Finance & Budget Committee
2019-2020 Meeting Minutes

Friday, April 10, 2020, 11:30am
HUB 314: GPSS Board Table

Present:
Shane Schrader – Treasurer; Committee Chair
Becky Tran – Budget Specialist, Staff
Danielle Brown, GPSS Senator; Committee Vice Chair
Ted Cohen, GPSS Senator
Simon Crean, GPSS Senator
Julia Overfelt, GPSS Senator
Tammy Senior, Guest: GPSS Communications Director, VP Internal Candidate
Logan Jarrell, Guest: GPSS Senator, Secretary Candidate
Austin Raymond, Guest: Secretary Candidate
Christina Madonia, Guest: Treasurer Candidate

Not Present:
Jared Canright, GPSS Senator
A.J. Balatico, GPSS Senator
Terrence Pope, GPSS Senator

Shane calls the Meeting to order at 11:36 am.

Overview

Becky provides each member an agenda, copy of last week’s meeting minutes, and Departmental Allocation: Chemical Engineering - Graduate Student Symposium application.

1. Call to Order
   a. Approval of Agenda

      Becky moves to amend the agenda to remove the Scandinavian Studies - Multipurpose Room Equipment presentation. Julia seconds this amendment.
      Julia moves to approve the agenda. Danielle seconds. No objections. Motion passes.

   b. Approval of the Minutes

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

2. Departmental Allocation Presentation: Chemical Engineering - Graduate Student Symposium
Presentation

Presenter is here to represent the Chemical Engineering department for their annual Graduate Student Symposium. It is the largest graduate student run event of the year in our department and is also their kickoff event for Fall quarter. It has two main goals. The first is to bridge the gap between industry and academia, so they invite industry representatives and labs in the Chemical Engineering department. They invite a keynote speaker who has a graduate chemical engineering degree to give a talk on their career and lessons learned. Some examples of past keynote speakers: a co-founder of a Washington startup, an alum who pursued a career in science policy, and an astronaut. At the end of the event, they have a panel of local chemical engineers from various fields to share their experiences and to show the vast amount of career opportunities.

The second goal of this event is to bring the department together so they can strengthen the community. They bring together faculty, staff, and graduate students. This is the first-time people meet first-year graduate students. They also have a few conference style presentations from higher PhD students and a poster session from every lead group. So, about a third of their graduate students are presenting, which is a great opportunity for them to practice their presentation skills in a low stress environment where they can get constructive criticism and feedback from faculty, peers, and industry guests. They end the event with refreshments and a networking happy hour.

The total budget for this event is around $3,800 and they’re asking GPSS for $1,000 to help cover the room reservation for hosting this event in the Molecular Science and Engineering Building and printing costs. They will continue to fundraise, apply for assistance from the College of Engineering, and through our industry contacts – but all of that money goes towards food, prizes for student presentations, and guest speaker gifts to thank them for their time. Overall, this event is a highlight of the year for UW’s Chemical Engineering department.

Questions and Answers

Julia asks if they have backup plans in case people still can’t have large gatherings in the fall.

Presenter answers that they have discussed that possibility with summer events but not with this event yet. However, the presenter believes the event will occur regardless, they will move it to an online panel with a keynote speaker online via Zoom. It wouldn’t have the same effect, but it’s definitely possible.

Julia reiterates that the presenter said GPSS’s money would go towards the room reservation cost. So, if there is no room reservation, where would this money be likely to go? Or would that depend on where else they get funding between now and then?

Presenter says that if this event goes online, it will definitely lower the cost significantly. However, the presenter expresses that it has been too early for their planning committee to think about that and acknowledges that it’s a good question that they need to think more about.
Shane notes that per GPSS’s guidelines for retreats / symposium events, our funding limit is $750; although the committee has the ability to vote to increase that amount for individual projects.

Presenter thanks Shane for the clarification and states that $750 would still be helpful for the room because that's around $750 itself.

Julia asks how many first-year graduate students typically attend this event. Presenter says that while it's not mandatory, mostly all of the first years come, so around 20 - 30 people depending on how recruitment went that year. They normally get a high attendance because they strategically plan it to be right after their departmental orientation. Typically the first years will go to orientation in the morning where a graduate advisor will tell them about course requirements, then they go to lunch, and then this symposium takes place after that. So, it's like a natural addition to their day. The presenter thinks it's a valuable event for first years as it gives them an opportunity to learn more about the research labs, because during their first quarter, they'll need to pick a research group.

Shane asks if the departments have used this symposium to reach out to incoming students or generate buzz around the program and try to build that community. Presenter answers yes and that last year they started inviting some senior undergraduate students who were interested in going to graduate school. It exposes them to the research perspective and industry side; like what you can do with a MS/PhD instead of just a BS. Last year, 2-3 seniors came but this low attendance was probably due to the timing because they were coming back from their summer internships or something. Going forward, the department will work on getting the word out to seniors sooner, possibly before they leave for summer break.

Danielle asks how many graduate students are involved in the planning process. Presenter says they have 3 people this year. They have a graduate student governing body, and they have an elected position devoted to planning this event. The presenter had this position last year, so they are helping the elected officer this year; and there's another student who volunteered to help out as well.

Discussion

Ted says that since he knows many graduate students in the Chemical Engineering department, he is going to recuse himself.

Julia asks if we still have quorum if Ted recuses. Ted and Shane answer yes.

Julia asks can we fund this event due to the timing of it? Shane says yes because technically this event occurs before Fall Quarter starts.

Julia asks how do we fund events that occur right at the start of the autumn quarter then? Shane says this is when it gets tricky because F+B doesn't exist over summer. So, funding for things like Travel Grants fall on the Treasurer, other officers, and the Executive board over summer. For other funding opportunities like Special Allocations, Departmental Allocations, and Diversity Funds – we’re not open or available to fund these. So, for this
event, we’re sending them the money during this fiscal year for something that happens right before Fall Quarter, so technically it’s occurring during Summer. It’s kind of a grey area, but it does help us spend our funds down for FY20.

Simon asks if we have ever funded the Chemical Engineering department before? Shane says no, this is their first time applying for our Departmental Allocations.

Simon expresses that he thinks this is a good event to fund.

Danielle says her concerns are similar to Julia’s questions about the timeline. But other than that, she thinks it’s a useful event for both current and incoming graduate students.

Christina asks about the funding caps. Shane explains that for Departmental Allocations, the cap for retreats is $750 and $1,000 for capital item requests. However, this is a soft cap because we can go above that. Although try to stay at/below the cap; this depends on how funding for the year goes since we want to make sure we have enough funding.

Christina follows up and asks if there’s a timeline cutoff for these requests? Shane says we basically turn off allocation requests when we run out of money. Otherwise, we can keep running up until the end of the academic year as long as Senate/F+B is still functioning.

Simon moves to fund at $750. Danielle seconds. No objections.

VOTE: 5 vote YES. None OPPOSED. 1 ABSTAINED. Motion passes.

3. Announcements

Shane says that he and Becky have not fleshed out the Endowment Projections project yet, but are working to get it ready for F+B next week. Other than that, Shane is presenting our GPSS Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget to the Student Activity Fees (SAF) Board at 1:40PM today. If anyone is interested, please let Shane know and they can send them a link to join in. For this budget presentation, it will be somewhat different than the ones he’s given in GPSS. Today’s presentation will focus more on the budget justification and how we’re going to be using funds moving forward. He doesn’t foresee a lot of pushback on the amount we’re requesting because we’re not requesting very much and are planning to spend down our reserves for next year. So it will be good for SAF to see that we’re not asking for more money and are not a unit that is in danger of losing funding from other resources, like revenue.

At the Executive Board meeting this past week, Exec members are looking into opportunities for funding relief for graduate students that are being hit hard by COVID-19. They are also trying to lock in the Provost’s funding for next year. For those that don’t know, the Provost’s funding is what GPSS uses to spend money on food and drinks. This money is not guaranteed every year, so they are talking to the Provost about getting a guarantee that it'll always come through. If the Provost agrees to funding for next year, then we can look into
options for providing food like lunches to graduate students that are working on the front lines to support. Other opportunities we see are coming from the money we’re getting back from Travel Grant recipients and Special Allocations for cancelled Spring Quarter conferences and events. So, all that money can go into the emergency student relief fund that Financial Aid has that’s drying up. We have to get creative because we have a lot of bylaws and stipulations on how we can use our money because it’s funding through taxpayers’ dollars to a public institution. Shane asks that if people are interested in getting involved, link them to the task force. Any questions?

Austin asks what the limitations on the Provost’s money for food and alcohol, i.e. do we have to go through a catering company, or can we use any local restaurant? Shane says that we can order from anywhere. Austin says that there’s a great opportunity to support struggling local businesses like those in the International District and giving food to people who are on the front line.

Logan asks that when GPSS presents its budget to SAF, is there typically a lot of changes made during this stage or is it mostly finalized? Shane says it’s mostly good to go and is a sure thing, although this statement is really survivorship bias. Background information – FY16-17, GPSS ended up with a whole lot of money in their reserve account so we’re trying to temper our expectations going into SAF requests. Plus, we had a bloated budget last year as well. So, the Treasurer and F+B Committee last year went through the budget to trim down what our budget was. Our SAF request increased a bit this year because this was the first year we didn’t partner with ASUW for Huskies on the Hill, so we have new expenditures coming out of that. And we also had some increases in programming and actual spending, although we passed a lot of these expenses onto our reserve funding for next year, rather then SAF. So, with the SAF money we’re actually requesting about half the percentage amount we could be requesting if we only asked for the increase in our mandatory benefits loading.

Logan asks if ASUW has presented their budget to SAF yet. Shane answers not yet, he believes they’re presenting their budget to SAF on 4/17. ASUW does not have the same approach that we do in regards to their reserves, and that’s due to a difference in leadership and ideas on how they approach that. They will probably request more from SAF because they have a bigger overall budget than we do; they at least have double our budget and they have a lot more staff members. Therefore, their finances are similar to ours such that a lot of their budget goes to wages and funding student workers.

Julia asks if F+B members can help with the Endowment Projections project, or is that something only officers can handle? Shane responds that he definitely wants F+B to help but the first step, as to not overwhelm everyone with so many different ideas, he first wants to create an initial plan to present to F+B and then Exec to review and make changes and additions from there. This is not a formal process because there’s nothing in our bylaws about this process. So technically, Exec can just make a request and vote to approve it with a ⅔ majority approval. This is just a chance for us to give a well thought out and educated presentation to Exec. If anyone has ideas, please let Shane know. Otherwise, Shane will present something to F+B next week.
He just doesn’t want to put more work on the committee to come up with ideas on their own. Currently, there’s some historical data that Shane and Becky are already building off of.

_Julia_ also asks if we’re going to touch base on the Travel Grant Exception language today. _Shane_ says we’ll discuss this next week. He hasn’t had a chance to work on it yet. So far, we’ve already opened it up for attending virtual conferences but now we’re looking into funding students who want to attend seminars and conferences where they’re not a presenter at.

4. Adjourn

_Ted_ moves to adjourn the meeting. _Simon_ seconds. No objections.

_The Meeting was adjourned at 12:08 pm._