



GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE

University of Connecticut

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes 27 February 2013

- I. Called to Order at 8:14 pm.
- II. Recognition of Attendees
 - a. All Present. Presiding: Chantelle Messier, Secretary: Erin Eighan.
- III. Approval of Minutes: 13 February 2013
 - a. Approved.
- IV. Officer Reports
 - a. Treasurer – Ian Yue
 - i. Printer will need to be replaced. Ian is looking into different options (approximately \$100-200) and will submit a recommendation to Exec within a week.
 - ii. Special Allocation Request from SAGE
 1. Civil Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering departments have confirmed \$200 funding. If the Computer Science department confirms, then it will be \$300. They are still waiting to hear back from the other 4 departments in the School of Engineering.
 2. Chantelle thinks it best to postpone a vote on the allocation until they receive information from the rest of the School of Engineering.
 - iii. Resolution on University Fee Information
 1. Please see Ian's email communication about this issue in the Addendum.
 2. Bursar's information on University fees is outdated.
 3. We can pass that recommendation on to SASFAC and that SASFAC will pass that on to Administration.
 4. Ian and Erin will work together to draft a resolution. They will send it to Chantelle for revisions.
 - iv. Finance Policies and Procedures Amendments
 1. Proposed amendment of 2.3.1.2 from 20% to 10% was based on precedent. Ian felt that it would be fair if GSS were held to the same standards as Tier-II organizations. Ian also wanted to have a defensible number that was at the same time fair and flexible.
 2. Leland: There have been some rumblings in the Senate where they see the Executive Committee as tyrants in one way or another.



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3. Chantelle: Some of the survey responses were disconcerting, as well. Quite a few of the respondents stated that they were uncomfortable with the way GSS manages its finances.
4. Leland: It seems appropriate that we hold the internally-funded events to the same standard as externally-funded events.
5. Anish has presented a series of arguments against the proposed amendments. Please see addendum for the full report.
6. Safet: Proposes a compromise. We can keep the 10% limitation but rather than go to the Finance Committee, go to the Executive Committee.
7. Erin: If these new standards go into place, we will need to consider a restructuring of the Executive committee terms entirely.
8. Leland: I feel as if Bill's comments indicate that he far undervalues the systems of accountability that are put into place in the Senate. We are not the kings of the Graduate Student Senate. We are meant to serve in an advisory role; the Senate makes the decisions. Once the Senate puts a budget in place, we need to adhere to it. We should have the flexibility to deal with extenuating circumstances, but it should not be on a single person to make those changes. I'm not comfortable pushing this onto Exec either because it feeds the incestuousness. The Finance Committee is more qualified because it is made up of 5 senators from different constituencies.
9. Chantelle: The Activities Director can still be transparent about the Activities Budget. The question is how much flexibility is in the budget once the Senate approves it. I can see the argument both ways pretty clearly. Historically it has been better for us to be more flexible when events like those co-sponsored by the Grad School. What would be the compromise to allow us to re-allocate quickly while still being transparent about it?
10. Anish would prefer that 2.3.1.2 remain the same (not be amended), but he would agree that it would be better for the reallocation approval to go through Exec.
11. Ian: The biggest issue here is accountability. If Exec has to bring a recommendation forward to the Senate, that would satisfy that requirement. I would be open to moving forward with Safet's suggestion.



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12. Leland: 10% of our budget seems like a lot—that could be anywhere from \$4000-5000. Could Anish comment on that? Perhaps there are special allocations that would fall outside this range, but I can't speak to that.
13. Anish: You never know what can happen and I don't want to be stuck in a position that would compromise the quality of my event because of hoops I would have to jump through.
14. Leland: LANGSA had money left over in their budget last year and they bought some specialty M&Ms and a tablet and we tore them apart. It's a double-standard.
15. Chantelle: Until we have better numbers about how this amendment would actually affect our ability to fund events, we can't make a decision.
16. Safet: How many emergency decisions need more than 10% of the allocation? And how fast is the turnaround?
17. Chantelle: People associate GSS with our activities, and for many people that's the only way they know us. If they're going to scrutinize us, unfortunately that's the first place they'll turn. My sense is that we need to balance our activities planning against the difficult position of getting this level of criticism about our budget.
18. Leland: When you put together the Activities budget for next year, was your plan that you were going to budget it in terms of expense codes?
19. Anish: Yes.
20. Leland: We definitely don't want to hamstring the next Activities Director. I wonder if it might be better to indicate in a public way that this is something that we're thinking about for next year. And that we could charge the Finance Committee to keep tabs on the Activities Budget and figure out what the proper level of flexibility would be.
21. Safet: Could we allow the new activities director to resubmit a budget to the senate at the beginning of the academic year.
22. Chantelle: As Anish is working on the next year's budget, it might be beneficial to hold off on a vote on these amended FPP.
23. Ian will look at the budget from this past Fall and see if he can determine how much was reallocated this year to compare to the proposed amendment.
24. Chantelle: Do you, Anish, feel like you've made savings on an event that would amount to more than 10% of the total budget?



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25. Safet: What if we raised the Tier II allocation limit to 20% too? That would also equalize the standards.
 26. Chantelle: It seems like Ian wants a defensible number. It seems like the issue is deciding how we make 20% a defensible number.
 27. Anish: But if there's no problem with the FPP, then why fix it?
 28. Chantelle: On the one hand there's been no problem in that there's been no abuse that I'm aware of. On the other hand, there has been a lot of criticism about transparency of GSS finances. If we don't have anything to say to those concerns, it's not going to look very good.
 29. Chantelle: If we bring in a Professional Development Coordinator, we would need to rework the structure of the budget entirely anyway. So we may need to continue this conversation as the Professional development special committee begins its charge.
 30. VOTE: Present the changes to the Senate with the changes to 2.3.1.2 redacted. Passed by majority.
 31. VOTE: All in favor of treating the Spring Budget as not subject to FPP 2.3.3. Passed by majority.
- b. Activities Director – Anish Kurian
 - i. Approached by Christina Reardon at the Writing Center. The writing retreats are really well-attended events and they're trying to seek sources of funding. Anish told them they could look into approaching GSS for funds.
 1. The one concern that Chantelle has is that GSS should never be in the position of subsidizing something that the Graduate School ought to be funding.
 - c. Secretary – Erin Eighan
 - d. Parliamentarian – Leland Aldridge
 - i. Told today by a staff member of the Physics department that in her training, she was told that the new ombudsperson was going to be helping faculty and staff exclusively. Chantelle will look into this.
 - e. Vice President – Safet Berisa
 - i. The Student Union is going to renovate our lounge over Spring Break.
 - f. President – Chantelle Messier
- V. Prepare Agenda for the Next Meeting
 - VI. Adjournment at 9:52 pm.



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Addendum: Resolution on University Fee Information

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Exec,

Earlier this week, I sent along the emailed comments/questions from graduate students about the fees they pay to SASFAC. Some of the most consistent complaints among graduate students are:

- The amount in fees we have to pay, particularly in comparison to stipend amounts,
- The fact that graduate students aren't made aware of the magnitude of fees until enrollment, and
- The reality that graduate students don't know what these fees are going towards

In a brief conversation I had today with two people on SASFAC -- David Clokey (Assistant VP for Student Affairs) and Roxanne Roy (Senior Financial Planning Analyst for the Office of the CFO) -- it was recommended to me that GSS make an official resolution on this to send to SASFAC (which could then route it to other offices) and/or Office of the CFO, Graduate School, and Office of the Bursar, among others.

What would this resolution cover?

Here are some ideas:

- Graduate students are frustrated by the fact that we are not made aware of the large amount of fees that we have to pay, particularly in comparison to our stipend amounts, and we feel it is only right that the Graduate School provide direct or indirect information to graduate students in the offer letter (or offer letter packet) explaining what these fees are. This is absolutely need, given that graduate students often make graduate school acceptance decisions based on financial offers, and a high fee bill can contribute to such a decision.
- Such information that would be helpful for graduate students to know is:
 - What programs we are required to support through our fees (e.g. the GUF units)
 - How much graduate students are expected to pay in fees every semester (approximately)
- How the Graduate School can provide such information in our offer letters or offer packets:
 - Provide a list of fees we have to pay with fee descriptions (found on the Bursar's website)
 - Provide an approximate value of the amount each fee is (found on the Bursar's website)



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- Provide an up-to-date list on what University units are supported by GUF (this could even be a Bursar issue, as the Bursar's Office is the unit that officially provides descriptions of all student fees)
- **At the very least**, provide URL links to where graduate students can find all of the above information (e.g. Office of the Bursar for [fee descriptions](#) and [amounts](#), Office of the CFO for the latest [recommendations by the UConn administration regarding the fee amounts of and units supported by GUF](#) and/or the [recommendations from SASFAC](#) (which are more up-to-date on actual GUF fee breakdown) -- or perhaps even linking to a GSS analysis/summary of such information

I would love to get something like this together ASAP if you are all on board with it. Let me know your thoughts.



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Why no stricter guidelines for AD & Activities Budget

In short, I view this potential change as having scant up-side benefits but adding substantive additional costs; or, in other words: being a poor investment (or time/energy). The rationale behind my above assertion is due to the following factors, but really comes down to this notion of limited up-side potential -- understood here to be greater transparency and control over fiscal resources -- while incurring a non-trivial amount of increased paperwork, time, energy, attention, etc. to members of Exec

There is a case, I suppose, one could make that by making the AD go through the same procedure as others, GSS is both providing necessary incentives and ensuring that it is treating not only its constituent groups but also its leadership in a 'fair' way. This argument is wholly unconvincing in my opinion, and fails for the following reasons:

(a) Is there merit in providing incentives for the AD to do as good a job as possible when budgeting for the subsequent year? Absolutely. But, to be honest, the senators are responsible for that aspect when they elect the AD, as is the case w/ all members of Exec. Ultimately -- and, regrettably, as politicians on the national and international stages continue to prove -- rules, regulations, laws, etc. are not sufficient to stop people who are in positions of authority from doing bad, ill-advise, generally dippy stuff. Or, in other words, you can't legislate good behavior. What you can do is make sure that there are mechanisms in place to deal w/ infractions if/when/should they occur. In this case, there already is such a mechanism in place: fire the AD if he/she behaves poorly.

(b) The AD -- in fact, any member of Exec -- is not fundamentally the same as a Tier II group. Information asymmetry: The AD has considerable knowledge about what is happening within GSS at a strategic level. Incentive alignment Given their nature, virtually all of the Tier II groups are focused primarily on their own groups' interest, and not the broader population of graduate students;

(c) Curtailing flexibility has the potential to cause the AD -- and, by extension, GSS and graduate students in general -- to miss out on opportunities that nobody could -- let alone would -- have foreseen. The screening of the PhD movie years ago serves as an example of this... Derek simply didn't know that arranging screenings of that film were a possibility until we were well through the budgeting process, nor could he have known. The same dynamic is troublesome for Tier II groups, but to a much lesser extent given both the quantities (money and num of events) involved.

Lastly, I wanted to add a comment regarding the intention of the 10% rule -- the spirit of the law, you might say... However, before doing that, I would be remiss if I didn't also note that the intention is somewhat immaterial to the current discussions. Having said that... The intention was to remove the possibility for Tier II groups to successfully employ 'bait-and-switch' tactics with regard to securing money from GSS. We were trying to guard against people doing things like getting a thousand dollars



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approved for speaker fees, and then spending that money on toys for their department, expensive food, etc. To be sure, the AD/Exec should not be behaving in such a manner either. However, in my experience, this hasn't been a problem. Additionally, if such behavior becomes an issue -- as I noted above -- there is already an effective way to handle the problem: get rid of the person.

The fact is that the nature of GSS activities requires the AD be able to flexibly allocate money across expense codes with little limitation. There are many reasons, and you hit a few in your comments in the doc. Here are reasons that I can think of:

1. University wide social events take time, coordination across many parties and caters to hundreds of students with diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, ever evolving university policies require us to purchase goods and services for events in specific ways (e.g., catering, police for grad prom, etc.). By nature, this makes it hard to nail down a precise, expense-code level budget well in advance of the events. Grad prom, GAIN, and the quickly maturing professional development day are perfect examples.
2. The budget for incoming activity directors are defined by outgoing activity directors. Before any restrictions on activity budgets should be applied, this must be resolved so that an incoming AD (who has a lot on his/her plate to get up to speed with) does not also have to contend with a written-in-stone budget.
3. Opportunities for great social events pop-up following the approval of an activities budget by the senate, e.g. the PhD movie last year, and the graduate school movie night in the Fall. By adding oversight to the distribution of activities budget funds across expense code, it adds barriers to making these great events happen.
4. There has been no precedent to require the activities budget to see additional oversight. In my tenure, we went over budget on an event I think once (perhaps twice), and we have never spent more than was approved by the senate. Particularly at the expense code level, I do not see a reason to suddenly instill oversight -- even at the 25% level.
5. Activities are typically over-budgeted already. The chance to add in an unscheduled event - using funds that have been saved up - should be an option the AD can exercise to add more opportunities for grad students to participate in social events.
6. Because we cater to graduate students, whose attendance and timing is always inconsistent, it is difficult to forecast how much food and space we need for events. The AD should have the discretion to spend more in on-the-spot moments, e.g., when we run out of food at Ted's social nights. Again, by nature of our events, we need flexibility.



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Maybe the root of the issue is that T2 budgets have strict oversights in place to make sure spending is done responsibly and in the spirit of the proposed budget that the finance committee approved. In contrast, while the activities budget is also passed through the finance committee, there is no oversight to make sure it stays 'in the spirit' of the approved budget. The fact is that spending more money on streamers for grad prom, and less on food, does not change the spirit of the event or anything like that. In contrast, short-changing a speaker honorarium to order pizza rather than coffee and cookies for a seminar, or turning money for a seminar into a travel award, is bad news. While the Senate may feel there is no formal oversight to the activities budget the AD actually announces at the meetings all events that are in the mix, and how much was spent on the event. If it pleases everyone, perhaps the AD can propose off-budget events for approval by the Senate, or something like that.

Perhaps the issue isn't with the activities budget, it is with T2 oversights. Is only allowing a 10% expense code swap too restrictive? Maybe. Like you, T2s need to create a budget for all events the following two semesters. Why does the Treasurer like the 10% number so much? That's not really something we talked about when discussing FPP changes last year.

There is a possibility of turning this into a 'why does GSS spend \$10k however they want for social events when I can't get \$200 for pizza for my department' as the senate meetings progress this semester. Ultimately, the senate does have all the final-decision making power, and unfortunately there are so many new faces in the Senate this year. If this means that it is better to make a change somewhere, before the discussion makes that turn, I encourage you to push for executive committee level oversight (not finance committee level). I'm actually fine with Exec having the power to push money out of the activities budget, if for example there is a pressing or an emergency need for funds. Cancelling an event because GSS is going bankrupt is not a bad thing to do. And besides, these are GSS sponsored events. However, there should be an exec committee vote tied to that.