Date: October 29, 2010

To: Bree Dalager, Chair Student Service Fees Review Committee
From: Jerry Rinehart, Vice Provost for Student Affairs
Re: Response to Student Service Fees Review Committee Recommendation

Let me begin by expressing my deep gratitude for the work of the Review Committee during the past few months. I understand the deliberations were sometimes difficult, but it appears the exchange of perspectives has led to a very thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of the issues. My thanks go out to you and the committee for this excellent work.

I will respond to each of the recommendations in the order in which they were presented in your final report.

I. Charge One: Clarifying or establishing an appeals process for late applications, incomplete applications, and final recommendations which are lower than the initial recommendations.

A. Late Applications

I agree with the Committee’s suggestion that interventions should be established that occur prior to the deadline aimed at re-enforcing the actual due date. Asking organizations to submit portions of their proposals by various pre-deadlines, however, seems likely to create problems for organizations and would require significant staff time. To simplify this process, we will adopt the following procedure:

a. Student group officers (at least two per organization) will sign a letter indicating that they are aware of the deadline. This letter will be distributed at the mandatory information sessions for student group applicants. Groups will be required to return the letter, with signatures, by December 1 to the Student Service Fees Committee (SSFC) Advisor.
b. The SSFC Advisor or his/her designate will send student groups who have attended the mandatory information session two reminder emails regarding the application deadline, in addition to the letter that the student group officers will physically sign. These emails will go to all of the student group’s officers.
c. These emails will also include general information about the Fees process; including suggestions about what applicants should be working on, services available through SUA for application assistance, days left until the request is due and/or procedural information applicants should be aware of.
B. Incomplete Applications

I agree with the Review Committee’s recommendation that the existing procedures for handling incomplete applications are adequate. I also agree that the SSFC, in consultation with the Fees Advisor, may determine that an application is so incomplete that it should be treated as a late application.

C. Appeals for late applications

I agree with the process outlined for responding to late applications: 1) the full SSFC will make an initial decision regarding whether or not to accept the late application. 2) An organization can appeal this decision to the SSFC Appeals Committee. This committee will be constituted as outlined in the Review Committees final recommendations (p.5). Except in extraordinary circumstances (which are hard to imagine given the process outlined above), the Appeals Committee decision would be final.

D. Final Recommendations that are lower than initial recommendations

I agree with the Committee’s indication that organizations that have been recommended to receive allocations less than that identified in the initial recommendations should have the opportunity to meet with the SSFC “to discuss the rationale for the reduction, and present evidence which may result in a more favorable outcome” (p.4).

E. Appeals Committee

As indicated above, I agree that an Appeals Committee should be convened to make final decisions on appeals regarding late and/or incomplete applications. The recommended structure/make-up of the Appeals Committee also seems appropriate. The charge to the Review Committee, however, did not include making recommendations on appeals related to SSFC funding decisions. The current process has been effective, and as the data below indicate, appeals resulting in overturning the SSFC recommendations are rare:

In the past five years, the SSFC committees have made 248 decisions on funding allocations. During this time there were 34 appeals; in 30 of the 34 appeals, the original decision of the SSFC committee was upheld. It is important to note that three of the four instances in which the original decision was not upheld occurred last year in relation to the SSFC committee refusal to accept late applications from three organizations.

During this time there were three instances in which the Office for Student Affairs used its discretionary funds to assist organizations that did not receive the funding they sought from the SSFC. Again, however, the original decision of the SSFC was preserved—these groups received only the student fees recommended by the SSFC.

I do believe, however, that decision making regarding appeals would be enhanced by having the opportunity to engage an Appeals Committee in the review process. I will,
therefore, ask the Appeals Committee to conduct an initial review of all funding appeals submitted at the conclusion of the Fees process and make recommendations to me regarding their merit. These appeals, however, will not be restricted to the three categories included in the Review Committee’s report. As the data above suggest, appeals are not numerous and it is unnecessary to create such restrictive categories.

II. Charge 2: Establishing policies, rationale, and criteria regarding reserve fund requirements for student organizations (i.e., the 10% rule) and administrative units. Recommendations regarding reserve requirements for administrative units should incorporate the input of the University’s budget and finance staff.

I agree with the Review Committee’s recommendations 1) that administrative units should not be required to maintain minimum or maximum reserve, and 2) that student groups may propose reserve levels, but both administrative and student groups will be required to provide full justification for any reserves they are proposing.

III. Charge 3: Determining if there should be restrictions on the percentage of an organization’s budget that can be spent on compensation for staff. If restrictions are recommended, should fringe benefits be included in the calculation of compensation? Should some organizations be exempted from this restriction? If so, what should be the criteria for granting exemptions?

I agree with the Review Committee’s recommendation to abolish the rule requiring that groups not spend more than 30% of its fees on compensation for staff. As noted in the Committee’s rationale, any organization requesting funding for staff should provide full justification.

IV. Articulating the purpose and status of “resolutions” passed by fees committees and determining a process for evaluating and responding to them. This process might include recommendations regarding how a resolution could become a requirement or restriction on the actions of future fees committees.

Previously passed resolutions (1992-present) have been preliminarily reviewed and categorized (by the Student Fee Advisor and Provost Office staff support) as either material or immaterial to the Student Services Fees process. Those that were deemed material to the SSF process and have not already been incorporated in the handbook, will be reviewed by a task force in the summer of 2011 (see section V below). That task force will make recommendations to me following the process for vetting new resolutions outlined below.

Resolutions that were deemed immaterial to the process, or were material but already incorporated in the handbook, or were related to items that the Student Services Fees Review Committee has since recommended to change (i.e., 30% salary/wages cap, 10% reserve level) would be cataloged and archived for historical purposes.
Regarding the process for vetting and formally acting upon resolutions, there are elements in the Review Committee’s recommendations that are workable. I’ve adopted much of the language of the Review Committee’s final report, though you will find some substantive variations.

1. At the end of each annual Fees cycle, the chair of each committee will prepare a written memorandum to the Fees Advisor regarding any resolutions approved by each committee, as well as specific suggestions or advice for the next year’s Fees committee to consider while evaluating fees requests.
2. The Fees Advisor will review the resolutions and determine which should or should not be deemed material to the Student Services Fees process.
3. The Fees Advisor will provide the language and rationale to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs who will review them for consistency with University policy, impact on the overall Student Service Fees process, and impact on the University student community.
4. The Vice Provost, committee chairs, and the Fees Advisor will meet to share perspectives regarding the resolutions. If modifications are agreed to, they will be incorporated and those changes will be forwarded to the Senate Committee on Student Affairs (SCSA). If there is disagreement on the resolutions, the supporting rationales for each side will be sent along with the proposed resolutions to the SCSA.
5. SCSA (or its special subcommittee) will review the recommendations and the rationales offered in either support of or opposition to the resolutions.
6. Following its review, the SCSA will prepare a document outlining its judgment on the merit of the resolutions.
7. The SCSA document will be presented for review to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs who will then make a final determination regarding the proposed resolutions.
8. The Fees Advisor will determine how to incorporate the intent of the approved resolutions in the SSFC handbook and guidelines.
9. All resolutions (approved and not approved) will be archived by the Fees Advisor for future reference.

V. Issues Outside the Scope of this Committee

Based on the Review Committee’s final statement in this section, we have agreed that a comprehensive review of the fee’s process should occur every five years. The next comprehensive review will commence in the summer of 2011, and it will include a review of the previous resolutions referenced in Section IV above.