

COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL STUDENT SENATE

Student Group Funding Guidelines

Approved by the Senate on September 21, 2009

I. Overview

1. How to Use This Document

This document serves as a statement of the Senate's funding policy and as a guide for student organizations seeking Senate funding. In addition to the Senate Constitution and By-Laws, this document serves to clarify the process by which the Budget Committee makes decisions regarding funding requests from student organizations. All necessary documents are available on the G: ("Senate") drive, the Student Senate website, or upon request from the Senate Treasurer.

In this guide we have sought to clarify the budget process; however, we understand that the process can be complex. Therefore, if you have questions or concerns that are not addressed in this guide, please do not hesitate to contact Gillian Horton (grh2119@columbia.edu), the Senate Treasurer for the 2009-2010 academic year.

2. Composition of the Budget Committee and Working With Your Budget Liaison

The Budget Committee is elected by the Senate in the fall and serves for the duration of the academic year. It consists of several representatives from each class who will be assigned to specific organizations as Budget Liaisons, and who will serve as guides throughout the budget process. They may give advice to student groups on what types of requests are acceptable, how to successfully submit requests, and how the budget process works. Budget liaisons will ultimately present the requests submitted by their groups to the Budget Committee during the semester meeting, at which point the Committee will vote on whether to approve the requests, and for what amount. The Budget Committee meets for an entire weekend to address all requests for the semester, and at its conclusion will present these results to the full Senate, who must approve the new budget by a majority vote. Finally, please keep in mind that your Liaison will likely be assigned to multiple organizations, so close communication and timely submission of documents is important to ensure the best representation for your group.

The Treasurer serves as the Chair of the Budget Committee, but will only cast a vote in the event of a tie. The Treasurer does not serve as a Budget Liaison, but is always available to student organizations that may have further questions or concerns about the process. While we endeavor to ensure fairness and consistency, the Committee asks for your patience and understanding. Each semester we receive requests for nearly twice the amount of funding we are able to distribute and it is inevitable that we will not be able to fund all requests fully. However, if you feel that your group has been adversely or unfairly affected, we encourage you to contact us. Please feel free to discuss the process of appeal to the Senate or an additional request for ad hoc funding (see p. 3) with your Budget Liaison- we are here to serve you!

Finally, groups should be aware that all amounts requested and allocated are available through the Senate website, and include (a) the actual funding request; (b) final amount allocated;

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and (c) any available breakdown of amounts allocated. In order to promote transparency, this information is made available to the entire student body.

II. Guiding Philosophy

The Senate Budget Committee and the Senate as a whole appreciate the central role student organizations play in making the Law School a dynamic social and intellectual community. Student groups make the law school a truly unique place to study, and we seek to support student organizations that foster this environment.

In administering the budget process and disbursing funds, the Senate aims to balance the growing needs of student organizations with the limited budget we receive from student activity funds. The difficult economic situation this year will pose new challenges for student organizations, and we ask for your understanding as we seek ways to effectively meet these increased needs. At all times, the Committee and the Senate keep in mind the welfare of the student community and the absolute requirement that resources be allocated in a fair and transparent manner. This document lays out some general guidelines, but above all is intended to promote flexibility and accountability between student groups, the Senate, and the Law School community.

III. Funding Processes

1. Fall & Spring Budget Processes

A standard Senate Funding Request Form, along with a copy of these guidelines, is available on the Senate Web Site at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/law/senate/>. Student Organization treasurers should familiarize themselves with these guidelines before submitting requests, and should address questions to their assigned Budget Liaisons.

In the fall semester, the Senate Treasurer will hold a mandatory orientation meeting for all student organization treasurers to discuss the budgetary process and answer questions that student leaders may have. The orientation meeting will be offered on two different dates in September. Attendance at one of the orientation meetings by a student group's treasurer or financially responsible officer is required in order to receive Senate funding for the coming year. If a student group treasurer is unable to attend the orientation meeting, he or she must contact the Senate Treasurer 48 hours in advance to discuss the possibility of a personal meeting. Groups that do not attend an orientation session will not be eligible for Senate funding during the fall semester, but may be considered for spring funding at the Treasurer's discretion.

"Core" Allocations for Senate-recognized groups (see IV.2 below) are available once a year, during the fall budgetary allocation process in September, except in the case of newly recognized groups, which may receive Core Allocations upon recognition in the spring. Newly recognized organizations should specify their request for core funding and detail their membership numbers, as Core is not automatic. A second designated funding consideration period will occur in January for Spring semester events.

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Each student organization will meet with its Budget Liaison, who will make contact with each assigned group prior to the Fall budget meeting. Each liaison should become familiar with the group's budget requests, financial history, and current financial condition. Groups should submit completed request forms to their designated liaison on the Budget Committee, who will make suggestions and may ask groups to revise their requests prior to submission. Groups should email a copy of their final request to their Budget Liaisons no later than the Tuesday prior to the upcoming budget meeting.

The completed Request Form will provide space for certain required disclosures. Requesting groups should also provide any additional information they believe the Committee and the Senate should consider in evaluating their requests. All factual submissions are subject to verification. In the event that any senator thinks further information would be useful in evaluating a funding request, that senator may contact the requesting group for clarification and inform the Committee of relevant findings.

The Budget Committee will then meet to consider submitted requests. This meeting usually takes place over the duration of a weekend and at its conclusion requesting groups will be informed of the funding decisions of the Committee. The Senate will then consider the final budget at its general meeting one week later. All recommended allocations, including recommendations concerning appeals, shall be considered and voted on by the full Senate, with due deference to the Budget Committee's deliberations.

Within one week of receipt of the Budget Committee's initial allocation decision, requestors may appeal by contacting the Treasurer. The Committee shall consider appeals and submit a recommendation to the full Senate before the final budget is approved in the general session. Requesting groups may provide further information of their own in advance of this meeting, and may also attend.

2. Ad Hoc Funding

Groups who become aware of opportunities requiring Senate funding after the regular funding consideration period may submit an Ad Hoc funding request. Because most money is disbursed at the beginning of each semester, we encourage groups to submit their requests during the regular funding process. However, we recognize that on occasion unforeseen opportunities may arise for which groups require funding.

The Budget Committee may choose to allocate Ad Hoc funding awards up to \$500 at any point during the semester. However, consent of the full Senate is required for requests exceeding \$500.

IV. General Funding Policies

1. Factors Considered

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In general, the Budget Committee favors funding requests that are well thought-out and clearly articulated. Requests should conform to the guidelines below, and should include as much information about the proposed events as possible, including details such as itemized costs, dates, times, locations, names of speakers, names of films, number of students expected, other sources of funding, and other organizations that may be co-sponsoring, etc. More detail helps the Committee with its decisions and is greatly encouraged.

A word about co-sponsored events: when several groups co-sponsor an activity, they should coordinate before making requests, and one group should request the entire amount for the event, clearly noting its partners, while the other groups make a note of their participation, but refrain from requesting funding.

In evaluating funding requests, the Committee shall consider factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- the clarity and presentation of the funding request, including names, dates, itemized cost lists, and as much detail as possible;
- the efforts of the group to communicate with the Budget Committee in an open and timely manner;
- the size of the group and how membership is calculated;
- whether the event is readily accessible to all students, or only to members of the group;
- the number of students likely to benefit from the event;
- the availability of alternative funding from other sources, including firms, associations, and member dues;
- the depth and impact of the organization's events and programs on the Law School community;
- and the extent to which the event in question will expose students to exceptional opportunities which would prove unavailable without Senate backing.

The Committee typically does not fund events or items such as the following, though all requests are evaluated on an individual basis and exceptions may be made:

- events that are limited to group members and not open to the entire law school;
- membership meetings;
- requests for tentatively scheduled events, without confirmed details;
- fundraising, publicity, or advertising costs for any event;
- events or items where a large amount of money benefits only a small number of students;
- hotel accommodations for speakers;
- transportation costs for speaker, absent extraordinary circumstances;
- transportation and accommodation requests for students, absent extraordinary circumstances;
- requests in excess of \$3 per expected student or \$150 for speaker-centric events;
- more than two film screenings per group per semester, or film screenings without named films or other details;
- some event and room cleaning fees: see p. 8 of this document for a description of those fees automatically covered and those that should be included in your funding request;
- personal items for individual group members, such as t-shirts or hats;

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- expenditures that appear unnecessary or wasteful.

Please keep in mind that the above are guidelines, and the Senate retains sole discretion over all funding requests. Special priority will typically be given to events promoting a vibrant intellectual and educational environment, increasing interaction between disparate groups, or promoting harmony and engagement within the Columbia Law School community, as well as those events that serve many members of the student body and make a significant contribution to the Law School community.

The Senate does not discriminate against groups or individuals on the basis of their political, social, religious or cultural goals or beliefs, and will not allocate funds to any organization or event which excludes on its face any member of the law school community or violates the principles of inclusion espoused by Columbia Law School.

Groups should also be aware that because the Senate is limited in the amount of funds it can disburse, requestors are strongly encouraged to seek other sources of funding in addition to that money allocated through the budget process. Groups are encouraged to approach firms, bar associations, cultural groups, and other organizations in an effort to fundraise for events. In addition, Columbia Catering Services can be extremely expensive, and groups are encouraged to comparison shop for items such as cheese trays, hors d'oeuvres, alcoholic beverages and other items. There are numerous options in the area and a brief search can save a large amount of money. Finally, many professors have access to alternative funding and are willing and able to contribute to activities in which they are involved, such as lunches. CLS faculty are provided with funds to promote faculty-student interaction, and funding decisions will be made in light of the availability of this alternative funding source.

We look forward to your help in making your student activity fee go further, and in creating the most active and vibrant Law School community possible!

2. Core Allocations, Events Funding and Capital Expenses

There are three different types of funding granted by the Budget Committee: Core Funding, Events Funding, and Capital Expense Funding. Senate-recognized student groups may request Core Allocations to cover the costs of administrative overhead such as printing, paper, one-time purchases of equipment, or refreshments for membership meetings, etc. Core Allocations should be spent in good faith and in furtherance of the group's mission at the discretion of elected leadership, but may be subject to a showing of how funds will be used and why they are needed. Core Allocations are typically allocated only once per year, in the fall semester, except in the case of newly recognized groups, which may request Core for the semester in which they are recognized. Core should be noted on the request form for the fall and is generally granted based on reported membership, but is ultimately subject to Budget Committee discretion.

Core Allocations are based on the demonstrated membership of each recognized student group at the following levels. The reported membership should be made in good faith and based on actual participation (no email lists), and is subject to the review by the Committee:

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- Groups with demonstrated membership of less than 50 students may request a core allocation of up to \$300.
- Groups with demonstrated membership of greater than 50 members may request a core allocation of up to \$400.
- Groups with demonstrated membership of greater than 100 members may request a core allocation of up to \$500.

Events funding is may be requested in the Fall and Spring semesters, and should be requested for the semester in which the events will take place. Groups should request Events Funding to cover the costs of holding events furthering the group's purpose and mission and benefiting the student community. Events Funding may also cover the costs of purchasing supplies and materials specific to an event, such as food for the audience for a speaker or playing cards for a poker tournament. Please keep in mind that funding for items such as membership meetings and overhead costs should be taken from Core Allocations.

Capital Expenses are one-time expenses incurred by a group for the purchase of durable goods – e.g., permanent banners, sports equipment, musical instruments, or drink coolers – which are for the ongoing as opposed to one-time use of a group. A group must apply specially for any Capital Expense funding, as the Capital Expense Allocation for 2009-2010 is set at \$2000 per semester. The Budget Committee, with approval of the Senate, may increase the allocation if needed.

The Executive Board keeps an inventory of all items purchased with the Capital Expense Allocation. Upon request, the Senate may take responsibility for storing these items during the summer recess, and for making sure they are returned to the appropriate group in the fall. Student groups when applying for capital expenses should indicate the number of years they expect such items to last and agree not to reapply for said items for said period of time. Groups will conform to reasonable requests by the Senate for the non-conflicting use of the items by other groups.

The Budget Committee has discretion to determine the category in which a request falls; if a group applies for Capital Expenditures during the semester and Senate has already allocated the entire Capital Expenditures Allocation (or the group's request would exceed the remaining Capital Expenditures Allocation), the Budget Committee may approve a Capital Expenditure from the ad-hoc funding pool, subject to the normal rules for ad-hoc funding.

3. Publicity & Disclosure Requirements

All events and undertakings funded by the Senate must be publicized to all students. All publicity for events funded in whole or in part by the Student Senate must contain the phrase, "This event sponsored in part by the Student Senate with funds from the Student Activity Fee."

Groups seeking Senate funding must disclose all alternative sources of funding, including firm sponsorship and member dues. Requests for Core Allocations and Event Funding must itemize all projected sources of revenue for the given group, describing the nature of the relevant plans or arrangements. The Committee affirmatively encourages groups to find and disclose alternative sources of funding, and this does not disqualify groups from receiving additional Senate money for an alternatively funded event.

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4. Recordkeeping Reporting and Auditing

a) Recordkeeping

Groups must retain receipts and records of all expenditures, including copies of letters of credit (and corresponding amounts spent), for all expenses involving Senate allocations. Groups must retain these records for a minimum of three years. Provided that the date and the vendor are clearly indicated on a given record, original records are not required – copies or scanned electronic records are sufficient.

b) Ongoing Reporting

No later than 14 days after holding an event funded in whole or in part by Student Senate, a group's treasurer must file an event expense report with the Treasurer by submitting a printed copy in the Student Senate mailbox. Student groups may be audited if the Treasurer does not receive an expense report and failure to file timely reports may be taken into account in future Committee proceedings. In addition, repeated failure to file reports in a timely fashion may result in a semester-long suspension from the budget process, subject to a majority vote of the Budget Committee. This reporting requirement allows us to ensure that funds are spent in a transparent fashion and in the manner in which the Senate has allocated them. We appreciate your understanding and thank you in advance for your cooperation!

c) Audits

Groups may be randomly selected for audit each semester, or may be referred for audit by a member of the Budget Committee, pursuant to a majority vote by Committee members. Groups selected for audit must submit to the Senate Treasurer receipts for all spending involving Senate funding allocations within one week of notification. Decisions to undertake audits may be subject to override by a majority vote of the Executive Board.

Starting in the academic year beginning Fall 2010, any group selected for auditing may be required to produce records for all expenditures for the past three years, as stated in the record keeping requirement above. For these reasons we recommend that groups keep their records in an organized and accessible fashion, so that they can be handed from one treasurer to the next and easily produced for review.

d) Failed Audits

A group that is unable to furnish receipts for all spending involving Senate funding allocations may face a several consequences. If the infraction is a first-time offense, the group will be placed on "probationary status." "Probationary status" will subject the group to 1) heightened scrutiny in the allocation process at the discretion of the Budget Committee and 2) mandatory audit the following semester.

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A group placed on “probationary status” that is found in compliance after the following semester’s mandatory audit will return to good standing. A group found not to be in compliance for a second audit will be subject to disciplinary action taken by the Budget Committee. Student groups are expected to act with honesty and in adherence to good faith, and failure to do so may result in partial or complete loss of funding and other appropriate sanctions taken by the Senate at large.

5. Surpluses & Event Cancellations

Funding in excess of \$50 allocated for a given event, but which is not spent in the preparation or conduct of that event, must be reported to the Senate Treasurer within a week. If an event for which Senate funding has been disbursed is cancelled for any reason, the Treasurer must be informed within a week of cancellation by elected leadership of the group. The money will then be returned to the Senate treasury for Ad Hoc funding purposes. Groups who wish to reschedule events for the following semester must request funds a second time through standard budget proceedings.

V. Facilities Fees

1. Columbia Law School Facilities Fees Policies

Facilities fees are charged whenever cleaning, maintenance, setting up or resetting furniture, setting up audio-visual equipment, or security is deemed necessary by Building Services of Columbia Law School. These fees often apply to the slightest adjustment and can be large. Student Services has provided a summary of policies regarding facilities fees and their relation to student organization events, including the charges for each function performed by Building Services, in the Student Organization Handbook, 2008-09 edition, p. 18-19.

2. Senate Mitigation Policy and Appeals

The Student Senate has received \$20,000 to offset some of the costs of holding events at Law School facilities. The \$20,000 will cover routine facilities costs. Specifically, this funding should cover ordinary food cleanup costs and minor furniture setup and resetting for the entire year.

Larger fees, however, cannot be covered by the Student Senate. Some examples of these non-covered fees include furniture setup and reset in Drapkin Lounge and security for large-scale events. Unfortunately, these fees must be paid by the student group incurring the charges. Groups hosting large events where substantial facilities fees are likely to be incurred should plan in advance and may include such estimates in their Event Funding requests. When funding permits, the Committee may choose to grant such requests.

If facilities fees are not included in initial funding requests, the Senate Treasurer will decide in each instance whether the Senate will cover fees exceeding the standard \$168. The Senate shall automatically cover any fees up to \$168, and these do not need to be included in Event Funding Requests.

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3. Communicating with Building Services and Getting an Estimate

Student groups are strongly encouraged to plan their events well in advance and in as much detail as possible. Groups are further advised to submit event plans to Building Services at least two weeks in advance of the event under consideration:

[S]tudent organizations should detail what will happen in the room reserved; what furniture may need to be moved or brought in; where the furniture should go; how long the event will be; what type of food and food service there will be; and where the caterer will set up. After you provide this information to Building Events [buildingevents@law.columbia.edu], ...they will let you know the total estimated cost.

Columbia Law School Student Organization Handbook, 2006-07 ed., p.22.

The Senate advises groups to retain and file any estimates received from Building Events. Should charges exceed the provided estimate, and the event was conducted as described in the original request for the estimate, the Senate Treasurer will facilitate a resolution between the group, Student Services, and Building Services upon request.

VI. Conclusion

1. A Word from the Senate

The Budget Committee, the Treasurer and the Senate at large are here to serve the student body and to help facilitate the vibrant and diverse student culture we enjoy here at CLS. We know that our student groups distinguish us among our peers, and help make Columbia a truly great place to study the law. We appreciate your time and your commitment and are here to help. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to approach any member of the Committee or the Senate. On behalf of the Budget Committee and the Columbia Law School Student Senate, thank you!

Gillian Horton
Treasurer, 2009-2010
CLS Student Senate