



Finance & Budget Committee

2020-2021 Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 20, 2020, 11:30 am
Online: Zoom Meeting

PRESENT VOTING MEMBERS:

Julia Overfelt – Treasurer; Committee Chair, Evans School
Danielle Brown, Department of Geography
Ted Cohen, Molecular Engineering Institute
Terrence Pope, Department of Psychology
A.J. Balatico, College of Education

NON-VOTING MEMBERS:

Stephen Lee – Budget Specialist, Staff

NOT PRESENT:

Jared Canright

Julia calls the Meeting to order at 11:33 am.

OVERVIEW

Julia gave each member an agenda and a copy of the last meeting minutes.

1. Call To Order

- a. Approval of Agenda

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

- b. Approval of Minutes

Danielle moves to approve the minutes. **Ted** seconds. Motion passes.

2. Old Business

- a. Travel Grants

Julia reports that **Julia** and **Stephen** went to the E&A Committee meeting to get feedback on the Travel Grants rubric and form. **Julia** acknowledges that, at the



E&A meeting, **A.J.** had feedback regarding the financial side of the Travel Grants that would have been more appropriate for today's F&B meeting.

Stephen tells **A.J.** that he saw **A.J.**'s comments on making the potential points for additional comments known to students and faculty. **Stephen** says he has been trying to make the Travel Grants process as transparent as possible and says he made the appropriate changes.

Danielle notes that when the Travel Grant rubric and forms mention "academic and professional development," they should insert "student's" before the phrase to specify that it's for the student's academic and professional development.

Julia acknowledges **Danielle's** comment and says it should not be difficult to change.

Stephen also acknowledges **Danielle's** comment and adds the appropriate phrasing to the sections **Danielle** mentions.

Julia brings up **A.J.**'s comments about the amounts of funding Travel Grants can award. She notes the differences between domestic and international travel, especially when considering that attending a conference in Canada may have less travel expenses than attending a conference in New York. **Julia** asks how we can change the Travel Grant guidelines to adjust how much we can fund people, especially when considering how much registration fees are. **Julia** adds that we did just increase the budget for Special Allocations, which may affect how much we can raise the Travel Grant budget.

Ted says that we didn't raise the Travel Grant budget because they weren't completely spent last year. **Ted** says that if that happens again this year, we should give out more Travel Grants, since the General Fund can also cover any gaps we find in the budget at the end of the year due to going over the Travel Grants budget. **Ted** notes that there will be less travel this year.

Julia asks if **Ted** had an amount in mind, and if he thinks it is still useful to have a difference between domestic and international travel.

Ted says that there should be a distinction between domestic and international travel, since international travel adds about \$1,000 to the overall expenses. **Ted** notes that the current amount for Travel Grants is \$500 and asks how much the Travel Grants budget is currently.

Julia says \$25,000.

Ted suggests an increase of the maximum amount a Travel Grant can award to \$750. That would put the grant in line with how much we typically fund entire organizations. **Ted** wonders if the lack of demand for Travel Grants were due to the low amount of funding a Travel Grant awards and the high prices



conferences demand these days.

A.J. reminds the Committee that the total budgets for many of the proposals were about \$1,000, so \$750 would definitely be more helpful. **A.J.** notes that he made comments on the financial section of the Travel Grants rubric regarding the “how much other funding is available” criteria and its “7 to 5 to 3” point system. **A.J.** suggests that the grading criteria be changed to make a clearer distinction between points and to take into account that there are more expenses in attending a conference, especially a multi-day conference.

Danielle asks **A.J.** to clarify if he is highlighting that the grading criteria does not include if the student has some funding.

A.J. clarifies that the grading criteria does include if the student has some funding, but there is a sharp dropoff with the 5 point to 3 point distinction. **A.J.** says that the criteria in the 5 point column should be changed.

Ted agrees with **A.J.**

A.J. continues to say that there was a proposal for a conference in Russia that had expenses at \$2,500, meaning that the \$500 Travel Grant would not have much effect on the student’s decision to go to the conference or not. **A.J.** says that **Ted**’s suggestion to raise the Travel Grant would definitely be helpful.

Ted acknowledges **A.J.**’s point and notes that conference funding is a zero-sum game: the student either has all the money to go to the conference or they don’t. **Ted** says that we should be funding the cases that the Travel Grant could actually change whether or not the student attends the conference. This contradicts how the Travel Grant point system is set up, because students get penalized for having other sources of funding. **Ted** says we should fund the cases that are more likely to have all the money to go to the conference through the combination of the Travel Grant and other sources.

A.J. agrees and brings up how much of the funding is advisor or department dependent. The amount of funding a student receives may be up to how much funding the department has available.

Julia adds the actual spreadsheet used in grading Travel Grant applications into the chat. **Julia** asks the Committee to examine the spreadsheet. In sections G through J, the applicant gets points based on the cost, how much of that cost was paid out of pocket, how much funding they already received, etc. **Julia** sent the spreadsheet to answer questions about how the point system actually works. Some of the financial questions are not included in the rubric because it only requires a yes/no. **Julia** acknowledges **Ted**’s comments about changing the point system to prioritize cases that may benefit more from a Travel Grant.

Danielle points to the 7 point column and asks if the second bullet point about



any additional funding in the financial package is even necessary.

Ted points out that we have reached the time limit on this issue.

A.J. says that extending the time is not necessary, but asks if anyone has any comments for **Danielle's** last point. **A.J.** agrees with **Danielle**, but also notes that since the rubric is not student-facing, the grader could just ignore that specific bullet.

Danielle says that if the bullet point does not have any value to the grading criteria, maybe it should just be deleted. It could be an intuitive part of the criteria that would be considered on a person-by-person basis.

Julia adds that, when she was in the Travel Grants Committee, consistency in grading was emphasized to her. The scores from each grader are averaged and are expected to level out by the end. **Julia** notes that the time limit for this agenda item has been reached.

3. Announcements

A.J. says that the STF Committee will meet on Monday to discuss whether or not to charge students the \$38 student technology fee for the next two quarters. He met with the Executive board yesterday and, for the most part, they were in favor of not charging students. The Executive board was only concerned about reinstating the STF fee once operations are on-campus again. **A.J.** reports that the STF Committee has \$8,000,000 in their fund and, this quarter, they only got \$1,200,000 in asking, which is not a guarantee that it will fund everything. The STF Committee has also discussed spending down that amount. They have stated goal of reaching \$6,000,000, which would be 30 units asking for the equivalent of \$200,000. **A.J.** says they considered alternatives, like reaching out to the Campus Sustainability fund and ask what they can spend related to technology. The Student Tech Loan program could be expanded, but they have limitations as well. All of the block funding is there at about \$1,400,000, and the proposals for Fall are at around \$1,200,000. **A.J.** says one of the next steps would be to reach out to the general body of GPSS in order to get more units to make proposals, especially in the large range of \$200,000. That amount tends to buy entire labs with remote access and 32 GB memory, which not enough engineering departments asked for. The STF Committee is trying to gauge campus-wide need.

Julia says she feels like the STF Committee does not want to cancel the fee, but cancelling the fee is what students want consistently. **Julia** asks **A.J.** if this is an accurate read.

A.J. agrees, saying that they should emphasize that they have this year covered. The STF Committee has \$14,300,000. For context, they make about \$4,800,000 on the revenues of STF, factoring out the portion needed for administration and



financial aid. Each year, about half of the amounts they budgeted are replenished, but because STF has not spent the amount they have replenished, they have funds that were backed up. **A.J.** says that it feels like students don't primarily use the STF for subsidizing larger projects in other departments that might be covered for other research purposes. The scope of the STF is very narrow, so it's not for fundamental expenses but for expenses that are non-critical to their department functioning. **A.J.** says that it's unlikely that STF uses up the funds it already has, so STF should have a longer discussion on how much to charge when returning the funds. Everyone gets charged the same amount, so graduate students are being charged and it's not covered by tuition waivers, an issue that the Union has been trying to address by minimizing student fees.

Ted adds that the money from the fees has been underutilized pre-COVID, and it's projected to be even more underutilized post-COVID. In the Chemistry Department, **Ted** says he has been able to see what the funding is used on, and comments that a lot of the equipment bought should be covered by federal grants because it's for a research project with an explicit purpose that does not have much impact on the students. **Ted** says he hopes that the fee is eliminated for this year. **Ted** asks if the money being underutilized could be donated to the COVID Relief Fund at UW.

A.J. says that the possibility of donating to the COVID Relief Fund is off the table. The redistribution of the funds was a concern brought up in the STF Committee since the funds are earmarked for technology, its limited use makes it so that transferring funds for a donation is not possible. **A.J.** comments that the limited use of the STF funds is another point for eliminating it entirely.

Danielle asks if only departments can request the funds.

A.J. answers that any academic unit with a budget number can request funds.

Danielle asks if it has to stay on campus.

A.J. confirms that the funding has to stay on campus, and you need to put a sticker that says "Funded by STF for 5-7 Years" depending on what you have. It is auditable, so the Chair of the STF has to go to departments annually to make sure it's in use and not broken. It was important last year because the Makerspace closed down, and so the machines for the Makerspace were put in a lot of different places on campus. If the vote was in favor of keeping the STF fee, there is a mechanism for ASUW and GPSS to say no by rejecting the STF yearly plan. The timeline that we need the decision is Friday, November 27. **A.J.** plans to meet with the Committee on Monday, November 23, and if the fee is canceled, the Committee would create the write up to send to the Board of Regents. **A.J.** says he contacted Christina, the Student Regent, and discussed this issue with the STF Committee on only two meetings. **A.J.** also reports that



only 20 STF proposals for Fall quarter were sent in, which was less than anticipated.

4. **Adjourn**

Julia entertains the motion to adjourn the meeting.

A.J. moves to adjourn the meeting. **Terrence** seconds. No objections. Motion passes.

The Meeting was adjourned at 12:07 pm.