



Fiscal Year 2026 Program Questionnaire  
Student Fees Advisory Committee

1. Please provide a one-page executive summary of your questionnaire responses. This summary should include, in brief terms: your unit's mission, goals that support your mission, and a justification of your unit's student fee allocation in terms of benefits for students.

The main mission of the Spirit of Houston Bands and Spirit Groups is to provide University of Houston students with the opportunity to participate in instrumental music ensembles and spirit groups that represent the university to the highest level possible. The University Band Department consists of the following ensembles: Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band and Twirlers, Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Winds, Symphonic Band, and Cougar Brass Athletic Bands. The Spirit Groups portion of the band department includes the University of Houston Cheerleaders, Cougar Dolls Dance Team, and Mascot team.

The Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band and Spirit Groups are the ultimate example of students from varied backgrounds and majors coming together to perform, learn, and grow as students while representing the University of Houston. All aspects of the Spirit of Houston and University Bands Department include non-majors. Over two-thirds of the Spirit of Houston are not music majors (this includes the marching band), and these students represent on average over 50 different majors from across campus. The work that these students do as members of the Spirit of Houston and University Bands creates a long-term sense of pride and commitment to the University of Houston that is among the highest of any group on campus.

The visibility of and demand for the Spirit of Houston continues to grow every year particularly following the university's move to the Big XII Athletic Conference. We continue to provide financial assistance to all students (marching band and spirit groups) as they perform and represent the university. In addition, we work to increase financial support to help fund student travel, instrument purchases and repair, music arrangements, marching drill design, uniforms and uniform maintenance, recordings (studio and live recordings), cheer and dance accessories, cheer and dance choreography, mascot equipment, mascot costume accessories, summer recruitment and training programs, and other program-related expenses. In this year's request, we will be seeking a single one-time allotment and a base budget increase. For the one-time request, we are seeking funding for Spirit of Houston and University Bands travel to continue our increased presence at athletic events and appearances around the state and country. For the base budget increase, we are requesting the restoration of the 5% budget cut that we received to our base, based on changes within both our overall budget and the increased demands on the department. The one-time request in addition to our base budget will help the Spirit of Houston and University Bands maintain our continued growth in what we provide to our students and to the University of Houston community.

2. Please discuss the means that you are utilizing to evaluate both your success in achieving the DSA strategic initiatives and/or action steps and their importance as compared to others that you might pursue. Where data exists, discuss any assessment measures and/or learning outcomes used to evaluate program success. Please provide the method for collecting this data.

## **Student Success**

- Focus on Leadership- All areas within the Spirit of Houston have grown and strengthened the involvement and training of student leadership within their specific branches. The focus has been on strengthening student involvement and ownership of the program, while working to develop their communication skills and personal leadership skills in a way that will impact their future education and careers. In recent years all student leaders in band and spirit have received yearly training to develop their leadership skills both within our ensembles and in ways that will translate to their careers following graduation.
- Focus on the student experience- The Spirit of Houston and University Bands Department has focused an increased amount of rehearsal time on monitoring the well-being of all students. Within all areas, including cheer, dance, and mascots, there has been a focus to help students understand all things offered to them on campus including physical and mental health resources. There has also been internal staff training and discussions to monitor and care for the general well-being of all students separate from their individual duties within the band or spirit areas. Our focus continues to grow in its desire to strengthen our individual groups (band, cheer, dance, and mascots) by strengthening our students away from those specific performance-based groups. In addition, our staff have consistently worked at ways to alleviate stress on the students and allow more time to focus on their studies, including scheduled breaks in weekly rehearsals throughout the semester, study days, and group tutoring and mentorship by students within the organization
- Focus on diverse experiences within our students and their community- The Spirit of Houston has continued to expand our focus on expanding the educational and social experiences for all students. The student members of the organization are a diverse group that are representative of our university and city. By elevating student leaders, as well as the leadership skills and responsibilities of all students, we are working to expand their world views while in the organization in a way that is representative of their experiences outside of our department. All of our students should leave the organization with a better understanding of social, cultural, and racial groups that were not their own at the end of their time in our organization. In addition, we want to foster a better understanding and commitment the local communities surrounding the University of Houston. Our organization will continue to develop this through the empowerment of our own students as they shape the path forward of our groups, growth in the diversity of repertoire and skills taught to all groups, and involvement from other musicians, artists, and educators from our community to bring a wealth of experience to our students. We are also finding new ways to engage in the immediate and external community of the University of Houston, including performing and engaging at new events on campus and off (White Cane Safety Day, Medical School 5K, elementary visits in HISD, etc.) that share our students with new and diverse audiences.
- UH Connection- The Spirit of Houston has continued and will continue to identify and create connections between all members and the University of Houston. Through the strengthening of performance aspects within all programs, we have strived to create a direct sense of pride within the students regarding what they do in our areas to represent the university. Each area within the group has also implemented new and different ways of connecting with alumni of the program to help our students understand their connections within the history of the university and to see how they can affect that for future students.

## **Evaluation**

- Staff Involvement- In recent years, all staff have engaged in new methods of recording all activity within the organization and tracking yearly activity. We have merged calendars, request database, and any other means of monitoring performance activity to provide a clearer picture of what the department does on a yearly basis. This allows for an easier sharing of information with outside areas, as well as for a better method of tracking what our students are both contributing performance wise and what they are being asked to do. In response, our staff has a yearly evaluation looking at student experience (e.g., how much time are they committing, how diverse are the events we participate at, where are areas to engage the students more OR give time back to the students, where are areas that we can engage more externally, etc), staff experience (evaluated in similar metrics to the students), and outside engagement (e.g., what are areas to engage with

- more, where are we meeting or not meeting performance goals for the year, etc.)
- Student Involvement- Band and Spirit staff have developed new processes for student engagement in monitoring our yearly activity in recent years. Noted aspects include exit interviews for all spirit team members (regardless of whether they are returning or not returning for any reason), student engagement in activity and program design (including music and drill choices, dance and cheer sequences, etc.), student engagement in leadership selection (band and spirit), and student leadership follow-ups in the band area. In addition, students have engaged more in activities they want to see more of through the leadership of the band service fraternity and sorority (Kappa Kappa Psi and Tau Beta Sigma). The tracking of student opinions and data has led to improvements in both student and staff experience within the organization.
3. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2024) SFAC request, their impact on your programs, and your reason for implementing them. SFAC recognizes that some programs did not receive the funds that they requested, that some programs were impacted by additional expenses after the conclusion of the budget cycle, and that some programs may be ahead of or behind their self-generated income projections.

The department has experienced several budget changes since our last SFAC request. Regarding the SFAC budget, the 5% cut to our base budget recently issued has taken effect for the current year. In addition, the School of Music has moved costs traditionally taken from other sources into the existing band budget (non-SFAC funding) resulting in a much larger cut to our overall budget. This includes moving the salary and benefits for the Associate Director of Bands/Director of Athletic Bands position into the department budget. While certain things have been moved out of the budget (school-wide instrument repair and rentals that until this year had been under the band budget), the numbers do not cancel out and resulted in a large decrease in budget coupled with the 5% cut to the SFAC budget.

In addition, staffing has decreased in the area. The Associate Director of Bands/Director of Wind Studies position (previously held by Dana Pradervand-Sedatole) has not been replaced and there is no plan in place to replace that position. The assistant band staff position (held by Sean Phelan) has transitioned into a hybrid staff position, sharing duties between the School of Music and the Band Department instead of primarily supporting band and spirit.

At the end of these changes, we have lost both 5% of our base SFAC budget, moved an entire faculty salary and benefits into our budget (non-SFAC funded) without equal costs being removed resulting in a budget decrease, and lost two positions and only partially replaced one, which in turn leaves a band and spirit department at a major university and P4 Athletic Department with two full time positions. These cuts have also hindered the hiring of a full-time spirit coordinator position for the spirit groups.

4. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2025 base funding is extremely limited and recognizing that it is likely that some units will not be allocated the new base budget and/or one-time funds requested. Please provide a narrative of how your unit would accommodate a reduction of 5.0% in your total FY2025 base Student Service Fee budget request and provide a line-item explanation of where budgetary cuts would be made.

The operational budget of the Spirit of Houston and University Bands Department, which includes travel and staff salaries, depends heavily on the funding received from SFAC. If our base allocation were to be cut, our ability to meet the needs of our students and demand for our ensembles and groups would be greatly diminished. Our mission as a student organization for the University of Houston would be greatly affected as staff cuts would potentially be necessary (in addition to the position lost for this school year) in addition to a reduction of travel and appearances representing the university and athletics department.

Coupled with the previously mentioned 5% budget cut along with other budget changes, any further cuts would result in major changes to the organization. This would include but not be limited to more staffing cuts, potential need to limit student involvement/numbers, reduction in activity, and other means of cutting significant budget.

At the same time, we are constantly working to tighten the demands on our budget and to find ways to stretch the money that we are graciously supported with. It is our duty to make sure that we do as much as we can with the funding received to support both our students and the University of Houston and we take that seriously at the highest level.

5. What are the other possible sources of funding available to your unit and what efforts are being made to access them (e.g. grants, donations, etc.)? **If you receive funds from other sources, please briefly describe the source, purpose, and duration of the funding and report the amounts received in the appropriate rows/columns on the SFAC Spreadsheet.**

Within our department, there is a strong desire and commitment to raising funds for our students. We work closely with the University of Houston Alumni Association as well as the Spirit of Houston Alumni Association to create new avenues for fundraising and support. Recently the main focus of these groups has been to help find ways to directly support students within our organization through student scholarships and assistance with meals during Spirit of Houston travel. The Spirit of Houston Alumni Association led by President Rhonda Pitts has graciously contributed meals, snacks, and other budget items to the organization in recent years. In addition, the UH Alumni Association led by Mike Pede has graciously covered meals and other costs for student, particularly in relation to travel for football and basketball.

New avenues are always considered and brainstormed, and our band staff led by Director of Bands David Bertman is working strategically in this area for future fundraising efforts particularly in relation to the centennial year in 2027. It should be noted that our college (like others) do not have direct development officers or staffing, and Mr. Bertman- in addition to his role as a full-time faculty member- is the primary fundraising lead for our area. Many other universities have a full-time or part-time position within advancement dedicated solely to fundraising for band and spirit teams.