

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Alexis Jordan and I am a former UWM-AAUP exec board member, an anthropology graduate student, and a former member of the Student Association - Student Appropriations Committee (Spring 2019-Fall 2019). I'm writing with important information on the Student Appropriations Committee and a request regarding a student funding issue. To be clear, I am speaking solely as an individual, not as a Student Association committee member.

On February 16th of this year I presented a statement to the Student Association (SA) on the grave concerns I had regarding the organization and function Student Appropriations Committee (SAC). Through UW system policies and state statutes, this student government committee is responsible for distributing the allocable portion of student fees to student organizations for events, speakers, operations, and travel through grants that each student organization can apply for. SAC is one of the few areas where students hold decision-making power in determining how a portion of their fees are spent. I have included the statement below followed by a summation of the outcome of that SA meeting and some additional concerns. I realize this summation is lengthy but the details are necessary to understand the full context of the issues I discuss below and my upcoming presentation at the Faculty Senate meeting.

Feb. 16th Statement

My name is Alexis Jordan and I am a graduate student, a member of the registered student organization - the Anthropology Student Union, and a former member of the SA student appropriations committee.

I have come to speak to you today regarding my time as a student appropriations committee member and the grave concerns I have regarding the current organization and function of that committee. My goal in making this statement is to alert the SA to the critical issues that have increasingly crippled the function of this committee and jeopardized the fairness of the grant application process.

For those unfamiliar with the committee, the student appropriations committee or SAC, exists to distribute allocable segregated university fees in accordance with state statutes, UW policies, the SA constitution, and SAC committee bylaws. Segregated university fees or seg fees are paid by every student at UWM and all UW System schools. At UWM these fees currently range between \$600-700 dollars per semester depending on the student's status. The fees are used to support student services, activities, programs and facilities. A subset of these fees known as the allocable seg fees, are distributed by a student committee (at UWM this is the SAC) to provide support for student activities.

At UWM allocable seg fees are distributed by the SAC through the review of grant applications submitted by the campus registered student organizations or RSOs every semester. Monetary caps for each grant type are to be determined by the SAC at least once a year prior to the grant submission process. The grants are reviewed at grant hearings hosted by SAC that executive members of that RSO attend to present their grant and answer questions from the SAC. The SAC then assesses if the grant is in compliance with laws for allocable fees, if the grant fits the mission of UWM and the purpose of the RSO, and if the grant fits with SAC bylaw allocation principles. SAC grants are one of the few opportunities on campus for students to have a say in how the fees they are required to pay are spent. This is one of the key areas where the Student Association has decision-making power as a shared governance entity.

I have seen both sides of the SAC grant process. I served as an executive committee member for the Anthropology Student Union and submitted a number of RSO grants to the SAC in years past. In the Spring 2019 I joined SAC in April to help the committee establish quorum and ensure fairness in the final approval of grants and subsequent budget cuts. At this time the approval of travel grants for academic conferences had been threatened by a series of critical misunderstandings by SAC members in the middle of the grant hearing process. I returned to SAC in the Fall 2019 where I acted as Vice Chair of SAC for the majority of the semester until meetings conflicted with my own dissertation research when the grant hearing schedule had to be greatly extended due to crippling software issues and the recurring problem of a lack of quorum.

During my time on the SAC it became apparent that there are a number of entwined practices and structural aspects of the committee that increasingly cripple its function.

These are:

- No formal training for new members to ensure they have a solid grasp of the nuance of the by-laws and relevant state statutes.
- No historical record keeping or data-based decision making regarding grant monetary caps
- No transparent and regular communication with the Student Finance Committee and the Student Involvement office regarding the allocable fee budget to ensure grant monetary caps can be set in a way that prevents budget cuts to approved grants.
- Bylaws that limit the number of committee members, recurring grant software issues, and an exhausting grant hearing schedule every semester that makes it difficult for the committee to maintain a voting quorum.

It is my belief that the SA needs to mount a formal review of the SAC with the goal of restructuring the committee to ensure its function and fairness. It is also critical that RSO members participate in such a review as they are the ones most impacted by the SAC's lack of function. Furthermore, I believe this review should involve listening sessions where RSOs that have submitted grants can come and voice their concerns to aid the SA in making effective

changes to the SAC. I also suggest the SA review the SAC minutes and audio recordings from the Fall and Spring of 2019 should they wish to further investigate my statements.

I am happy to lay out the specifics of each of these issues in detail here and now to further illustrate the necessity of this review. I also have some recommendations in which these issues can be addressed. This information is also included on the printed version of my statement which has been handed out.

Lack of Committee Member Training

The need for more committee member training to ensure fairness and viewpoint neutrality in the grant hearing process was most obvious to me during my time with SAC in Spring of 2019.

In the middle of the grant hearings the committee decided to disallow funding academic conference travel despite these conferences regularly being funded. This was based on a misunderstanding that academic conferences resulted in academic credit for students, which would be a violation of UW System Administrative Policy 820. To be clear, academic conferences do NOT result in academic credit and these conferences are a key component of the missions of academic-focused registered student organizations. Only after a number of graduate student and academic focused RSOs attended a senate meeting to express concern that a MAJOR change in the grant approval process had occurred in the middle of the grant hearings without any warning or discussion, was this ill-advised course of action ceased. It was at this time that I and a number of other concerned students joined SAC in order to have oversight on the grant-awarding process.

During my time on SAC that semester I repeatedly heard committee members make statements that were decidedly not viewpoint neutral with regards to travel grants. They viewed RSOs that predominantly asked for academic conference travel as less deserving of funding than on-campus event grants despite the fact that attendance at these conferences fit the goals of these RSOs as well as just as many if not more of the SAC allocation principles as event grants. Graduate students and grad student-based RSOs were explicitly accused of exploiting the grant process simply because their organizations regularly requested academic conference travel grants. These conferences best fit with their goals of professional development within their disciplines, much of which happens off-campus. Without evidence these orgs were discussed as taking more of the SAC budget than they were supposedly entitled to, despite the fact an RSO could only apply for 1 travel grant per semester while multiple event grants with much higher monetary caps were permitted. Committee members also attempted to push for travel grant awardees to take on more of that semester's budget cut than other grant types, claiming that event grants were more important to more RSOs without any data to support this statement.

These attacks on travel grants and the misunderstanding of state statutes illustrate a lack of good training in understanding the importance and function of these grants that was reflected in other aspects of the history of the committee.

No Historical Record Keeping or Data-Based Decision Making Regarding Grant Caps

In reviewing grant caps in Fall 2019 it became apparent to the committee that there was no method of centralized record keeping to track annual changes in the SAC budget, how grant monetary caps were set, why, and how budget cuts were made to grants in budget shortfalls, or trends in RSO grant request amounts and types. While some of this information could sometimes be located buried within the meeting minutes, it was not easily available nor consistently documented.

This means that decisions regarding setting grant monetary caps were not based on any long term data trends that would provide members with important insights into what RSOs were requesting funding for, if the grant caps were set-up in a manner that fairly allowed them to request funding to support activities that fit their mission, and if/when caps needed to be adjusted to account for major budget reductions and prevent retroactive budget cuts on approved grants.

Because of this lack of accessible data as well as the recurring struggle to maintain membership quorum, the SAC had few opportunities to research the best ways to adjust caps to account for another budget shortfall before grant caps had to be made available to RSOs and the next cycle of grant hearings began.

In the past year roughly 30-40% of each grant was cut after approval to account for a budget shortfall. What this means is that RSOs, which selected grants to submit based on the grant monetary cap information given to them as well as their own goals as organizations, now had to scramble to deal with massive grant cuts which could drastically impact their ability to use the grant funding at all. While RSOs are told not to expect SAC grants to cover all of the cost of their activities, in the current structure they are unable to realistically plan and prioritize what grants to apply for as monetary caps are basically meaningless and do nothing to prevent a third or more of the approved grant from being cut. In some cases RSOs were able combine grants and use the funding on fewer activities but this is not always possible. In any case the current system of drastic budget cuts to grants has created a massive drain in time for RSOs and the SAC, as well as the Student Involvement and Student Association Professional Staff offices that work with SAC and RSOs in the grant process.

Although SAC and Student Finance Committee-SFC are established by SA's constitution as two distinct committees, there is nothing in UW Policy requiring this separation. The majority of UW Schools operate a single "Segregated University Fee Allocation Committee" that makes recommendations on unallocable SUF expenses, and makes decisions on allocable fee distributions. Madison and UWM are the two schools that have large enough student bodies (and therefore significantly more grant requests and unallocable funding demands) to warrant that the two functions be split amongst two committees. However, the divorce of these committees and their functions has led to disconnect in the vital roles the two committees perform together. In my time on SAC it was the SFC and the Student Involvement office that ultimately made allocable fee budget determinations that would impact the available funding for grants. While the SAC chair attended meetings on this topic, the SAC committee had had no involvement nor input in this process despite the fact that it is the SAC members that have to vote on grant monetary caps and budget cuts to approved grants. A more formalized process of timely communication between SAC, SFC, and the Student Involvement office regarding budget issues that will ultimately impact the grant process would allow SAC to reset grant monetary caps in a

more timely manner. This would have prevented some of the 30-40% budget cuts had the committee been more aware in 2019 that the allocable fee budget no longer had a surplus of funds to spend.

Furthermore, a thorough understanding of the budget process should be a skill all SAC members have. This information should not be siloed within Student Involvement and/or the SFC. Not only is this valuable training for committee member professional development, it is also integral to ensuring that students maintain their position as the driving force behind allocable fee decisions as is their right and power as written in UW System Administrative Policy 820.

Lack of Quorum

This lack of structured support is also a contributing factor to another recurring problem on the SAC, a great difficulty maintaining quorum. The committee bylaws are currently written to comprise the SAC of five senators and four non-SA RSO members, with no flexibility in the maximum number of members. As a result, the quorum requirement is fixed, making it difficult to achieve quorum, especially considering the length and frequency of meetings and difficulty scheduling them. Committee members were constantly joining and leaving during my time on the SAC and last semester I saw the SAC chair repeatedly request the SA for more senator members to no avail. I think this is in large part due to the fact that this committee takes up an unreasonable amount of time for both committee members, the chair, and the RSOs presenting their grants.

While dates were set for grant hearings (which require quorum to approve grants), many additional days of hearings were needed b/c of a variety of grant application software issues both semesters that made it difficult for RSOs to submit grants and difficult for committee members to review the grants during hearings. At hearings and in emails last semester RSOs repeatedly noted conflicting information they had received regarding the submission process and many were stuck waiting weeks for access to the software program. Software issues and rollout delays are likely to be a recurring problem as software platforms regularly change as these tech companies are frequently bought and sold. In my time at UWM the grant software has changed 4 times alone.

The forced multi-week extension of grant hearings creates an unfair time commitment for members. Spending sometimes 6-10 hours a week for 6 or more weeks in a row is unreasonable for an unpaid student committee position. Many members could not attend all these additional meetings which had a number of consequences.

In Spring 2019 when quorum could not be maintained for hearings this meant that all grants had to be reviewed a second time when quorum could be maintained and grants could be voted on. Again, this creates an absorbent amount of extra work committee members. Another concern with this method is that RSOs are not present to answer any new questions SAC may have regarding their grants nor ensure SAC minutes from the initial grant hearing are accurate. This is not conducive to a committee making well-informed and fair decisions.

In Fall 2019, without all or most members attending these additional hearing slots quorum could not be maintained and this meant that ultimately it was the senate that had to approve grants rather than the committee. This was in spite of the fact that RSO members- informed of the difficulties with quorum at their grant hearings, stepped up and joined the committee to attempt to rectify this problem.

I was apparently removed from the SAC in late November of 2019 despite having committed to all the original grant hearing dates and kept the minutes for all the hearings I attended. I could not attend many of the additional hearings added because of software issues as I had already scheduled academic research overseas during this time. I presume my seat was needed by someone who could attend these additional hearings but despite multiple emails to the SAC I have never received official confirmation as to the reason for my removal. Again I think this speaks to the current state of chaos this committee is forced to operate in. These recurring problems with quorum and the grant software have also left little time for the committee to make by-laws changes or consider new strategies for setting monetary caps more in line with the current budget.

Solutions

While these problems are deeply entrenched and intertwined there are key changes that can be made that would allow the SA to effectively overhaul the committee and its bylaws to function more fairly and efficiently.

I recommend writing the following into the bylaws:

- requirements for new committee member training
- engagement with the SFC and Student Involvement especially with regards to the allocable fee budget
- Updating the number of committee member seats to better facilitate quorum
- Reconfiguring the grant hearings to be on an annual rather than a semester basis to give SAC members more time to learn their roles and adjust grant monetary caps after reviewing updated budget data.
- And centralized record keeping with transparency in the reasoning used behind grant monetary cap setting that would ensure members are well positioned to make fair and well-informed decisions. Organizing data on how grant caps were set and the types of grants awarded would provide insight on better ways to set grant monetary caps that would allow RSOs to better determine what they want to apply for. Moving forward It may be best for RSOs to have an overall budget they can use to apply for whatever grant types best fit their needs rather than trying to constantly adjust individual grant type caps.

To reiterate, the SAC is a vital component of the Student Association with the authority and duty to ensure the money each UWM student pays in fees are spent fairly. I hope this statement has made the necessity and urgency of reviewing and restructuring the SAC apparent.

End of statement

At this February 16th SA meeting, I learned that the SA has recently formed an informal working group to investigate and troubleshoot problems in the SAC. However, to my knowledge this working group currently only consists of the SAC-chair, the campus and community outreach officer, and members of the administration, including representatives from the Student Association Professional Staff (SAPS), Student Involvement (SI), and/or the Dean of Students office. Each of these administrative offices are all hierarchically connected to the Student Association and are meant to advise and assist students in their roles. They are not meant to take on students' responsibilities or make decisions for them. Some student organization officers (in a general SA updates email sent out on Feb. 19) and senators were only recently invited to join this working group. Additionally, as it is not a formal committee, no meeting minutes, audio recordings, or public meeting notices (which would enable public attendance and input) are required. This means that the reasoning and justification for any decisions made in restructuring a key financial committee of the SA will not be made transparent or public to the entire student body, nor formally documented and accessible via open records requests. I find the lack of a formal and publicly accountable committee very troubling considering the myriad of ways the issues with the SAC have increasingly made it difficult for student organizations to successfully apply for grants and undermined student trust in this committee.

Worth noting, and of particular concern, is the fact that both the Student Association Professional Staff and Student Involvement offices, and some individuals of said offices, have been engaged with the SAC process throughout its increasingly crippled capacity to function beginning in 2019. Through my work on the committee, I observed that some of these administrators do not share the same concerns that myself, other SAC members, and student organizations have regarding the function of this committee. This was most apparent to me in dealing with issues surrounding travel grants used for academic conferences. In March and April of 2019 there was no concern or action from the SAPS office regarding SAC misinterpretations of allocable fee state statutes and the nature of academic conferences as well as related attacks on graduate student organizations requesting these grants and unsubstantiated accusations of misconduct directed at these organizations and the UWM Graduate School. In SAC and SA meetings during March of 2019 the then SAC-Chair noted that travel grants had been explicitly targeted by SAC for reductions in funding partially on the advice of the SI office, a sentiment that was echoed by a SAPS office staff member and a SAC committee member. Subsequently during a SAC meeting in October of 2019, a SI staff member stated that travel grants did not align well with the spirit of SAC goals and provided a great deal of funding to fewer students when compared with on-campus event grants.

These conferences award students, both undergraduate and graduate, meaningful opportunities to develop their research skills, generate project ideas, and make valuable connections with scholars and potential employers who can and do provide future career opportunities. While travel grants do not entertain dozens of students on campus in the same manner as some event grants, I would argue that the impact of this funding on student lives is critical to their futures beyond UWM. Indeed, the Faculty Senate echoed these sentiments last spring when travel grants were undergoing this radical change that would have disallowed students presenting at conferences from accessing this funding.

To be clear, my goal in stating this is not to disregard the hard work which many of the administrative staff in these offices engage in to help distribute SAC grants to student organizations so as to facilitate SAC goals. I am well-aware and appreciative of this work. However, it is clear to me that there are those among the SI and SAPS staff who do not see the value in the professional development opportunities that are possible through travel grants and choose not to listen to students who seek to demonstrate said value. This situation contributed to certain SAC members' negative and ill-informed perceptions of these grants and the student organizations that requested them in the Spring of 2019. I foresee the same or similar situations arising in the SAC working group without the accountability of a formal committee and the inclusion of a wide variety of perspectives from student organizations.

The recent invitation to student organization officers and senators to join the working group provides the opportunity to diversify perspectives on SAC issues. However, the lack of by-laws and voting requirements, publicly accessible meetings and records, and the undefined involvement of administrators with different views on the nature and validity of these grants has the potential to unduly disregard any valid concerns raised. In its current structure any recommendations made by the working group would not necessarily have to be voted upon by a quorum of members nor would recommendations have to be formally presented at a SA meeting for discussion prior to being voted on as SAC by-laws changes. This is not conducive to a fair and transparent restructuring of the SAC that considers how the UWM student body as a whole wants to spend the allocable segregated fees set aside for student organizations.

In concluding my original statement to the SA on February 16th, I urged them to create a formal committee that actively involved student organizations as well as hosting listening sessions where students could air their concerns about the SAC. One of the graduate student senators made a motion to add a discussion regarding the possibility of forming such a committee to the agenda. However, the SAC-chair described such a committee as unnecessary and the senate ultimately voted against even discussing the matter. I believe the SA is abdicating their responsibilities and rights regarding the use of student fees to a small number of individuals whose concerns and goals may not ultimately align with those of the students and student organizations they are meant to serve.

Making meaningful change with regards to this process is only possible if students across UWM get involved. If student organization members abdicate their rights in how segregated fees are used and do not voice their concerns or demand a formal committee to resolve SAC grant issues, it is my adamant belief that travel grants for academic conferences will cease to exist. I encourage any students that share my concerns to contact two of the student senators who strongly supported the creation of a formal committee to review SAC- Reed Heintzkill (heintzk2@uwm.edu) and Robert Bavisotto (bavisot3@uwm.edu), to inquire after the current status of these issues and the best courses of action moving forward.

I also recommend students request access to the audio recordings of the SAC and SA meetings from the Spring 2019 and Fall 2019 in order to gain better insight into the problems surrounding this committee as the meeting minutes will not provide that information, sanitized as they are. The following are the most informative with regards to the concerns I have outlined in this email

and the attached statement:

Student Appropriations Committee Meeting-March 10, 2019

Student Association Meeting- March 24, 2019

Student Appropriations Committee Meeting-April 23, 2019

Student Appropriations Committee Meeting- October 11, 2019

To obtain copies email the SA Secretary Liz Sunday (esasunday@uwm.edu) and be sure to state that the request is being made “in accordance with Wisconsin Open Meeting laws”

I am requesting that the Faculty Senate share this information with their students and I would be grateful for any advice they may have on addressing the issues I have raised above.

Thank you for your patience and time in reading this.

Sincerely,

Alexis Jordan