All-Campus Elections Commission

January 4, 2014

Student Services Fee Request for the 2014 - 2015 Academic Year

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“We acknowledge that the Fee Committee does not award actual dollars, but rather a penny fee that earns dollars based upon student enrollment levels. Any differences between anticipated and actual income resulting from changes in enrollment are the responsibility of the student organization, not of the Fee Committee.”

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Is your organization an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit? Yes X No
If yes, please provide proof of your organization’s 501(c)(3) status.

Funds are being requested for (check all that apply):

General Operating Support: X
Start-Up Costs: Capital:

Project / Program Support: X
Technical Assistance: Other (List):

Budget

- SSF Dollar Amount Requested $11,226
- Total Annual Organization Budget $12,930
- Total Program Budget (apart from General Operating) $8,965
Section One: Narrative

History & Structure

The All-Campus Elections Commission (ACEC) is an autonomous non-profit student group responsible for the administration and oversight of campus-wide elections, a time for the University student community to participate in their role in the University’s shared governance process. The All-Campus Elections ballot is primarily and consistently utilized by Minnesota Student Association (MSA), Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) and Twin Cities Student Delegation of the Student Senate (University Senate) for their respective elections. The express duty of ACEC is to formulate, disseminate, and interpret the All-Campus Election Rules and to govern the general conduct of the All Campus Elections in an unbiased and viewpoint-neutral manner. The Commission is advised by Student Unions and Activities (SUA), and its responsibilities include, but are not limited to, interpreting and maintaining the All-Campus Election Rules, overseeing the conduct of candidates and other election personnel, identifying violations, resolving complaints, and generating awareness of the electoral process at the University. The Commission aims to foster a sense of community on the Twin Cities campus by promoting involvement in student government leadership through facilitating campus elections and holding candidate debates, voting awareness rallies, and get-out-the-vote events (Guidelines 1, 5).

The Commission consists of five student-appointed commissioners. Each position reflects a specific focus area needing attention during the election season, as determined by previous Commissions and the appointed SUA advisors. For this year, these positions include:

- Chair
- Public Relations/Marketing Coordinator
- Social Media Coordinator
- Event Coordinator
- Rules/Finance Coordinator

The Commission has existed in various forms for as long as student government has been present on campus. In the past, it operated as a part of MSA, but now conducts itself as a financially-independent entity advised by SUA. Financial and organizational independence from the organizations the Commission oversees, allows it to better carry out its duties in an objective, viewpoint neutral, and unbiased fashion. As such, GAPSA and MSA’s involvement is now limited to assisting in the commissioner selection process.

Increasing Awareness

ACEC’s main goal is to increase voter turnout from previous years (Guideline 5). Over the years, it has found that one of the most powerful ways to increase voter turnout is to promote voter awareness and education using advertising and events.

The Commission plans to leverage its existing partnerships and create new ones in the upcoming year to support increased voter turnout. In past years, the Commission has partnered with The Minnesota Daily by placing election awareness ads, contributing to election news coverage, and allowing students to stream live debate coverage from The Minnesota Daily website. The Commission is currently pursuing a partnership with the University’s Political Science Department to offer incentives to increase student involvement in elections and attendance at debates, and is exploring using Undergraduate and Graduate e-mail updates and advertisements on Radio K as a vehicle for disseminating information regarding the campaigning and election processes. As social media continues to be a ubiquitous vehicle for interactions with students, this year’s Commission is focused on enhancing its digital presence via Facebook (including sponsored ads and other non-sponsored content), Twitter, and its
website. The Commission expects these efforts will result in increased voter turnout and will strengthen student body visibility of campus elections for years to come (Guidelines 2, 3, 5, 6).

In addition to creating and strengthening partnerships and enhancing its digital footprint, the Commission also plans to hold several campus events to increase visibility and awareness (Guideline 5). All candidates are invited to attend these events, and ACEC typically budgets to provide food and/or entertainment for students who attend. The Commission believes that allowing the candidates a forum where they can meet with students helps increase awareness of elections and poll attendance and helps students become more involved in University governance and the student body.

Last year, the Student Services Fee Committee encouraged the Commission to build a stronger sense of student community by encouraging student engagement with the elections process and to reach out to students in key areas on campus. We’ve taken this direction to heart and have focused on achieving this goal by enhancing communication and collaboration with MSA, GAPSA, USenate, and The Minnesota Daily. In the past, the Commission has communicated sporadically with these groups regarding candidate filing and the elections, and has received feedback that it could do a better job of being proactive at managing timelines and disseminating information to these organizations. This year, we’ve held meetings with the MSA, GAPSA, and USenate administrations to discuss syncing timelines for candidate filing and debates/forums and cross-promotion strategies to maximize elections awareness on campus. From these efforts, we’ve been invited to speak at college leadership meetings and post in various newsletters promoting candidate filing and elections awareness. As this has taken and will continue to take a substantial amount of the Commission’s time and resources, we plan to create a pilot role focused primarily on acting as a liaison with our key stakeholders. At the outset, we will assign this task to the Social Media Coordinator, as we believe the person in this role would be most able to accommodate these additional tasks relative to the workload of others in the group. After this year if we find that the liaison role is useful but too much work for the Social Media Coordinator, we would like to consider requesting an increase in the 2015-16 SSF budget request to allow for the onboarding of two additional Commissioners (one undergraduate and one graduate) who are expressly responsible for managing relationships with undergraduate and graduate partner organizations at the rate of $425 per Commissioner per academic year (Guidelines 2, 3, 5, 6).

Section Two: Organizational Chart

Anna Sturdevant
SUA Advisor

Mallory Kurkoski
Chair

Kwen Cheng
Rules & Finance

Hillary Heyerdahl
Marketing/PR

Aaron Garrido
Social Media

Cho Kwan Li
Events
Section Three: Performance Report

The All Campus Elections Commission’s (ACEC) purpose is to be an efficient and effective resource for student group elections on campus. Its goal is to facilitate campus wide elections by providing a successful and fair elections process. The previous success of the services and work it has provided, as well as the improvements it can make in the future will allow this and future Commissions to continue to gain momentum on campus (Guideline 2).

Commission Selection

Candidate recruitment began in the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester. The application was available online and could be emailed or physically delivered to the Student Activities Office. Commissioner openings were promoted in a variety of ways, including advertisements in The Minnesota Daily, flier posting throughout prominent areas of campus, and campus-wide emails sent to all eligible students. Advertising for Commissioners was also done by MSA and GAPSA. Recruitment started as early as August 2013. Interviews were conducted for during the beginning of October and candidate selection was finalized at the GAPSA/MSA joint meeting at the end of October. The Commission held its first training meeting on November 7th, earlier than last year, which allowed for more preparation for the upcoming election season. For 2014-2015, we will be beginning to market these positions early in order to continue gaining exposure. Advertisements will continue to be used through The Minnesota Daily, as well as social media and MyU. Also, the commissioners plan to have a booth at the Explore U Fair to reach the incoming first-year students as well as the Fall Activities Fair to reach more of the student population. The current Commission is also discussing a plan to stagger Commissioner tenure in order to provide increased continuity of service and institutional knowledge retention (Guideline 1).

MSA & GAPSA Debates

In 2013 ACEC held two debates, one for the MSA candidates and one for the GAPSA candidates. Both debates were held in Mississippi Room of Coffman Union. Attendance at both events was estimated around 60 people based on food consumed. Attendance at the GAPSA debate was lower, which we believe was due both to the fact that the GAPSA candidates announced they were running together and unopposed and that GAPSA had also scheduled a student event immediately prior to the event (Guideline 3).

We plan to hold the 2014 candidate debates again in Coffman Union and have worked closely with both MSA and GAPSA to ensure no further scheduling conflicts arise. As previously mentioned, this year the Commission has focused on partnership building with these organizations to promote our events internally, so we anticipate that more members of these groups will be able to attend. We have also proactively established a relationship with the student government reporter at The Minnesota Daily to assist in drumming up attendees. We have also planned to continue serving food as an incentive for individuals to attend (Guideline 8).

In addition, the Commission plans to promote the debates through a series of digital and print advertisements in The Minnesota Daily, Facebook, Twitter, the ACEC website, the MyU Portal, and by the candidates themselves. The Minnesota Daily will also be live streaming the debates, which was considered a success in past years. The Commission will continue to work with MSA and GAPSA to further improve the debates and increase awareness across the student body (Guideline 1).

Voting Awareness Campaign

ACEC is continuing to develop its relatively new Voting Awareness Campaign (VAC), which was first introduced 4 years ago. Despite its short history, it has shown to be a successful way of reaching voters (Guideline 5). For the 2013 elections, pizza was handed out on both sides of the Washington Avenue Bridge. Attendance at this
event was estimated around 1,200 people based on the number of pizza slices distributed, in addition to the number of individuals with whom Commissioners and candidates talked to about elections and/or distributed fliers. This represents an over 40% increase from the previous year and continues to be an effective method for generating widespread awareness of upcoming elections (Guideline 3). We also saw record candidate involvement in VAC activities, with participating candidates reporting that the exposure to candidates positively impacted their campaigns.

Since the Voting Awareness Campaign and its food offerings have proven itself one of the most successful ways to promote campus elections, the Commission has decided to continue offering food at two big events as well as participating in the Spring Activities Fair. At the Spring Activities Fair, the Commission will hand out candy with labels containing an elections events timeline. In addition, we plan to send postcards to University Residence Halls containing election dates, the voting tool (ballot) address, debate information, and advertising the distribution of food as part of the Voting Awareness Campaign. Finally, ACEC will sponsor two big events - one on East Bank and one on West Bank – that will circulate food and promotional materials regarding the elections. The Commission will also have a contact table with information and candy for distribution on the Saint Paul campus, similar to that at the Student Activities Fair. These events will be advertised in The Minnesota Daily, on social media, through MSA and GAPSA, as well as by candidates themselves. It will also be required for the candidates to attend these events to speak with constituents and help the Commissioners promote the elections. Buttons or stickers will also be handed out to remind people to vote (Guideline 1).

Get Out the Vote Rallies

The Commission redeveloped its “Get Out the Vote” rallies in 2013 to improve voter turnout during the elections (Guideline 2). The main rallies took place in Walter Library, Wilson Library, and on the St. Paul campus, as well as a contact table in Coffman, near the dining area on the ground floor. In addition to having promotional materials at each location, Commissioners and/or Volunteers were available to answer questions and assist with voting. The Commission distributed cards with a link to the electronic ballot for people to take.

This year the Commission also plans to place election reminders in University Dining Halls. By redesigning the “Get Out the Vote” rallies and making them more diverse and widespread across campus, the Commissioners hope to greatly increase voter turnout (Guideline 6).

Elections

The All Campus Elections will be held on April 2 – April 4, 2014. The Groups participating in the elections and the number of positions available are as follows:

(The colleges below are eligible to place open positions on the All-Campus Elections ballot under University Senate)

- College of Biological Sciences
- College of Continuing Education
- College of Design
- College of Education and Human Development
- College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences
- College of Liberal Arts
- College of Science and Engineering
- Carlson School of Management
Voting Tool

ACEC measures attendance at its Voting Awareness campaigns, Get Out the Vote Rallies, and number of ballots cast to determine the success of its outreach efforts. It also evaluates if any complaints were placed regarding the elections to gauge if changes need to be implemented to campaigning rules and election processes the following year. The goal for each year’s Commission is to carry out the All-Campus Elections in a proper, organized, efficient and informative way as well as to interpret all rules properly and in a fair manner (Guideline 2). To improve the number of students voting, the Commission holds a variety of events, including Voting Awareness Campaigns and Get Out the Vote Rallies that utilize promotional materials to inform students of the upcoming elections. The Commission also uses social media, The Minnesota Daily, Radio K, and other campus publication channels to provide information about the elections. Finally, it holds candidate debates and forums, creating an opportunity for voters to learn more about and directly interact with the candidates, believed to increase voter turnout (Guideline 5). By informing more students of the option to vote, ACEC’s presence on campus is important in maintaining the integrity of the elections process. ACEC hosts and promotes the elections to engage more students to vote but doesn’t promote candidates individually (Guideline 2).

In the 2013 election, voter turnout for the MSA elections was 15.4%, or 5,137 voters, representing an increase of 2,121 voters from 2012. Voter turnout for GAPSA was also markedly higher than the previous year at 6.4% of the student body, an almost threefold increase. A total of 2,257 voters cast ballots in University Senate elections, up slightly from previous years (Guideline 3).

Although these numbers represent positive improvement and are some of the highest voter turnout numbers in schools of comparable size (e.g. University of Wisconsin – Madison and University of Iowa), the Commission still believes there is substantial room for improvement. Additional marketing, direct partnerships with student government and the media and additional focus on candidate recruitment are expected to increase the voter turnout.

For the upcoming 2014 elections, the Commission is hopeful for an increase in voter turnout with the increased collaboration among student government leadership and the continued restructuring of the GOTV and Voting Awareness Campaign to align them with student preferences (Guideline 1). The voting tool, Simply Voting, is an improvement over the previous tool, and has been enhanced to improve voters’ ability to complete ballots via their smartphones, allowing for students to vote easily and immediately after they receive information about the elections. The Commission is looking to promote the elections via flyers containing QR codes this year to make voting even simpler (Guideline 4).

ACEC strives to promote the elections through promotional materials in The Minnesota Daily, on social media, on Radio K, in email announcements, print advertisements displayed throughout campus, and secondary student publications, as well as through the many events it holds across campus. Despite these efforts, the Commissioners maintain that the candidates are the most useful promotional material when recruiting voters and have the biggest impact on voter turnout. By working closely with MSA, GAPSA, and University Senate, and associated candidates, ACEC will continue to work toward increasing voter turnout. Starting last year, the Commission required candidates to attend mandatory information sessions in which it stressed the importance of candidate promotion of elections awareness and required candidate volunteer involvement in its Voting Awareness Campaign efforts. ACEC is committed to increasing awareness of the candidates, the upcoming elections, and the importance of students being civically engaged in student government (Guideline 1).
Section Four: Reserve Accounts

The All-Campus Elections Commission has previously maintained a 10 percent reserve and will continue to do so in 2014-2015. The Commission believes that maintaining a reserve is essential to preserving the mission of its organization. A 10 percent reserve allows the Commission to cover any unanticipated expenses throughout the year, such as unexpected website maintenance, while continuing to provide a high quality of service to the student body. However, as the Commission’s expenses are mostly predictable from year-to-year, it has not used its reserve funds in past years and does not anticipate needing to use them this year. Finally, as ACEC is a Campus Life Program, it keeps reserve funds in a University financial account along with our other operational and programmatic funds and budgets for them accordingly.

Section Five: Fees Request

The All-Campus Elections Commission is requesting $11,226 in student services fees for the 2014-2015 academic year. This request represents a small increase from the previous year for to account for growth in the costs of advertising via The Minnesota Daily and to provide for increased voter awareness efforts via Radio K and other campus publications. We believe that these actions effectively implement the Student Services Fee Commission’s recommendations from past years and will allow the organization to fully realize its mission of increasing voter turnout.

As noted in the Commission’s 2012-2013 Student Services Fees request, the amount of the decrease in its requests from prior years reflects the University’s decision to cover the cost of the online voting tool used in campus elections and is not due to a reduction in programming or services offered to the student body. This shifted expense resulted in a large carry-over from the 2011-2012 budget, which allowed the Commission to request less for the 2012-2013 budget than it had in the past. Without this large carryover in 2013-2015, the Commission must restore its funding request to previous levels.

The amount requested helps to fill the gap between an operating surplus and the Commission’s standard annual budget. It strongly believes that the amount of student services fees requested is necessary to achieve the organization’s mission of enhancing the visibility of and driving increased student voter turnout in campus elections. Advertising and voting awareness events are a proven means to achieve these objectives, and a majority of the Commission’s budget is allocated to serve these ends.

The Commission is committed to serving as a steward of student-provided funds and ensures that it will continue to carry out its activities in a cost-conscious manner while remaining true to its mission to facilitate unbiased and independent campus elections. Student Services Fees allocations assist the Commission in maintaining its viewpoint neutrality by eliminating the need for the organization to hold fundraising activities that may jeopardize the group’s impartiality and integrity. The Commission is composed of only five students who are collectively responsible for overseeing, promoting, and administering the whole of campus elections. These activities take months of work to coordinate, starting in October when Commission members are selected, and need to be largely finalized before the start of the filing and election processes in the spring semester. Adding fundraising requirements to the Commission’s duties would create an undue burden on its members and distract it from its mission and continued success. The Commission also believes it is improper of an impartial and independent electoral body to attempt to secure alternative sources of funding, as it may appear to influence the Commission’s decision-making with regard to candidates or referenda (Guidelines 7, 8).

As such, the Commission respectfully asks that its request for $11,226 in student services fees be granted without qualification.
Section Six: Description of Impact of 10% Decrease

The Commission operates on a lean budget and only requests fees that it deems necessary for its essential operating functions. A cut of 10 percent to the fees would not only have a detrimental effect on the overall effectiveness of the Commission but would also erode fairness and neutrality during elections due to potentially biased sponsorships. A substantial portion of the Commission’s budget is focused on elections promotion, which would suffer drastically from the decrease.

Given the size of the University of Minnesota student body and campus, an all-campus election is a complicated and difficult process. Marketing and advertising are key to driving voter turnout, and when publicity is limited, lack of awareness leads to low voter turnout. The Commission’s mission is to provide adequate publicity for campus elections through a diversity of advertising methods. The Commission remains cost-conscious of its advertising and promotional activities and continues to innovate to reduce its costs while increasing its impact in this area.

To reduce the amount of SSF funds requested, ACEC plans to aggressively pursue SUA grants and invest in digital advertising. Our SUA adviser, Anna Sturdevant, will assist us in exploring grant options for this and future years in February and March of this year, and we anticipate the ability to reduce future SSF requests as a result. We will also continue to place greater emphasis on digital advertising as it is generally more cost-effective and has the potential to reach a greater amount of students than traditional print media. For example, this year the Commission will use pay-by-click sponsored Facebook and Twitter ads to increase voter awareness and direct students to an electronic ballot. While this method has the potential to drive a significant increase in traffic to the ballot, it costs pennies on the dollar to advertising with print sources such as The Minnesota Daily.

In addition, Commissioner positions have undergone a net 25% reduction in their overall stipend amount over the past few years in accordance with the recommendations of previous Student Service Fees Committees. Another 10 percent reduction would further negatively impact the Commissioners’ ability to fulfill their responsibilities, and the Commission believes it would have a difficult time recruiting qualified applicants with specialized knowledge and attention to detail if previous Commissioners were dissatisfied with their workload and remuneration. Generally, by the end of the year, Commissioners spend hundreds of hours on elections preparation, equivalent to a part-time job. As such, the Commission believes stipends are necessary in order to continue making these positions attractive and accessible to students with many competing demands for their time.

One of the most important ingredients of previous years’ success is the use of food at the Voting Awareness Campaign events. The Commission designed the Voting Awareness Campaign in hope of generating on-campus awareness if candidates and elections two weeks prior to the all-campus election. Food is a value proposition offered to students in exchange for their presence in all-campus elections. A 10 percent cut would definitely negatively impact our food budget for upcoming elections.