Student Affairs Committee Resolution

TO: All Decision-makers in Forming Policy for the Student Services Fee (SSF)

FROM: The Senate Committee on Student Affairs’ (SCSA) Sub-committee on the Student Services Fee; Rebecca Houske, Kyle Kroll, and Nitish Mittal

DATE: 3/10/2015

SUBJECT: Recommendations for Improving the Twin Cities SSF Process, Admin. Units

I. Background

In December, 2014, we began investigating the fees process in response to some proposed ideas for how to improve the SSF and the annual process used to arrive at its amount. We polled hundreds of students, student leaders, and past SSF Committee (SSFC) members on the topic. In that time, we learned more about the process, both its strengths and weaknesses. We have decided to break up our recommendations for addressing the SSF process’s weaknesses into three parts: student groups, administrative units, and other general recommendations.

This resolution-letter addresses our recommendations in regards to administrative. Unlike the other sets of recommendations, we are of the belief that the best way to address the increases in administrative unit needs, disproportionate usage by different student populations, and the complexity of administrative unit fees requests is to remove administrative units from the process. Hence, our recommendations here relate to rolling administrative units into tuition.

II. Recommendations for Future Changes

A. OSA Should Work with the University to Roll Administrative Unit Funding into Tuition

We recommend that OSA endeavor to roll administrative unit funding into tuition. As it stands, administrative unit budgets are too complex and varied to be adequately evaluated and scrutinized by student members of the SSFC. Administrative unit spending is also integral to the University’s accreditation, legal liability, and reputation. In addition, there is no easy way to address the large cross-subsidizations that occur between undergraduates and graduate and professional students in the current fee structure, but tuition financing may be able to address these issues. We recommend excepting the Minnesota Daily, Radio K, and USLS from this change, along with some programmatic aspects of other administrative units.

We recommend that a working group assist in rolling administrative unit funding into tuition. We tentatively recommend the roll-in to occur at the start of the 2017-2018 academic year, at which point in time the University’s proposed tuition freezes will end. We also believe this period of time is sufficient for the University to plan for this structural change. We lastly recommend that students still have a voice in administrative unit funding decisions.
III. Background

In December, 2014, we began investigating the fees process in response to some proposed ideas for how to improve the SSF and the annual process used to arrive at its amount. We polled hundreds of students, student leaders, and past SSF Committee (SSFC) members on the topic. In that time, we learned more about the process, both its strengths and weaknesses. We have decided to break up our recommendations for addressing the SSF process’s weaknesses into three parts: student groups, administrative units, and other general recommendations.

This resolution-letter addresses our general recommendations. Many of the ideas in this document are the product of synthesizing both the original ideas we were tasked with evaluating and ideas we encountered along the way as we spoke with stakeholders. The ideas respond to a variety of concerns, chief among them: the need for SSFC members to be knowledgeable, the concern that having MSA and GAPSA appoint SSFC selectors introduces bias into the process, the difficulty some students have in finding information about the SSF, and the lack of broad student body participation in the SSF process.

IV. Recommendations for Changes to Next Year’s Process

A. OSA Should Institute a More-formal Hiring Process

We recommend that OSA institute a more-formal hiring process, which not only focuses on a prospective SSFC member’s ability to be viewpoint neutral, but also financial skills, background, experience, and understanding. We believe this will aid future SSFCs when reading audits, evaluating budgets, and making funding recommendations.

B. Student Senators Should Serve as SSFC Selectors

We recommend that members of the Student Senate be chosen to serve as SSFC selectors. The Student Senate is the only student government organization that does not receive SSF funding, and many Student Senators have little to no affiliation with MSA or GAPSA. Nevertheless, we also recommend that the Student Senate Consultative Committee (the Senate’s leadership) solicit interest from Student Senators and pick from them those who can maintain viewpoint neutrality throughout the selection process and who have very few or no interests in funding any SSF applicant. Although Student Senators have some involvement in MSA or GAPSA, many are not actively involved in the organizations. Lastly, we recommend the SSF advisor have broad ability to reduce and control bias in the selection process.

C. The Office for Student Affairs (OSA) Should Publish Information Faster
We commend OSA for making fee rationales and funding recommendations available online and applications available upon request. We believe, however, that the process would benefit if students had easier access to information. For this reason, we recommend that OSA improve its website by utilizing an easy file sharing service, such as Google Drive and Docs, to make Fee applicants, rationales, and funding recommendations available to the student body as quickly as possible. We recommend OSA provide links to this file sharing service on the SSF website, the OSA website, the Onestop website, and in the SSF’s description in the student account.

D. OSA Should Send An All-Campus Email After Initial Recommendations

To increase transparency further and encourage broad student involvement in the SSF process, we also recommend that OSA send an all-campus email notifying students about initial funding recommendations, providing a link to applicants and funding recommendations, and listing the various public forums to be held in the upcoming weeks. We believe that this will better disseminate important SSF information than Minnesota Daily advertising, and it will also be cheaper for OSA.

E. Onestop Should Break Up the SSF Into Major Parts in the Student Account

At least until (if it ever should occur) administrative units are rolled into tuition, we recommend that the SSF be broken up into smaller parts in the student account to increase student understanding about the use of the SSF. When listed in the student account, we also recommend links in the description of each to further information on the SSF website. We tentatively recommend the following parts, which we think would accomplish this goal:

a. Boynton Health Service Sub-fee
b. Learning Abroad Center Sub-fee
c. Northrop Auditorium Sub-fee
d. Radio K & Minnesota Daily Sub-fee
e. Student Conflict Resolution Center Sub-fee
f. Aurora Center Sub-fee
g. Recreational Sports & Center Sub-fee
h. Student Union Sub-fee
i. University Student Legal Service Sub-fee
j. Student Groups Sub-fee
k. MSA/COGS/GAPSA Sub-fees
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DATE: 3/10/2015

SUBJECT: Recommendations for Improving the Twin Cities SSF Process, Student Groups

V. Background

In December, 2014, we began investigating the fees process in response to some proposed ideas for how to improve the SSF and the annual process used to arrive at its amount. We polled hundreds of students, student leaders, and past SSF Committee (SSFC) members on the topic. In that time, we learned more about the process, both its strengths and weaknesses. We have decided to break up our recommendations for addressing the SSF process’s weaknesses into three parts: student groups, administrative units, and other general recommendations.

This resolution-letter addresses our recommendations in regards to student groups. Many of the ideas in this document are the product of synthesizing both the original ideas we were tasked with evaluating and ideas we encountered along the way as we spoke with stakeholders. The ideas respond to a variety of concerns, chief among them: the inexperience and lack of knowledge among current student group applicants in filling out SSF budget sheets, the useless and excessive nature of some applications and presentations, the need for student voices to be heard, the need to correct inaccuracies that lead to misinformation, the increasing number of student group applicants and SSF funding for student groups, the subsidization by graduate and professional students of undergraduate student groups, the desire to hold student groups and officers accountable for misused SSF funding, the need to provide consistent funding rules, the lack of general promotion of SSF-funded events, and the need for accountability and flexibility.

VI. Recommendations for Changes to Next Year’s Process

F. OSA Should Require Finance Training for All Student Group Treasurers & Presidents

We recommend that OSA require all student group applicants’ treasurers and presidents participate in finance training, to be conducted by the SSF advisor. We further recommend that if a student group does not comply with OSA in attending training, their application shall be automatically rejected.

G. OSA Should Streamline Application Materials

We recommend that OSA streamline the written narrative, rename the narrative to “application,” and create a list of key points that all student group applicants should address in their presentations.

H. The SSFC Should Be Allowed to Respond to Public Comments at Forums
We recommend that the SSFC Chair or the Chair’s designee be allowed, but not be required to, briefly respond to public comments made at public forums in order to reduce confusion, clarify the truth, or address any other salient issue.

I. OSA and SUA Should Collaborate to Promote SSF-funded Events

We recommend that OSA and SUA collaborate to ensure that all students receive a newsletter detailing all SSF-funded events occurring on campus, so as to encourage participation in these events and ensure SSF funding is utilized to its fullest extent by the student body. We tentatively recommend for the creation of either a new weekly newsletter or for inclusion in an existing newsletter, such as the SUA newsletter.

J. A Working Group Should Be Created to Determine a Set Fee for Student Group Funding

We recommend that OSA convene a working group this summer. We recommend OSA invite members of the Sub-committee. We also recommend the working group to be comprised of students from all academic levels.

We recommend the working group first investigate whether or not to set the SSF in regards to student group funding at an even amount. We recommend that the working group investigate what set amounts are at other peer institutions. We recommend the working group consider what amount to set for undergraduates and what amount to set for graduate and professional students. We also recommend that the working group propose the set amount for a referendum in the ACEC elections of 2016, to go into effect for the following year and to be reconsidered every three to four years by another working group and referendum.

K. The Working Group Should Also Finalize Additional Guidelines

We recommend that the working group also investigate the current Guidelines for Decision Making. We tentatively recommend for inclusion of the following additional guidelines in the 2015-2016 SSF process, which we recommend the working group to finalize:

1. The SSFC shall determine whether or not a student group is primarily targeted to undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, or both, which determination shall determine from which Student Groups Fee the funds will be drawn from;

2. The SSFC is to presume that no student group is entitled to funds unless clearly and particularly proven by the student group applicant;

3. Year-to-year increases between funded amounts and requested amounts in excess of 10% or $5,000, whichever is greater, are to receive increased scrutiny and should not be fully funded unless there is substantial cause to do so;

4. Inflated requests that are unreasonable or rise to the level of dishonesty to deceive the SSFC should receive no funding at all;

5. Student stipends are generally discouraged, especially for non-representative positions that are not elected by the student body;
   a. In general stipends should only given, if at all, to high-level representative officers and positions;
   b. Student stipend amounts should be restricted amounts that would be reasonable in the eyes of a typical student paying the Fee;
c. Student stipends in any case should generally not exceed $5,000 per position (in 2015 dollars);

d. Fee funding for stipends shall not be awarded if the applicant does not have a student stipend review process that fairly, objectively, and regularly reviews the performance of stipend-receiving student leaders;

6. Fee funding for support staff and regular part-time or full-time employees is discouraged, unless clearly linked to the services, programs, and events of a student group and necessary for its ability to serve the student body;

7. Fee funding shall not be allotted for any fees, payments, reimbursements, or any other kind of compensation to advisors;

8. Fee funding shall not be allotted for any food costs associated with general, recurring meetings of student groups;

9. Fee funding for food at programs and events shall be limited to the smallest extent necessary for the success of the programs or events and consistent with the importance and value of the event to the student body

   a. Fee funding for food at programs and events is suggested to have a maximum of about $10 (in 2015 dollars) per attendee reasonably expected to attend, with the understanding that some events may be funded at higher levels when reasonably appropriate;

10. Fee funding shall not be allotted, nor shall it be used for any retreats, programs, or events exclusive to the members or leaders of an administrative unit or student group, unless clearly necessary to provide services to the student body;

11. Fee funding for travel expenses to events is generally discouraged, except that Fee funding may be allotted for travel grant programs when those programs have a well-established, blind grant application process;

   a. As a general recommendation, no more than 50% of travel costs for off-campus events, competitions, and conferences should be awarded, and the SSFC should pay special attention to the ability for students to pursue cheaper travel options for off-campus events;

12. Fee funding shall not be allotted for any costs or expenses related to purchasing gifts, prizes, or scholarships;

13. Advertising expenses should be limited to the extent necessary for the adequate and reasonable promotion of an event;

14. The SSFC should separately evaluate the reasonableness of fundraising and other income goals, and if unrealistic, the SSFC is recommended to allot no funding for the operation, program, or event;

15. Fee funding shall not be allotted for operational reserves unless the reserve is clearly necessary for operations beginning immediately at the beginning of a term,

   a. All operational reserves shall be held in traditional saving or checking accounts with minimal interest payments;
16. If Fee funding is to be allotted for any amount, the amount allotted shall be reduced by any projected positive carryover amounts and any unnecessary operational reserves held by the student group;

17. Fee funding shall not be allotted for any services, programs, events, or other costs (especially capitalization costs) or expenses not primarily directed toward use and enjoyment by current students, and student groups and administrative units shall clearly prove that services, programs, events, and other costs or expenses open to both students and non-students are primarily for students;

18. The SSFC should prioritize spending according to the goals listed in Guideline 1, in order they are listed;

VII. Recommendations for Future Changes

B. The Working Group Should Consider Transitioning the Process to Per-semester

We recommend that the working group also investigate how to transition the current SSF process into a per-semester process. We believe this process will engender greater accountability and provide more flexibility for student groups in planning events. We tentatively recommend that if a per-semester process is desirable after investigation, that such a process begin, at the earliest, in Fall 2015, but no later than Fall 2017.

C. The Working Group Should Also Evaluate the Merits of an SSF Auditor

We further recommend that the same working group evaluate whether or not there should be an SSF Auditor to oversee the use of SSF funding by student groups. The working group should conduct a cost-benefit analysis with the University’s payroll administration and determine if the SSF Auditor could replace Deloitte for SSF audits. Initially, we believe the SSF Auditor would be cost-effective, based on our preliminary analysis.

If the working group recommends for the hiring of an SSF Auditor, we recommend the working group then consider whether the SSF Auditor would be part of the University or separate, the SSF Auditor’s role in providing resources to student group applicants and SSF recipients, the reports the SSF Auditor should conduct, the powers of the SSF Auditor to reclaim unused SSF funds, and the powers the SSF Auditor or OSA should have in holding both student leaders and student groups accountable for misuse of SSF funds.

After considering these topics, we recommend the working group set a timeline for integrating the SSF Auditor into the SSF process beginning in Fall, 2016.