for students. We explain that SAF pays for the student portion not covered by insurance (co-insurance or entire cost of visit for students who do not have insurance). Students are always relieved and happy to hear that their contribution to SAF provides them with access to mental health services.

7. **When projecting out 1-3 fiscal years, what challenges, if any, do you foresee for your unit (policy changes, financial, etc.)? How could SAF be helpful in navigating these challenges?** *(Optional – Answer "N/A" if not relevant to your unit)*

There are efforts on campus to create a health fee that would cover the funding currently provided by SAF to the Counseling Center, Husky Health and LiveWell. This is not a challenge per se; this is part of our potential future financial landscape.

As Washington state is facing a large deficit, Governor Ferguson has already stated his intention to include a 3% cut to UW in his budget proposal. We expect a decrease in GOF funding starting in the next biennium. This may lead to decreased services, or we may ask SAF for help to bridge the gap.

In addition, there are concerns that with changes to Medicaid, some of our students are likely to lose insurance, which translates into SAF covering the cost of services for them.

SAF has been an incredible partner to respond to student mental health needs, and I am grateful for all your support. One example that comes readily to mind is when the SAF Committee was particularly helpful as we worked on merging the two mental health units on campus in 2021. This has resulted in decreasing confusion significantly about how to access mental health services. It has also paved the way for innovative collaborations that removed cost as a barrier to accessing mental health care.