Finance & Budget Committee
2019-2020 Meeting Minutes
Friday, March 6, 2020, 11:30am
HUB 314: GPSS Board Table

Present:
Shane Schrader – Treasurer; Committee Chair
Danielle Brown, GPSS Senator; Committee Vice Chair
A.J. Balatico, GPSS Senator
Jared Canright, GPSS Senator
Ted Cohen, GPSS Senator
Julia Overfelt, GPSS Senator
Terrence Pope, GPSS Senator

Not Present:
Becky Tran – Budget Specialist
Simon Crean, GPSS Senator

Shane calls the Meeting to order at 11:34 am.

Overview
Becky gives each member an agenda and copies of last week’s meeting minutes.

1. Call to Order
   a. Approval of Agenda

   Ted moves to approve the agenda. Terrence seconds. No objections. Motion passes.

   b. Approval of the Minutes

   Ted moves to approve last week’s minutes. Julia seconds. No objections. Motion passes.

2. Special Allocations Presentation
   RSO did not show up for their presentation.

3. Proposed FY21 Budget Draft
   Shane walks the Committee through the Budget Sheet. Column E is Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) and Column F is the proposed FY21 budget. Shane tells the Committee that his personal budget sheet has additional columns for F&B and Exec so he will take notes on what anybody says at either meeting. Lastly, Column G is the budget line change from FY20 to FY21.
Shane explains how this meeting will work - as the Committee covers each budget number, they will vote to approve each section rather than approve the entire budget sheet at the end. This should be an easier way to lock down sections of budget at a time.

Shane is taking any amendments or questions about the proposed FY21 budget sheet.

Terrence asks if this is the best option. What is there are line items that are relevant between budget numbers (i.e. the officers’ budget numbers for example - what if we have an issue with the Treasurer’s budget number that we want to move a line item to VP Internal, but we already approved the VP Internal’s budget number?).

Shane answers that that might be a problem. In that case, we can just approve the budget as a whole after reviewing everything.

Shane starts with the Admin Budget - are there any questions for this section? If so, what specific line items do people think we should tackle or change?

Ted asks a question about the Materials and Equipment line item - was the $1,000 spent this year? Ted thinks the 5% increase of the overall budget is pretty high and distressing because a lot of these little additional expenses are going to be coming from the General Fund and Endowment Distributions, which are going to be depleting those reserves. And the reason that the General Fund exists is because in the past, GPSS has been chronically over-budgeting; so Ted wants us to be wary of that.

Shane answers, currently, we will have spent about 50% of our Materials and Equipment line item at the end of this quarter.

Julia asks why did this line item go up?

Shane says that in FY19, there were line items for equipment for each officer and they combined it all into one Materials and Equipment line item for the collective office use.

Shane does not want to change our Promotional line item because, while we will not need to purchase a new GPSS tent (like we did this year), printing expenses on campus are high. Currently, we have spent $500 of our $600 printing budget. Many of these printing jobs are for posters to advertise our events. For promotional materials, we have spent around $900 of the $1,000 budget. So, while we will probably go over budget for the Promotions line item this year, keeping it as is should project actuals better since we’re not buying another tent.

Shane explains for Officer Travel, that will be up to the Exec committee to determine the procedures and protocol around this budget line item.

Shane moves onto the Programming Budget Number. This total budget of $30,000 is set, it is the money we expect to receive from the Provost, although it is not guaranteed that we will receive that much. So we can move around funds within this budget number, but the $30,000 total amount will stay the same. For Fall events, Shane wants to go up to $9,500
because it’s the first quarter that we’re introducing ourselves to graduate students in the academic year and thus, we hold major events during this quarter. For Winter and Spring events, each quarter is allocated $7,000. Then, Grad Day on the Hill funding numbers are extracted from this year’s actuals ($1,000 - $1,200).

Danielle asks for clarification on the budget sheet and the total SAF Funding Request, General Fund, Endowment Fund - the $30,000 is coming from the Provost funding.

Shane confirms.

Danielle specifies that she wanted to confirm so she could gauge how much we would spend out of our own reserves.

Shane says that we can play with those funding sources numbers once we have finalized a proposed budget. But ideally, we want to request roughly the same from SAF as we did last year.

Shane addresses VP Internal’s budget number next - there is the travel line item reduction that was consolidated into the Administrative budget number. Based on actuals, Shane decreased the Committee Events from $2,300 to $1,500; it did not have as much traction this year and since this amount does not go towards food, we’re bringing the budget down for next year. Shane adds that he thinks the best use of this fund would be for an honorarium for someone to come speak to the Equity and Accessibility Committee. Overall, the officers’ budgets are not really changing that much.

Julia asks why doesn’t the President have new line items?

Shane asks for examples of new line items.

Julia says, just in general. Does the President not spend that much money? Or do they not utilize that much money?

Shane explains that the President speaks on behalf of the graduate student body and what a lot of that means is going to meetings, and they’re already paid for 19.5 hours/week, and compensated tuition and benefits. So the President’s work is mostly people-facing.

Julia asks if the President travels to other campuses? Or do they get compensated for any of their travel?

Shane answers that if they do, the compensation would come from the travel funds. If they don’t use their own car, and they don’t have to, we could rent them UCars to use and there’s a whole procedure for that, but the cost would be reduced than renting a car. This expense can come out of their own Discretionary funds or the Administrative Officer Travel, whereas before it was coming out of their Conference Travel line item.

Shane moves into the VP External’s budget number - travel expenses are increasing because of the increase in lobby days next year; and parking expenses are being combined
into this line item. Grad Day on the Hill cost us a little over $1,800 for the bus, so Shane rounded it up to $2,000 for next year. Conference Travel is remaining for VP External because they have to attend SAGE in Fall and Spring quarter.

_Jared_ asks how many people are being sent to SAGE Day on the Hill besides the President and VP External?

_Shane_ answers in addition to those two, Abby, and three other general graduate students. Last year, they agreed to include a budget for one additional person to attend but this year we’re spending four non-officers.

_Ted_ asks if that’s the plan for next year as well.

_Shane_ answers yes, and says that if everyone agrees to share a hotel room - $4,000 for 4 people (not including officers) should be easily done.

_Terrance_ asks why 4 extra people? Why that number?

_Shane_ says it’s solely based on our numbers from this year of people who applied, who we then accepted, and who then confirmed that they would attend.

_Julia_ asks why does the travel expenses for this come out of this particular line item? Why isn’t it done through other means like Travel Grants?

_Shane_ explains that it’s because it falls under GPSS advocacy. GPSS’s main purpose is to advocate on behalf of graduate students before lawmakers. What we could do in the future is create a grant within the Legislative Advisory Board (LAB) Committee, LAB would create the procedures for this grant, but currently LAB is not part of GPSS’ bylaws yet - either way, LAB doesn’t have grant making abilities yet.

_Julia_ presents a hypothetical: why are SAGE attendees special? If another graduate student wanted to lobby elsewhere, they couldn’t receive additional funding for it.

_Shane_ explains that it’s because SAGE is an official national group, so they have more pull - whereas an individual person wouldn’t be as effective.

_Julia_ goes on to elaborate - what if there’s another group, besides SAGE that wants to go lobby on behalf of graduate students.

_Shane_ elaborates that that’s the magic of GPSS - that people can still approach us with their event and ask about how to get financial assistance and we would be willing to help. If there’s a need for it, we can work it into the budget.

_Terrance_ adds it might be worth considering putting in an extra line item for “things of value” like lobbying. So, making a non-SAGE travel bucket that a committee would decide what group of four people could travel to. Because what we have right now really privileges SAGE.
Danielle agrees that there would be use for this proposed application process for other lobbyists but also thinks that SAGE is thoroughly built into GPSS’ Executive officers - so if officers are still going to SAGE every year, why not fund additional students to attend with them as well?

Shane adds that if the officers next year see a need for this, they can create this additional support as well - whether through the budget or marketing or other means. Shane’s hesitation is to create a budget item that doesn’t get used next year and then is pushed into the General Fund.

Terrance mentions that the number of participants changes every year, but wonders if there would be merit to creating a fixed number of slots (i.e. 4) who could attend every year to keep this budget line item consistent.

Shane gives background information that this is the first year GPSS has done it. Last year, GPSS wanted to send two people to SAGE and their budget could only send one. So they only included one travel in the budget for this current year. So, we’re not sure of the actual demand yet. So, Shane’s thought is to set next year’s budget based on this year’s numbers so that for FY22, there could average the last two years and set a better number of participants.

Ted says that his issues with it is that while there is demand for 4 people to go, that doesn’t necessarily equate to there being more value in sending 4 people. Ted is more comfortable advocating to send 2 people to start. What Ted hopes is that F&B disagrees with Exec and proposes the option of sending 2 versus 4 people to Senate to decide.

Shane points out that if F&B decides to send 4, and Exec agrees, then Senate will only see that option of 4 people.

Terrance asks Ted and Shane to further explain why they think 2 versus 4, respectively. Shane explains the reason why he chose 4 is because combining the officers’ travel expenses, it came out to be around $4,000. And with roughly each person costing $1,000, that allows for 4 people.

Ted explains his reason for choosing 2 people is due to how much the budget is increasing, so travel is an area to cut budget expenses.

Shane mentions he’s worried that, as a precedent, as we are forced to increase our funding for SAF, we are decreasing our events budget. So if we decrease it this year, due to financial constraints, it will be further decreased next year, and so on and so forth.

Danielle asks how well funded was Grad Day on the Hill?

Shane answers it was very well attended, we had to get a charter bus for it. And we were able to meet with 60 legislatives and ASUW who sent more students to and had a bigger budget for their Huskies on the Hill, met with fewer people. Then, with next year being a budget and election year, we expect an even bigger turnout.
Terrance asks if Shane was to project the budget increase year after year, considering for inflation, how much does Shane predict the annual increase; 5% per year?

Shane answers that we’ve been growing, at least, an average of 4% each year.

Danielle asks if we’re like every other organization that requests SAF funding where our SAF request includes the minimum wage increases.

Shane answers yes, that SAF expects us to request more funds than we did last year.

Ted expresses that his issues about allotting a set number of 4 attendees to go to SAGE Day on the Hill every year creates the expectation that 4 people will get to go, on GPSS’s bill, every year. This creates an issue during years where there is little interest and people who know if they apply, they will automatically get chosen to go. Then, as the popularity for this event continues to grow as we expect it to, this number may increase. So, Ted’s argument for setting the number for next year’s attendees down to 2 will force the VP External, and whoever else that helps make that decision, be more selective towards the quality of candidate(s) that get to attend.

Julia comments that while she is unaware of how SAGE applicants get chosen, she would recommend GPSS create a committee that oversees how SAGE attendees get chosen, and to create a grading/scoring rubric similar to how Travel Grants are handled.

Shane thinks it’s important to point out that SAGE is benefiting the collective graduate student body whereas Travel Grants only go towards an individual serving type of grant. This year, we’re sending 3 officers and 4 people to SAGE. With us allowing $4,000 as a limit, we’re actually not covering all expenses for those 4 people; so we’re not spending as much as we could be and we’re already hedging at a lower value than we could be. Thus, by having a dedicated line item, we can argue that we can’t send everybody, we can only spend up to $4,000 worth of people.

Terrance wants to know how budget forward we can be. Are we able to flag or mark this line item for next year’s Finance and Budget Committee to reassess and consider this process carefully before increasing it further for subsequent years.

Ted says that something the future Exec and the VP External could do if we only set the number of attendees to 2 people, but get 10 amazing applications and they really want to accept more people, they can request a post-budget withdrawal from the General Fund. Shane mentions that this may become an issue when we set this precedent after doing this two years in a row, like we did this year and is setting up for next year.

Ted says the alternative scenario is budgeting for 4 people, but we only end up sending two people, and the excess is moved into the General Fund - which is the issue we’ve been having with over budgeting.
Shane wonders if a different approach to this problem is to call this line item a Non-Officer Travel line item and that way, it’s not specific for SAGE travel but would encompass it, and that way, we can set up better rules and protocol on how to apply for these funds.

Terrance thinks there’s validity to dedicating travel funds to SAGE because SAGE is established, UW is already participating in it, we’re actually sending people/officers there already - so as long as SAGE is the only game in town, we might as well keep the name. So Terrance thinks we can just give a dollar amount, without a people count, and with the $4,000 that we’re proposing - if 4 people are interested, then it can be set 4 ways; but if 7 people are interested, then the $4,000 can be set 7 ways.

Shane says maybe we can reduce the amount to $3,000, which is double than what it was last year; which is still clearly under what we need to fully fund.

Julia asks how much is ASUW’s budget growing?

Shane says we don’t know for sure, but their budget is at least twice of ours. And their reserves are bigger than ours, with no plans on how to spend it down.

Julia says she asked because she doesn’t want to overspend but also not to limit GPSS in ways that other organizations are not. It should not be our responsibility to manage the available funds, it should be the allocating funders’ responsibility to say “nope, you’re asking too much”. So Julia doesn’t want us to factor in too much on how to limit how much our budget is growing.

Ted proposes an amendment to change the line item budget to double of last year’s budget, and reduce the SAGE Day on the Hill line item down to $3,000.

Shane moves on and confirms with the committee the VP External’s budget is fine as is.

Shane discusses the Treasurer’s budget next; Shane has not increased the Treasurer’s budget because we don’t have actuals to base our budget on.

Shane informs that committee that for next year, there’s a possibility that SAF will cover all HUB Accounting fees, so that’s $4,000 that we may no longer include in our budget.

Shane moves onto the Secretary’s budget, the only change is removing the travel funds and lumping it in with the other officer travels.

Danielle asks if all the discretionary funds for the officers are often fully used?

Shane says sometimes. It’s hard to tell because it’s for an “as-needed” expense that gets used some years while other years, it’s untouched. But most of the time, it’s at least partially used. Having it there gives the officers good flexibility in their position.
Shane moves onto the Personnel budget. The biggest change is the tuition line item, which is being changed based on actuals. We have no say over compensation and benefits amounts. And we increased the Executive Assistant’s hours to better include the added responsibilities we’re giving that position.

Ted asks why are we not increasing Travel Grants?

Shane says that we may not hit our $25,000 budget total this year. We’re currently at 56% spent for the year already. Shane thinks that the increase from last year was good, but people haven’t been applying as much this year. So Special Allocations is our only grant budget that will run out of money.

Julia attests to this. She says the Travel Grant committee really tried to give as much money away last cycle as possible. But Julia thinks a lot of people are not applying because they heard GPSS is out of Travel Grants funds from last year because we overspent, but graduate students out there don’t realize that our budget resets every academic year.

Ted moves to extend time by 5 minutes. Danielle seconds. No objections.

Shane recaps: F+B has proposed a change to line item #6 for SAGE Day on the Hill Travel from $4,000 to $3,000. We have a total annual budget of $529,356 down to $528,356. And for the SAF request, the idea coming from F+B is that we will increase our request from last year by 4%, which reflects only the required increases for personnel and staffing. Shane asks for a motion.


VOTE: ALL vote YES. No objections. No absentions. Motion passes.

4. Adjourn

Julia moves to adjourn the meeting. Terrance seconds. No objections.

The Meeting was adjourned at 12:36 pm.