2014-2015 STUDENT SERVICES FEE APPEALS COMMITTEE FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA - TWIN CITIES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Austin Cole
Alex Ngure
Colin Scott
Bradley Sprangers (Chair)
Moshe Volovik
Jill Merriam (Ex-Officio)
Megan Sweet (Advisor)
April 14, 2014

To: SSF Appellate Student Groups and Administrative Units

Re: SSF Appeals

The SSF Appeals Committee has reviewed the written documentation submitted on behalf of appellate student groups and administrative units, and reached a consensus regarding recommendations for final funding allocations. The committee examined the decision making processes, and deliberations procedures practiced by the Administrative Units and Student Groups SSF Committees to determine any potential misinterpretations, misconduct, or deviation from the guidelines for decision making. The eight student groups that have submitted formal appeals to the committee can be found below, along with a brief summary of the Appeals Committee’s findings. Recordings of the appeals committee deliberations are available to individuals upon request through the Office for Student Affairs.

All the best,

Bradley JM Sprangers,

Chair SSF Appeals Committee 2014
AL MADINAH STUDENT CULTURAL CENTER

VOTE: 5-0-0

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $63,450

MAJORITY OPINION:

The committee would like to thank Al Madinah for submitting such a transparent and thorough appeal. The effort that was put into this document is commendable, and shows the presence of strong leadership within this organization. The specificities regarding your appeal can be found below, along with a brief summary of the findings by the committee.

1. $1,000 Travel Reduction for Islam Awareness Week

   - While the rationale from the Student Groups Committee articulates a cut of $1,000 dollars for travel, on the grounds that “subsidizing travel for students outside the University was not enough to justify funding,” the appeals committee has concluded that this statement is an inaccurate representation of why the committee had made this reduction. In general, funding for non-local speakers was not funded by the fee, because many members of the committee felt that viable keynote speakers would be more impressionable if they were local. The Student Groups Committee indicated that it would like to see Al Madinah consider contracting local speakers that will be effective in helping students to understand the importance of having a variety of religious affiliations in the campus community, and help them to become more familiar with Islamic culture and customs.

2. $4,000 Reduction in Entertainment Costs for the I-Cultures Festival

   - The Committee has reviewed the follow up documentation submitted on behalf of Al Madinah, and considered the possibility that the committee had misinterpreted the necessity in a $2,000 increase from last year’s request to this year’s. Although the follow up documentation was able to adequately indicate the need, it is the assertion of the appeals committee that the SSFC did not violate any SSF procedures in cutting funding for this event; and that guidelines 7 and 8 outlined in the SSF Handbook are adequate justifications for this reduction.

3. $3,200/$3,330 from Sister’s Socials/Brother’s Bashes

   - The committee has reviewed the appeal submitted, which questions the validity of a cut to the Sister’s Socials and Brother’s Bashes due to a violation of the Equal Opportunity Statement. The information made available to the committee during initial and final deliberations indicated that these events were exclusive to specific genders, which would in fact be a violation of this statement. While the committee does not question that this may be a valuable program that Al Madinah offers to students, it asserts that an event such as this is inappropriate to be funded with SSF funding.
VOTE: 4-1-0

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $82,530

MAJORITY OPINION:

The committee voted to accept CFACT’s appeal on the grounds of misapplication of a rule, and misconduct by the committee. The majority wholly agreed with the committee’s finding that CFACT had copied another group’s application, without providing proper attribution. The majority also affirmed the committee’s prerogative to assess penalties. We found CFACT’s claim that the committee had “neither authorization nor precedent”, to be without merit. The majority also determined that no breach of viewpoint neutrality occurred during deliberation of CFACT’s application and budget.

We determined that the committee erred in two ways; first in the assessment of an 80% penalty, and second, in not giving CFACT’s follow up materials due consideration. We found the 80% penalty to be unduly harsh, and were unable to find proper justification for such a high penalty in the guidelines for decision making. The committee voted to reduce the penalty to CFACT’s allocation to 10%. We also voted to review CFACT’s follow-up materials, and carefully considered every deduction that the group had contested. The majority voted to allocate $1500 for office supplies, and to fund the CFL recycling program at $2000. The final allocation for CFACT will be amended to $82,530.

AMMENDMENTS:
- $1,500 for Office Supplies
- $2,000 for CFL Recycling Program
- Deduct 10% or final allocation (in place of 80%)

MINORITY OPINION:

The Minority felt that this group should have been funded at $121,316. While the committee funded identical positions at another group, it refused to fund these positions for CFACT. This constituted an unambiguous case of viewpoint discrimination. The idea that an identical position, described in a near identical way, would be funded for a group at one end of the political spectrum, but not for groups with a different viewpoint calls the entire fees process into question.

The funding recommendation was arrived at by adding $30,000 for the Campus Organizer, $6,000 for officer stipends, $2,295 for taxes on these positions, and $4,800 for insurance on these positions to the Appeals Committee’s pre-penalty recommendation of $91,700. These restored amounts are in line with CFACT’s revised requests in their follow up information. A 10% penalty was then applied to the total of $134,795 to reach $121,316.
CAMPUS CRUSADERS FOR CHRIST (CRU)                            (No Amendments)

VOTE: 4-0-0 (one recusal noted)

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $6,775

MAJORITY OPINION:

The appeals committee would like to thank CRU for the time and effort put into submitting a formal appeal. After carefully reviewing the decision making processes, it was concluded that CRU’s application was fully comprehended and deliberated on with accordance to the guidelines governing the Student Services Fees Committee. The areas of concern articulated in the submitted appeal included the concept of precedence in funding allocations. While a member of the committee had observed that CRU was “already receiving more than the previous year” this statement did not reflect the views of the greater committee. The committee only evaluates funding allocations for the year in question, and does not consider past funding of high importance in allocating student funds.

The additional areas of concern regarding cuts to food costs, and room rental were also examined by the appeals committee, and it was determined that the guidelines for decision making referenced in the final allocation recommendations were relevant, and utilized in accordance with SSF principles.
MAJORITY OPINION:
The Appeals Committee has voted to reject GAPSA’s appeal. The Appeals Committee was tasked with analyzing the processes through which a consensus was reached by the Student Groups SSF Committee, and concluded that the Student Groups Committee adhered to the guidelines for decision making, and did not violate the Regent’s Policy on viewpoint neutrality.

GAPSA claimed that the integrity of the committee was “breached beyond repair,” and that they were concerned with engaging in a “flawed process.” The Appeals Committee investigated this claim, through a meeting with the Chair, and Sub-Committee Chair of the Student Groups Committee. In this meeting, Chair Benjamin Beutel justified his presence for GAPSA’s SSF Presentation, on the grounds that he was there to facilitate anonymous questions to the organization. Many members of the appeals committee were present for this event, and can attest to submitting such questions regarding budgetary concerns. The time constraints at this presentation did not allow for committee members to voice all of their budgetary concerns, and therefore many individuals submitted their questions to the Chair for further inquiry with the organization. The Chair had previously identified his conflict of interest with GAPSA, and indicated that he would recuse himself from initial and final deliberations as to remain viewpoint neutral. His presence at the presentation, however, seems to be justified to the Appeals Committee, and furthermore, the fact that he did not participate in deliberations shows that the SSF process was not flawed, and that viewpoint neutrality was not breached.

The 35% reduction in funding due to a lack of compliance with the SSFC also seems to be justified to the appeals committee. GAPSA had a wide margin of time to submit follow up information to the committee, in an effort to help secure maximum funding for this student group. They instead, insisted that the process was flawed, and refused to answer the follow up questions that the committee had. The appeals committee asserts that a lack of complacency was an inappropriate response to the committee’s inquiries, and feels that a reduction is appropriate in order to encourage leadership to cooperate more effectively with the committee in future fees processes.

During the Appeals Committee deliberations, a fees paying student was yielded time by a committee member to address concerns regarding financial mismanagement by GAPSA leadership. This student noted a considerable lack of information regarding GAPSA’s pass-through funding, and indicated that further inquiries from OSCAI or SUA would be an appropriate recommendation by the Appeals Committee. The Office for Scholastic Conduct and Academic Integrity investigates individual students based on credible information, and due to a lack of evidence available to the Appeals Committee, and GAPSA’s inability to meet with the committee regarding these allegations, the Appeals Committee has decided that an investigation by the OSCAI is unjustified. The committee would, however like to indicate that the SSFC will take this information very seriously, and should there be any indication of continued
fiscal irresponsibility, the proper administrative channels may be notified, and a formal investigation may be appropriate – whether through the OSCAI, or SUA.
MAJORITY OPINION:

The Appeals Committee has reviewed the appeal received on behalf of an individual fee paying student, and students “similarly situated” at the University of Minnesota. After reviewing the information contained in this document, it was the general consensus of the committee that the appeals committee has very little that it can do, as far as changing the overall SSF process. This is because the role of the Appeals Committee is to review the specific procedures through which decisions were made for the 2014-2015 SSF process, and to gauge the veracity of the committee’s final recommendations.

In regards to statements claiming that the SSF process was inconsistent, not viewpoint neutral, and flawed, the Appeals Committee disputes this assertion. The SSFC has a long-standing history of allocating funding to various administrative units, and student groups, that all help to benefit the student populous at the University of Minnesota. While the overall process may not be perfect by any means, it has proven effective, and in the opinion of the committee, continues to be so.

The Committee also rejects the request to be reimburse all student services fees paid, because creating exceptions for paying the fee would be a precedent that the University cannot adopt. In addition, the committee would like to forward this anonymous appeal to future SSF task forces, who would have the ability to take these issues into consideration for possible amendments, or alterations to the SSF process.
VOTE: 5-0-0

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $497,425

MAJORITY OPINION:

After conferring with members of the Administrative Units Student Services Fee Committee, the appeals committee found that there had been a clerical error in the final recommendations of the committee, and thus the committee voted to accept the Minnesota Daily’s appeal. The final recommendation for the Minnesota Daily shall be amended to reflect that the unit was allocated $497,425, with a balance sweep of $100,000 for fiscal year 2014-2015.
POKEMON LEAGUE

VOTE: 5-0-0

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $5,635

MAJORITY OPINION:

The Appeals Committee thanks the Pokemon League for all the work they do on campus. The committee voted to uphold the Student Service Fees Committee’s final funding recommendation for this student group. It is the duty of the Appeals Committee to evaluate the decision making process, and not the decisions that were made by the Student Service Fees Committee. With this being said, the Appeals committee found the decision making process of the Student Service Fees Committee to be thorough and justified using the University of Minnesota Guidelines for Decision Making in regards to this requests. There were no compelling reasons presented to overturn the Student Service Fees Committee’s decision.

The Appeals Committee sympathizes with the Pokemon League’s desire to get more feedback from the fees process; however, funding recommendations are not the venue to do so. On questioning, the chair of the Student Services Fee Subcommittee that heard this request confirmed that the cut to the ‘Retreat’ referred to the Wii, Wii Games, and Wii Controller that this group requested. In order to be more successful in future requests, the committee recommends that this group seeks out guidance from U-Finance, Student Activities advisors, and the Fees Advisor Advisor regarding the SSF application, process and general financial management. Historically groups that seek out advise before submitting requests have been more satisfied with their funding recommendations. For specifics regarding the rationales behind the Student Service Fees Committee’s cuts, the committee recommends that the Pokemon League listens the recording of deliberations from this fees cycle and sends a representative to listen to deliberation of their future requests.
PRE-MED/ AMSA

VOTE: 5-0-0

RECOMMENDED ALLOCATION: $37,075

MAJORITY OPINION:

The appeals committee voted to uphold the SSFC’s deduction of $1500 from Pre-Med AMSA’s budget. The Student Groups Student Services Fee Committee applied the appropriate guidelines for decision making, given the information they had. We fully appreciate Pre-Med AMSA’s concern that the committee may have misinterpreted the “other” budget line item, but found that this confusion could have been avoided, had Pre-Med AMSA more thoroughly explained the necessity and purpose of this category.