Columbia Law School Student Senate 2006-2007
Student Group Funding Guidelines

Changes to the Guidelines as Approved by the Senate on September 12, 2006 and Amended on February 12, 2007.

I. Overview

This document is intended to serve as a statement of the Senate's funding policy and as a guide for students and groups seeking Senate funding.

These guidelines, along with the Senate Constitution and By-Laws, have been prepared with the intention of clarifying the process by which the Budget Committee will make funding decisions, and with reference to the Senate Constitution and By-Laws. Both documents are available on the G: (“Senate”) drive, the Student Senate website, or, like these guidelines, upon request from the Senate Treasurer or other members of the Senate Executive Board.

Students are urged to bear in mind that all policies will be implemented at the discretion of the Budget Committee and the Student Senate. While we endeavor to ensure fairness and consistency, it is inevitable that we will not be able to fund all requests as fully as we would like. We beg forbearance, and encourage those adversely and unfairly affected to contact us freely and to appeal our decisions as you may deem appropriate.

All amounts requested and allocated shall be made available to the general student body through the Senate website, including but not limited to: (a) the actual funding request; (b) final amount allocated; (c) any available breakdown of amounts allocated. Any student group, in the belief that this disclosure may expose sensitive materials, may request that the Budget Committee make subsequent redactions. Any such redactions must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the Budget Committee.

Students are encouraged to bring any concerns with the general policies set forth herein or with specific funding decisions to the attention of the Senate Treasurer or, in the event such concerns are not satisfactorily addressed, to the attention of other members of the Student Senate. The Senate has final authority on all budgetary matters.

The Treasurer for the 2007-2008 academic year, Adam Sparks, Max Miller, can be reached by email at Adam.Sparks@law.columbia.edu (ams2185@columbia.edu) CLSBudgetCmte@gmail.com.

II. Guiding Philosophy

The Senate Budget Committee (“Committee”) and the Senate at large are mindful of, and grateful for, the central role student organizations play in setting the Law School in a wonderfully dynamic social and intellectual community. We are sympathetic to the constraints within which groups and their leaders operate, from necessarily frequent leadership turnover to extreme time pressures to scarce facility space.

In administering the budget process and disbursing funds, the Senate aims to balance the growing panoply of highly meritorious funding requests from all manner of interested parties needs of...
student organizations with its limited funds and its limited need for accurate information on which to base decisions. 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 justly, fairly, and transparently. These guidelines, in their substance and in their implementation, are intended, and will be construed, to promote flexibility and accountability within student groups and throughout the Law School community.

III. Funding Processes

1. Fall & Spring Budget Processes

A standard Senate Funding Request Form (“Request Form”), along with a copy of these guidelines, shall be circulated or otherwise made available to all Senate-recognized groups by the beginning of each semester, and will always be available on the G: drive or upon request from the Senate Treasurer.

“Core” Allocations for Senate-recognized groups (see IV.2 below) shall be available only 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. Groups should also request Event Funding for events they have confirmed for the Fall semester during this time. A second designated funding consideration period will occur in January for events groups have confirmed for the Spring semester.

Each requestor will be assigned a liaison on the Committee. Each liaison shall meet with the requestors they are assigned and become familiar with the group’s budget requests and financial history and condition. Groups should submit completed request forms to the Senate Treasurer and their designated liaisons on the Budget Committee, pursuant to the instructions on the Request Form.

The completed Request Form will provide space for certain required disclosures. Requestors 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 requestor for clarification and inform the Committee of her findings. The Committee shall accept appendices to the Request Form of reasonable length and relevancy.

When the deadline for submission of core funding requests has passed, the Budget Committee shall convene to consider funding requests in accordance with the guidelines set forth herein and in an efficient and just manner. Requestors will be promptly informed of the funding decisions of the Committee.

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. Requestors may supplement the materials forwarded by the Committee to the Senate with further information of their own in advance of the meeting at which the Senate is to consider the group’s appeal.
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.

2. Ad Hoc Funding

Groups or individuals who become aware of opportunities requiring Senate funding after the relevant funding consideration periods at the beginning of each semester may submit an Ad Hoc funding request.

The Senate delegates to the Committee independent authority to consider and allocate funds pursuant to future Ad Hoc funding requests, up to a cumulative total of $5000, renewable at the Senate’s discretion. All Committee decisions made regarding Ad Hoc requests are subject to the same appeals process utilized in Core Allocations and Event Funding deliberations. The Committee may, at its discretion, disburse Ad Hoc funding awards less than $500 independently. The Senate Treasurer shall promptly disclose all such disbursements to the full Senate. The full Senate shall consider, however, all Ad Hoc group requests exceeding $500.

Understanding that opportunities often arise unexpectedly, the Budget Committee will consider event funding requests submitted at any time. Groups requesting funding, however, are encouraged to do so as early as possible and practicable.

IV. General Funding Policies

1. Factors Considered

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

- the clarity of the presentation of the funding request;
- the size of the group and how membership is calculated;
- the accessibility to all students of the event or thing for which funding is sought;
- the volume of students the event or thing is expected or likely to serve;
- the availability of alternative funding;
- the depth of 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.

Special priority shall be given to events promoting interaction between socially or rhetorically disparate groups or which otherwise promote harmony and engagement within the Columbia Law School community.

The Senate shall not discriminate against groups or individuals on the basis of their political, social, religious or cultural goals or beliefs, and shall not allocate funds to any organization or event which excludes on its face any member of the Law School community.

Because the Senate is, regretfully, limited with respect to the amount of funds it can disburse, requestors are strongly encouraged to seek other sources of funding. Demonstrated,
Conscientious pursuit of alternative funding for a given event, or fundraising generally, is looked upon favorably by the Committee during its deliberations.

2. Core Allocations and Events Funding

Senate-recognized student groups may request Core Allocations to cover the costs of administrative overhead such as printing, paper, refreshments for membership meetings, etc. Core Allocations shall be spent in good faith and in furtherance of the group’s mission at the discretion of elected leadership, subject to a showing of how these funds will be used and why they are needed.

Groups may 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. Requests for Events Funding shall not be made for, nor shall Events Funding awards be applied to, the costs targeted by Core Allocations.

Core Allocations shall be pegged to the demonstrated membership of each recognized student group at the following levels:

- Groups with demonstrated memberships of less than 50 students may request, and be allocated, a core allocation not to exceed $300.
- Groups with demonstrated membership of greater than 50 members may request, and be allocated, a core allocation not to exceed $400.
- Groups with demonstrated membership of greater than 100 members may request, and be allocated, a core allocation not to exceed $500.

There are no required means of demonstrating group membership to the Committee, though email lists are generally disfavored if another means of demonstration is available. The reported membership should be made in good faith and is subject to the review and investigation of the Committee.

3. Disfavored Funding Requests

While speaker-centric events in and of themselves are not disfavored, only limited funds shall be available for refreshments, generally not in excess of $3 per expected CLS attendee and not exceeding a cumulative total of $150.

In exceptional cases, and as necessary to enable groups to bring otherwise unavailable out-of-town speakers to the Law School, the Committee may subsidize transportation costs for speakers on a strictly limited basis. Hotel accommodations shall not be funded unless the Committee finds extraordinary circumstances warrant a departure from this practice.

Similarly, given the limited funding available for student use and the need to maximize the benefits of Event Funding for the entire student community, transportation and accommodations costs for student travel shall not be funded by the Senate absent extraordinary circumstances.

Absent compelling reason, Senate will not provide funds to defray fundraising or publicity/ advertising costs for any event. See supra, IV.2.
CLS faculty are provided with funds to promote faculty-student interaction. Although the Committee strongly encourages events involving or featuring faculty, funding decisions will be made in light of the availability of this alternative funding source, and events exclusively featuring CLS faculty will generally not be funded.

The Committee disfavors providing funding for refreshments for more than two film screenings per student group per semester. When applying for refreshments funding for a film screening, the group should name the film to be screened or explain why the film cannot yet be named. The Committee will accept “hoped-for” films to be screened, so long as a replacement title is also named and an explanation for the uncertainty is provided.

The Committee strongly encourages groups to provide as much detail as possible about planned events. Well articulated, well planned events with itemized cost projections attract more attention from the Committee than haphazardly thrown together, highly tentative proposals. Confirmed names and dates are highly preferred.

4. 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 by the Student Senate with funds from the Student Activity Fee.” At the discretion of the Budget Committee, failure to follow these procedures may subject a group to higher scrutiny for future budget requests.

Groups seeking Senate funding must disclose all alternative sources of funding. 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.

5. Joint Events

When multiple groups intend to collaborate on a given event, the participating groups may submit a joint funding request for that event, or request that funds be distributed entirely to a certain group, or ask for a specific breakdown of funding as between the groups. The Committee looks favorably upon multi-group collaboration on events during its deliberations.

6. Recordkeeping and Audits

Groups must retain receipts and records of all expenditures, including copies of letters of credit (and corresponding amounts spent), for all expenses incurred pursuant to Senate funding allocations, and are encouraged to retain records from year to year.

Each semester, the five (5) requestors that receive the largest allocations shall submit to the Senate Treasurer receipts for all spending pursuant to Senate funding allocations. The groups conducting the five events that receive the largest allocations also shall submit to the Senate Treasurer receipts for all spending pursuant to Senate funding allocations and material to the event. Requestors will be notified if they will be subject to these automatic disclosure requirements at the time Committee liaisons notify groups of final funding decisions.
The Committee may undertake additional audits, either at random or of specific requestors, pursuant to a majority vote of the Committee upon motion from any Committee member. Decisions to undertake additional audits are subject to override by a 2/3 vote of the full Senate.

**Penalties for Non-Compliance:**

Any student group that during the auditing process is unable to furnish receipts for all spending pursuant to Senate funding allocations will face a series of 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.

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 Senate Budget Committee.

The Budget Committee has at its disposal a sliding scale of disciplinary measures. At the low end of the spectrum, the Budget Committee can deny funding to particular events (for example, the following term’s version of the event for which accounting information is unavailable or similar events) or core funding. At the higher end of the spectrum, the committee can deny funding for all events where alcohol is served, all non-speaker events, or all events. The severity of the disciplinary action taken by the Senate will depend on the following factors:

1. The percentage of the subject group’s total budget which is unaccounted for. For example, if the group on probation can account for 98% of their budget allocation, the Committee will punish that group less severely than if they could only account for 50% of their allocation.

2. The percentage of the subject group’s events which is unaccounted for. For example, if a group can account for all but one of their ten events, they will be punished less harshly than if they are missing receipts for six of those events.

3. The accounting history of that group, according to prior years’ audits and budget allocations, institutional knowledge within the Senate and the Budget Committee, and other institutional knowledge of Columbia Law School.

Because the Senate favors the use of its funds for academic programming, the last events to which the Budget Committee will deny funding are events which bring in speakers from outside of the School. The restriction of Senate funds for these events will be reserved for groups that are suspected of active fraud, are repeat offenders, or are unable to account for a substantial percentage of their funding.

Any student group that, without the permission of the Budget Committee, uses Senate funds for any purpose other than the one for which they were allocated must return those funds to the Senate immediately and will receive “probationary status.”

These penalties may be modified by a 2/3 majority vote of the Budget Committee as circumstances warrant. Any modified penalties may be appealed to the full Senate, with a 2/3 majority vote overturning the penalties.
7. Surpluses & Event Cancellations

Funding in excess of $50 allocated for a given event, but not spent in the preparation or conduct of that event, must be reported to the Senate Treasurer. 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 that requested funding for the event. Appropriate arrangements must then be made to direct the relevant allocation to the Senate treasury for Ad Hoc funding purposes. At the discretion of the Budget Committee, failure to follow these procedures may subject a group to higher scrutiny for future budget requests.

8. Fraud

Failure to exercise good faith in requesting funds, or to manage funds disbursed by the Senate, will result in appropriately severe sanctions taken against the group(s) and/or individual(s) involved. Fraud will not be tolerated.

Similarly, appropriately severe sanctions will be taken against a group or groups that fails to prevent spending from exceeding the Senate funding and alternative funding available to the group.

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 or change. 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, 2006-07 edition, p. 21-22.

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 is intended to cover *routine* facilities costs; specifically, the Senate envisions that ordinary food cleanup costs will be covered for the entire year. Minor furniture setup and resetting costs will usually be covered as well. 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 other than that ordinarily provided by the Law School. While the Senate would greatly prefer to cover all facilities costs, the weighty nature of the facilities fees and the fiscal realities of the Student Activity Fee will not permit that result. As of this time, these fees must be paid by the student group incurring the charges, and groups should plan accordingly.

The Senate Treasurer shall decide in each instance whether the Senate will cover fees exceeding $168. The Senate shall automatically cover any fees up to $168 inclusive. The Treasurer of the student group incurring the uncovered facilities fee may appeal the Senate Treasurer's decision to the Committee. The Committee shall consider any unresolved appeals within one week of their receipt.
submission, and may reverse the Senate Treasurer's decision by a two-thirds majority. Such decisions may themselves be overturned by a unanimous vote of the Executive Board.

3. Student Group Responsibilities

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 one week in advance of the event under consideration:

[H] student 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.


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.

In light of V.2 above, groups conducting events that are likely to incur facilities fees exceeding routine levels should account for and itemize these fees in relevant Event Funding requests. Groups should make requests for facilities fees above and beyond the routine in good faith and with the expectation that related invoices will be reviewed.

4. Facilities Usage Reporting and Audits

The limited resources available to cover facilities fees (and events generally) necessitate that the Committee know whether events taking place in the Law School (and elsewhere) take place as scheduled, or are rescheduled or cancelled entirely. For this reason, groups should keep careful track of their events not only as funded but as performed.

Groups will be required to report on the past semester’s event performance, in the context of law school facilities twice yearly, in January and May, to the Senate Treasurer. Failing to report on events in a timely manner subjects the group to zero funding the following semester. Approximately 15% of student groups will be randomly selected for auditing by the Committee. Groups can facilitate this process by keeping all materials relating to event conduct and expenditures related to event conduct organized and available.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Adam Sparks
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Treasurer, CLS Student Senate